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Brasilia, February 1 (RHC)-- Protesters in Brazil rallied for the second straight weekend in a number of cities to demand the resignation of President Jair Bolsonaro for his government's handling of the COVID-

19 pandemic.

Hundreds protested on Sunday in Brasilia, the capital, holding signs and banners reading: “Bolsonaro Out” and “Impeachment Now,” while a procession of cars honked their horns in support. Other demonstrations were also held in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Bolsonaro, an ultra-right-wing coronavirus sceptic who has downplayed the seriousness of the virus and the need to enact strong public health rules to prevent its spread, has faced increased pressure in recent weeks about his handling of the pandemic.

Brazil has reported more than 9.1 million cases and nearly 224,000 coronavirus-related deaths, the third- and second-highest tallies in the world, respectively, according to Johns Hopkins University data. A recent surge in cases in Amazonas state, which pushed hospitals in the capital Manaus to their limits and led to a lack of oxygen supplies for COVID-19 patients, has also spurred the demonstrations against Bolsonaro.

Doctors have warned the situation in Manaus could spread to other regions of Brazil, as the discovery of a new, potentially more contagious variant of COVID-19 in the country has heightened concerns of the accelerated spread of the virus.

One group of protesters on Sunday stood outside the National Congress building in Brasilia wearing plastic bags over their heads to symbolise the COVID-19 patients in Amazonas state who died after hospitals ran out of oxygen.

Last week, a Brazilian Supreme Court justice approved an investigation into Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello’s response to the crisis in Manaus. The country earlier this month approved two vaccines – China’s Sinovac Biotech Ltd and the UK’s AstraZeneca – for emergency use, but delays in the shipment of vaccine ingredients to Brazil has meant slow distribution.

The Sao Paulo state government said on Sunday that it is expecting to receive on Wednesday ingredients from Sinovac Biotech that will allow local production of 8.6 million doses.

The ingredients are at the airport in Beijing awaiting discharge and will be used by Sao Paulo’s state-funded Butantan Institute, which has a partnership with Sinovac to produce the vaccines in Brazil.

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