

Amazon

'Let forest breathe'

Native group patrols to expel 'invading loggers'

ALTO RIO GUAMA INDIGENOUS TERRITORY, Brazil, Sept 17, (AP) - A bit after sunrise, dozens of Indigenous Temb  men began preparing for the important day ahead. They danced, chanted and donned matching black T-shirts before setting off on motorbikes into Brazil's Amazon forest. Self-declared "forest guardians," their aim was to find and expel illegal loggers and miners within their territory on the eastern edge of Brazil's Para state. Emblazoned on their T-shirts was their group's name - Ka'Azar, which in their language means "Owners of the Forest."



Bolsonaro

"For a long time, since I was born, I heard my father and the elders talk about the need to fight the loggers in our lands," said Ronaldo Temb , a 21-year-old member of the 40-man patrol. "We are trying to combat deforestation within our reserve, which is becoming increasingly precarious."

The Temb  began these patrols last year as increasing encroachment on their territory and lax enforcement during President **Jair Bolsonaro's** administration prompted them to take matters into their own hands. Put on hold during the pandemic, the patrols resumed last week.

"We created the guardians, so these young men can inspect the land, to show where the invasions and illegal loggers are," said village leader S rgio Temb , adding that Bolsonaro's staunch support for Amazon development has emboldened the illegal activity.

Accompanied by an Associated Press photographer, the men rode for four hours before they heard barking dogs in the distance. Leaving their motorbikes, they walked along a trail until they found a wiry man in shorts and sandals near a huge felled tree.

Altemir Freitas Mota, 52, claimed the destruction wasn't his doing, and that he was merely gathering vines to make brooms and chairs. But he conceded that he had seen the loggers and, surrounded by the Temb  men brandishing rifles and machetes, agreed to guide them to their camp.

Deforestation

Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon region may have reached a 14-year high in the 12 months through July, according to preliminary data published last month by the country's space agency. It calculated the Brazilian Amazon lost 9,216 square kilometers (3,558 square miles) of vegetation in that period.

Bolsonaro has repeatedly said he believes it is folly for relatively small Indigenous populations to control vast swaths of rain forest. The Temb  people's Alto Rio Guama territory spans some 2,800 square kilometers (1,080 square miles), nearly the size of Rhode Island, and has about 1,700 residents, according to the advocacy group Socio-Environmental Institute. The Temb  are the western branch of the Tenetehara Indigenous group.

"No one is against giving due protection and land to our Indian brothers, but in the way it was done, and today it reflects 14% of national territory demarcated as Indigenous land, it is rather abusive," Bolsonaro said earlier this year.

He has also blasted Brazil's environmental regulator, IBAMA, for seizing lawbreakers' logging equipment or setting it afire, which is permitted under law. His administration's recently submitted 2021 budget proposal for IBAMA's environmental control and monitoring is down 25% from 2018, the final year of the prior administration.

S rgio Temb , the village leader, told the AP that Bolsonaro's stance has motivated criminals in the region to exploit their lands. Then he offered a plea to Bolsonaro.

"Our land is invaded, President, because you gave incentives for the loggers, the land grabbers to invade," he said. "So stop it, President. You need to have respect for us."

Initially, the Temb  destroyed the trespassers' tractors and other heavy equipment too, but doing so brought death threats and attempted ambushes. Last September, public prosecutors issued an official request for the Federal Police to conduct an urgent operation to protect the Temb  from loggers' attacks. They also recommended that the Temb  patrols limit their activities to monitoring and recording invasions, then alerting prosecutors, who can work to force action from federal authorities.

But even patrolling can be dangerous for the Temb  in a place where public oversight is scant, and where killing is an all-too-common recourse for lawbreakers. Several of the Guajajara Indigenous people, whose forest guardians defend their own land in neighboring Maranh o state, have been killed in the past year.

Mota, the man who said he'd seen the loggers and knew where their camp was, told the Temb  patrol that those at the camp were unarmed. Still, the Temb  kept their rifles at the ready as they walked an hour through the forest. They paused to discuss strategy as they drew near, and some painted their faces red with oil from the seeds of achiote pods.

They came upon a clearing where two large tarps were propped up with branches over a makeshift kitchen and sleeping area. There they found six loggers, a female cook and her son. Mota took a seat beside them.

The Temb  men explained to the loggers how felling trees harms both the environment and their people, while using their cellphones to record the exchange. Then they demanded the loggers leave their territory.

"We just ask you to leave from what is ours, and we stay in peace, no trouble with no one," one of the Temb  men told the logging camp's leader, Zeca Pil o, who stood shirtless with his arms crossed.

The Temb  will return and give one further warning, said S rgio Temb . If the loggers fail to comply, they will burn the loggers' equipment and camp, and hold the government responsible, he added.

"Up until now, we don't have support and we will never stop protecting our forest," said Ronaldo Temb . "We will never stop doing what's right, never stop allowing our forest to breathe."

Also:

BERLIN: Satellite images show that smoke from wildfires in the western United States has reached as far as Europe, scientists said Wednesday.

