

*Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro leads right-wing rally in Sao Paulo, complete with Israeli flags*

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Sao Paulo, September 8 (RHC)-- Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has rallied thousands of protesters in central Sao Paulo to protest against the country's ban of the social media platform X. The demonstration was timed to the country's Independence Day on Saturday.

It also unfolded while Bolsonaro's political rival, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, led an official parade with the country's military in the capital Brasilia.

Dressed in the colours of the Brazilian flag, Bolsonaro climbed atop a temporary stage erected on Sao Paulo's main thoroughfare, Paulista Avenue, and addressed the crowd -- where some of those attending the rally waved Israeli flags, in apparent support of Tel Aviv's genocidal war against Gaza.

Speaking to the crowd, Bolsonaro's remarks took aim at one of the main figures responsible for the ban on X: Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

"I hope that the Federal Senate puts the brakes on Alexandre de Moraes, this dictator who does more harm to Brazil than Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva himself," Bolsonaro told the crowd. De Moraes had called upon the social media platform to appoint a legal representative in Brazil, as is required under Brazilian law.

In August, when X refused to comply, De Moraes released an order for the suspension of all the platform's activities in Brazil. It was the culmination of an ongoing spat between De Moraes and X's owner, Elon Musk.

The billionaire entrepreneur had closed X's offices in Brazil earlier that month, to avoid having to comply with separate court orders to suspend accounts peddling misinformation.

On September 2, Brazil's Supreme Court unanimously upheld the decision to ban X, with all five judges offering their support. Explaining the decision, Justice Flavio Dino said: "A party that intentionally fails to comply with court decisions appears to consider itself above the rule of law."

But that failed to quell the uproar, particularly among members of the far right in Brazil, who considered the shuttering of X as an infringement of their free-speech rights.

Bolsonaro, a figurehead of Brazil's far right, seized the moment to call for protest.

"When freedom of expression and the press are threatened, democracy cries out for help," he wrote on social media on September 4th. "Therefore, I call on all Brazilians who love freedom and our democracy: Come to Paulista Avenue next Saturday, September 7!"

Bolsonaro himself has had clashes with De Moraes, who formerly led the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), which oversees Brazil's elections.

In the lead-up to the 2022 presidential elections, Bolsonaro, the incumbent, spread misinformation about electoral fraud. After he lost the vote, Bolsonaro and his allies proceeded to challenge the results, using unfounded claims to sow suspicion.

The result was weeks of protests and a violent assault on Brasilia's government buildings on January 8, 2023, as Bolsonaro's supporters looted the premises.

De Moraes led the Superior Electoral Court in voting to ban Bolsonaro from office until 2030 for his role in spreading false information.

At the Independence Day protest in Sao Paulo, Bolsonaro re-upped his false claims about the 2022 election. "The 2022 elections were completely biased by the president of the Superior Electoral Court, Alexandre de Moraes," he told the crowd, adding that the January 8th riot was a "set-up".

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