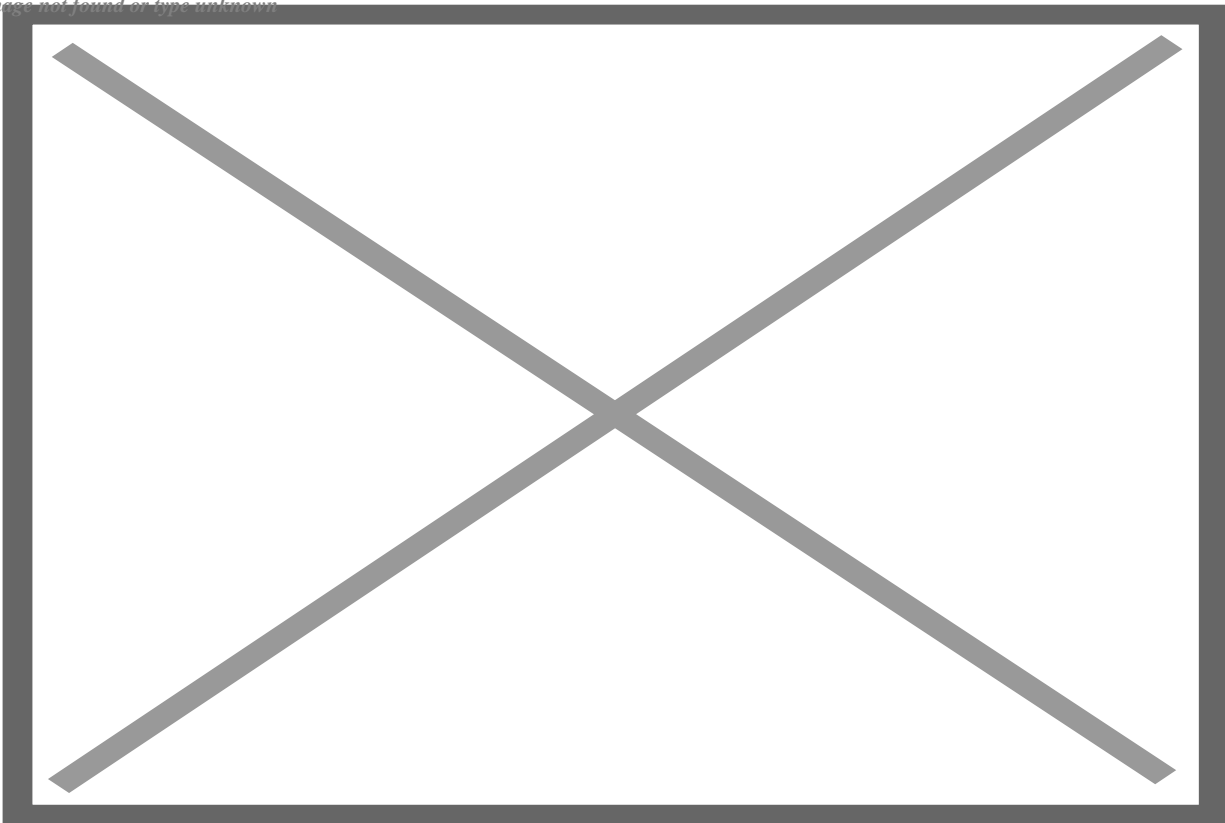


Brazilian Supreme Court to hear requests to block Copa America

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Many groups and individuals have raised concerns and questions about the football tournament being held in Brazil, which has recorded the second-most deaths due to the coronavirus in the world [Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters]

Brasilia, June 8 (RHC)-- Brazil's Supreme Court has agreed to hear two requests to block Copa America, after several groups and individuals raised concerns about the South American nation hosting the international tournament amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Chief Justice Luiz Fux said on Tuesday that, given the "exceptional nature of the case", he had decided to have the full 11-member court take up the matter in an extraordinary virtual session on Thursday.

The 10-nation championships are scheduled to kick off on Sunday and run through July 10. But some coaches, players, Brazilian Senate staffers and others have raised concerns and questions about the tournament, saying it risks worsening Brazil's already sky-high coronavirus infection and death rates.

More than 16.9 million cases have been reported to date in Brazil and more than 474,000 people have died – the second-highest death tally in the world after the United States – according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Many Brazilians blame far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, a COVID-19 sceptic who has rejected public health measures to stem the virus's spread, for the surging pandemic.

A Senate commission in April launched an investigation into Bolsonaro's handling of the coronavirus, including whether he acted too slowly and inefficiently to secure much-needed coronavirus vaccines.

But the South American football confederation, CONMEBOL, confirmed Brazil as the host last week after Colombia and Argentina were nixed as co-hosts due to continuing unrest in the former, and surging COVID-19 infections in the latter.

On June 6, Senate commission staffers urged organisers to postpone the tournament. They pointed to Brazil's low vaccination rates, saying just more than 10 percent of the population had received first doses of coronavirus vaccines as of Friday across the country.

"Brazil does not offer sanitary security for holding an international tournament of this magnitude. In addition to transmitting a false sense of security and normality, opposite to the reality that Brazilians are living, it would encourage agglomerations of people and set a bad example," they said.

"We are not against Copa America in Brazil or anywhere else. But we believe the tournament can wait until the country is ready to host it."

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