Data collected by the European Union's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service found smoke from the fires had traveled 8,000 kilometers (almost 5,000 miles) through the atmosphere to Britain and other parts of northern Europe.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, which operates some of the Copernicus satellite monitoring systems, said the fires in California, Oregon and Washington state have emitted an estimated 30.3 million metric tonnes (33.4 million tons) of carbon.

"The scale and magnitude of these fires are at a level much higher than in any of the 18 years that our monitoring data covers, since 2003," Mark Parrington, a senior scientist and wildfire expert at Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, said.

Parrington said the smoke thickness from the fires, known as aerosol optical depth or AOD, was immense, according to satellite measurements.

"We have seen that AOD levels have reached very high values of seven or above, which has been confirmed by independent ground-based measurement," he said. "To put this into perspective, an AOD of one would already indicate a lot of aerosols in the atmosphere."



In this July 9, 2020 photo, provided by Northrop Grumman and NASA, is one of two solid rocket boosters that have been donated to the California Science Center for display of the retired space shuttle Endeavour, being prepared for transport in Promontory, Utah. The boosters will allow the shuttle to be displayed in Los Angeles as if it was about to blast off into space. Shuttle boosters, filled with solid fuel, provided most of the thrust for the first two minutes of flight and then parachuted into the ocean where they were recovered for reuse. (AP)

Coronavirus

Numbers are misleading

Questions raised on India's death toll

NEW DELHI, Sept 17, (AP) - When Narayan Mitra died on July 16, a day after being admitted to the hospital for fever and breathing difficulties, his name never appeared on any of the official lists put out daily of those killed by the coronavirus.

Test results later revealed that Mitra had indeed been infected with COVID-19, as had his son, Abhijit, and four other family members in Silchar, in northeastern Assam state, on India's border with Bangladesh.

But Narayan Mitra still isn't counted as a coronavirus victim. The virus was deemed an "incidental" factor, and a panel of doctors decided his death was due to a previously diagnosed neurological disorder that causes muscle weakness.

"He died because of the virus, and there is no point lying about it," Abhijit Mitra said of the finding, which came despite national guidelines that ask states to not attribute deaths to underlying conditions in cases where COVID-19 has been confirmed by tests.

Such exclusions could explain why India, which has recorded more than 5.1 million infections - second only to the United States - has a death toll of about 83,000 in a country of 1.3 billion people.

India's Health Ministry has cited this as evidence of its success in fighting the pandemic and a basis for relaxing restrictions and reopening the economy after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a strict lockdown of the entire population earlier this year.

But experts say the numbers are misleading and that India is not counting many deaths.

"We are undercounting deaths by an unknown factor," said Dr. T. Jacob John, a retired virologist.

The Health Ministry has bristled at past allegations of an undercount in fatalities, but it refused to comment this week on whether states were reporting all suspected and confirmed virus deaths.

Determining exact numbers during the pandemic is difficult: Countries count cases and deaths differently, and testing for the virus is uneven, making direct comparisons misleading.

In India, recording mortality data was poor even before the pandemic struck. Of the 10 million estimated deaths each year, fewer than a quarter are fully documented, and only one-fifth of these are medically certified, according to national figures.

Most Indians die at home, not in a hospital, and doctors usually aren't present to record the cause of death. This is more prevalent in rural areas, where the virus is now spreading.

Dr. Prabhat Jha, an epidemiologist at the University of Toronto who has studied deaths in India, said countries should err on the side of overestimating deaths if they want to make progress in fighting the virus.

"It is better to have no estimate than an underestimate," Jha said.

Record

The Health Ministry guidelines echo this concern, asking states to record all suspected virus deaths, including "presumptive deaths" - those who likely died of COVID-19 but weren't tested for it.

But those guidelines are advisory, and many states don't comply. In Maharashtra, India's worst affected state with more than 1 million cases, suspected deaths aren't recorded in the tally, said Dr. Archana Patil, the state's health director.

Other states, like Assam, have created panels of doctors who differentiate between "real virus deaths" and those from underlying illnesses. In some cities like New Delhi or Mumbai, these panels occasionally have added missed deaths to the tally.

But Dr. Anup Kumar Barman, who heads the panel in Assam, said the state is not including many fatalities where the virus was "incidental" and not the cause of death. In Narayan Mitra's case, he had more symptoms of his underlying neurological disorder, Barman said.

Assam state was following the federal guidelines and was citing the virus only in those deaths due to respiratory failure, pneumonia or blood clots, Barman added. But the guidelines list these factors as instances of how the virus can kill and are not a restrictive checklist. Barman refused to answer

any follow-up questions from The Associated Press.

Assam state has recorded over 147,000 infections but fewer than 500 deaths as of Wednesday.

In West Bengal state, a similar panel was shelved in May and the state said it would subsequently follow federal guidelines. Of the 105 deaths of those testing positive for COVID-19 in April, the panel found that 72, or nearly 70%, weren't caused by the virus.

P.V. Ramesh, who until July 8 headed COVID-19 management for Andhra Pradesh state in southern India, said coronavirus deaths "at home, in transit or while arriving at hospitals don't get counted."

