

Thousands rally for Bolsonaro despite Brazil's COVID crisis



A demonstrator holds a Brazilian flag during a demonstration in support of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in Brasilia, Brazil, May 1, 2021 [Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters]

Brasilia, May 2 (RHC)-- Thousands of people have rallied across Brazil in support of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, whose handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has been widely decried amid a continuing surge in deaths and infections.

Protesters gathered in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and the capital, Brasilia, where thousands assembled on the Esplanade of Ministries as Bolsonaro briefly passed overhead in a helicopter.

“It’s a critical moment and Bolsonaro needs the people’s support,” Edvaldo de Paulo, a demonstrator who looked to be in his 60s, told the AFP news agency in Brasilia.

Bolsonaro has continued to downplay the seriousness of COVID-19, dismissing it as just a “little flu” earlier on in the pandemic, and he rejects public health measures such as lockdowns, despite Brazil’s continuing coronavirus crisis.

The South American nation surpassed 400,000 deaths linked to COVID-19 on Friday – the second-highest total in the world after the United States – and it has recorded more than 14.6 million infections to date, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

More than half of those deaths were recorded in 2021 alone, while April was the deadliest month since the virus first began spreading in Brazil last year. Experts have said new, more easily transmissible variants of the coronavirus have contributed to its spread, while many have blamed Bolsonaro for failing to take action to contain COVID-19.

Last week, the Brazilian Senate opened an investigation into the government’s handling of the pandemic, including how healthcare facilities in the Amazonian city of Manaus ran out of oxygen earlier this year. Bolsonaro has rejected any criticism, however, saying last week that his government would not “accept this politics of stay home and shut everything down.”

Meanwhile, poor and marginalised communities across the country continue to bear the brunt of the virus, as millions of people also are going hungry amid the crisis.

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