

Amazon rivers fall to lowest in over a century amid Brazil drought

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The Negro River, the second largest tributary of the Amazon, reached its lowest level on record near Manaus on Monday, marking a significant milestone in the Amazon rainforest's worsening drought. This crisis follows closely after a period of intense flooding just over two years ago.

The water level at the city's port has plummeted to 13.5 meters (44.3 feet), a stark contrast to the 30.02 meters (98.5 feet) recorded in June 2021, marking its highest level ever documented. The Negro River, responsible for draining approximately 10% of the Amazon basin, ranks as the world's sixth-largest river by water volume.

The drought has also affected the Madeira River, another vital Amazon tributary, causing Brazil's fourth largest hydroelectric dam, Santo Antonio, to halt its operations due to historically low water levels.

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The drying tributaries of the Amazon have left boats stranded, isolating remote villages and cutting off vital

supplies of food and water. The unusually high water temperatures are suspected of causing the deaths of more than 100 endangered river dolphins.

Additionally, commercial navigation supplying Manaus, a city of 2 million people with a significant industrial sector, has been severely disrupted.

The Brazilian Science Ministry attributes the drought to the onset of this year's El Niño climate phenomenon, which is causing extreme weather patterns globally. The ministry said that the drought is expected to persist until at least December, coinciding with the peak effects of El Niño. As of Monday, the drought has affected 481,000 people, according to the civil defense agency in the state of Amazonas, where Manaus is located.

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Manaus, the largest city and capital of Amazonas, the state hit hardest by the drought, declared states of emergency in 55 out of 62 municipalities due to the severe water shortage.

The drought has persisted for a month, leading to changes in transportation methods. Brazil switched to a lower-powered boat suitable for shallow waters, but most communities along Taruma-Açu, a tributary of the Negro River, remain unreachable. Some residents must trek up to three hours to reach their homes, and tourism in the area has come to a standstill.

In addition to the water crisis, Manaus and nearby cities are grappling with soaring temperatures and thick smoke from human-caused fires used for deforestation and clearing pasture. The drought has likely contributed to the deaths of numerous river dolphins in Tefe Lake, near the Amazon River.

This dire situation stands in stark contrast to July 2021 when the Negro River inundated parts of downtown

Manaus during historic flooding, damaging crops and impacting riverine communities for about three months.

The Negro River converges with the Amazon River near Manaus, marking the beginning of the Amazon in Brazilian maps, while internationally, the Amazon River is considered to commence in Peru. Philip Fearnside, an American researcher at the Brazilian National Institute of Amazonian Research, anticipates the situation will worsen both during this ongoing event and in the future due to the increasing frequency and severity of such events caused by climate change.

(With inputs from agencies)