The gaps in data also mean that India's ability to identify spikes in deaths from natural causes from previous years is spotty. Problems in death counts have raised concerns in countries like South Africa.

Meanwhile, the courts have criticized some states, like Telangana, over transparency in sharing data about fatalities.

In addition, federal Health Ministry guidelines in May advised hospitals against conducting autopsies in suspected COVID-19 cases to prevent exposure to the virus. Although the guidelines say the certification can be done by doctors, experts said this also was leading to undercounting deaths.

The government's emphasis on the low death toll despite the rising number of reported infections has resulted in people thinking the virus wasn't necessarily fatal, leading to a "false sense of protection," said Dr. Anant Bhan, who researches public health and ethics in the city of Bhopal. That has led to people letting their guard down by not taking precautions such as wearing masks or maintaining social distance, Bhan said.

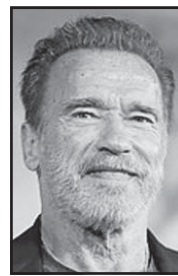
Regional officials also felt pressure to play down deaths to show the health crisis was under control, said Dr. S.P. Kalantri, director of a hospital in Maharashtra's rural Wardha district. Initially there were "subtle hints" from district officials to "play down the numbers" by listing some deaths as being caused by underlying diseases, he said.



Anindita Mitra, 61, poses with a portrait of her husband late Narayan Mitra, at her house in Silchar, India on Sept 13. Mitra wasn't listed among those killed by the coronavirus that authorities put out daily because the test results confirming COVID-19 arrived after his death. (AP)



Christiansen



Arnie

Discovery

'Use stimulus funds - Arnie': Government stimulus programs designed to keep countries afloat during the coronavirus pandemic offer "a tremendous opportunity" to build a clean-energy economy, actor and former California governor **Arnold Schwarzenegger** said Thursday.

Schwarzenegger called on governments not to "invest in the past," saying that "forward-looking decisions" are needed now as trillions are being poured into rebuilding economies around the globe.

"These funds are so massive they're capable of remaking societies; we have a tremendous opportunity here," Schwarzenegger said while speaking by video link from Los Angeles to the Austrian World Summit in Vienna, an offshoot of his climate initiative. "All we have to do is pick it up."

Since leaving political office in 2011, the Austrian-American actor has devoted time to environmental causes. A Republican, he has sparred with US President Donald Trump over climate issues.

"When you hear that government plans to spend stimulus money bailing out fossil fuels, we must ask ourselves: if investors aren't supporting those declining companies, why should taxpayers?" Schwarzenegger said. "Government must realize what the smart money knows instinctively: don't invest in the past."

Schwarzenegger said efficient uses of money would include making buildings more energy-efficient and weatherproof, installing energy-efficiency appliances, cars using alternative fuels and planting trees. (AP)

T rex goes up for auction: He weighed at least 7 tons and had eyes the size of baseballs. His bite could have crushed a car. He bore scars from fierce prehistoric battles.

All this could be yours for as much as \$8 million.

The legend of the Tyrannosaurus rex nicknamed Stan is getting fresh life thanks to Christie's. The auction house put his bones on display starting Wednesday through floor-to-ceiling windows at its midtown Manhattan gallery in advance of putting them up for auction.

"He is 37 feet long and one of the fiercest killing machines that has ever roamed the earth," said James Hyslop, head of the auction house's science and natural history

department.

About 67 million years after Stan did all that roaming and killing, his remains were discovered in 1987 by paleontologist Stan Sacrison in a geological area in the Midwest known as the Cretaceous Badlands.

The fossils became known for forming

one of the most intact dinosaur skeletons ever discovered. Researchers also marveled at how the skull had large puncture wounds, speculating that they were the result of T. rex warfare.

The skeleton - being put up for sale by the Black Hills Institute in South Dakota -



Stan, one of the largest and most complete Tyrannosaurus rex fossil discovered, is on display on Sept 15, at Christie's in New York. (AP)

will remain on display through Oct 21 at Christie's flagship location at Rockefeller Center. The auction is set for Oct. 6.

Hyslop assured potential buyers that Stan "is being offered with no reserve. So absolutely everyone has a shot at him." (AP)

Lego to ditch plastic bags: Lego has said that it will stop using plastic bags inside its boxed sets and replace them with paper ones.

The Danish toymaker said it will start making the switch next year and expects plastic bags to be completely phased out in the next five years. The bags are used to hold loose bricks in boxed sets.

Lego, as well as other big brands, have been looking for ways to cut plastic use in order to please customers increasingly worried about how their purchases impact the environment. Monopoly maker Hasbro, for example, has also announced plans to eliminate plastics in its packaging.

Among the environmental issues posed by plastic is that it doesn't disintegrate. Instead, it breaks down into tiny pieces that can be eaten by birds or other wildlife, endangering their health.

"We have been exploring alternatives for some time and the passion and ideas from children inspired us to begin to make the change," said Lego CEO **Niels B. Christiansen**, in a prepared statement. (AP)