

The World's Largest Rainforest Is In A State Of Emergency

The Amazon, the world's largest rainforest at 5.5 million square kilometres, has been burning for weeks. A state of emergency was declared earlier this month over the rising figures of forest fires in the largest state in Brazil, the Amazonas. In an attempt to raise awareness, the #PrayforAmazonia tag has been trending on social media.

According to the Brazilian Government's National Institute for Space Research (INPE), the forest fires have broken records this year with 72,843 detected thus far. This is the highest figure since records began in 2013 and marks an 83% increase over the same period in 2018.

[On Monday new satellite data](#) captured huge streams of smoke wafting across Brazil's largest city, Sao Paulo and other regions of South America, following the wildfires ravaging the South American rainforest. [Sao Paulo was submerged into darkness](#) from as early as 3pm, for more than an hour. After some light rain, clouds became so heavy that they even caused lightning. An accumulation of humid air, cold and smoke from the Amazon rainforest fire thousands of miles away, were all identified to be causes of this phenomenon by the Brazil National Institute of Meteorology (Inmet).

Due to its natural humidity and moisture, the South American tropical rainforest has historically been relatively fire-resistant. However, the recent wildfires are a consequence of droughts and human activity. The Amazon rainforest has experienced three major droughts, considered "once-in-a-century events" in [2005, 2010 and in 2015-2016](#). Brazil's National Institute for Space Research also forecasts that rainfall in the northern and central Amazon will be 40-50% below average over the next three months.

Wildfires have increased in Mato Grosso and Para, two states where Brazil's agricultural frontier has pushed into the Amazon basin and spurred deforestation. Despite being a common occurrence in the dry season, the wildfires are also intentionally instigated illegally by farmers deforesting land for cattle ranching.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, appointed in January, vowed to develop the Amazon region for mining and farming, ignoring the international concern over increased deforestation. The valid distress is justified considering over [20% of the world's oxygen](#) is produced by the Amazon, also dubbed the "lungs of the planet". The president has criticized the national agency data, saying they were inaccurate and additionally recently fired the director of INPE.

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