

'We lost everything': Brazil floods leave thousands destitute

December 29 2021



People in the Joia do Atlantico village in Bahia state have to use a boat to cross roads following heavy flooding.

Carlos Batista da Silva holds his hand above his head, indicating on a wall the level where floodwaters reached inside his northeastern Brazil

home.

Although he was warned of the approaching deluge, his house was submerged before he could react as Bahia state faces a heavy cost from the flooding caused by torrential rains that burst two dams and left at least 24 people dead.

"We wanted to take out the furniture but there wasn't time, we lost everything. The only thing we could save was the television," da Silva told AFP as he threw out a sofa, armchairs and microwave that were all destroyed.

"My mother also lost everything," said da Silva, who will only move back into his home "when the sun is hot, and the weather improves," something that is expected in a few days.

Neighbor Joao Vitor Gomes Santos was also taken by surprise when the water entered his home in Itapetinga.

"The wardrobe, bed, dresser... we lost everything."

More than 90,000 people have been displaced, with the floods affecting over half a million victims across some 140 municipalities.

Authorities say it has been the heaviest December rainfall in Bahia in 32 years. In some towns, a month's worth of rain fell in a matter of hours.

While the waters are receding in some areas, leaving behind mountains of rubbish, in others the risk is increasing due to the opening of floodgates.

Firefighters in Bahia say at least 10 dams are at risk of collapsing as waters rise in several rivers.

Inhabitants of the areas most at risk have been urged to evacuate.



Some 40 state highways have been blocked or damaged by flooding in northeastern Brazil.

In some parts of the state, help only comes from boats and helicopters.

In total, 44 state highways have been blocked or damaged as a result of the floods.

Meteorologists fear that in the next few days heavy rainfall could reach far more populous states such as Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo.

Bolsonaro absent

President Jair Bolsonaro on Tuesday authorized a 200-million-reais (\$36 million) loan to rebuild infrastructure and roads in five states, including Bahia, which will receive 80 million reais.

Bahia Governor Rui Costa, from the opposition Workers' Party, said the measure was "insufficient" and called for more resources to tackle the crisis.

On Monday, Costa described the floods as "the worst catastrophe in the history of Bahia."

On Tuesday he described the scene in his state as a war zone, saying it was too early to estimate how much damage had been done.

Bolsonaro has come under fire for not visiting the affected areas.

While several ministers flew over the devastated zones on Tuesday, Bolsonaro was seen jet-skiing at a beach in the south of the country.

"I hope I won't have to cut short my holidays," he told supporters, according to a local website in Santa Catarina.

Leftwing legislator Marcelo Freixo accused him on Twitter of "a lack of compassion."

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