

## International

# Bolsonaro increasingly isolated as Trump leaves

## Brazilian president's reputation has been tarnished

**BRASILIA, Brazil:** When Jair Bolsonaro became Brazil's president in January 2019 he nurtured relationships with other like-minded, far-right governments, but as the political tide turns he now finds himself and his country increasingly isolated. Boasting close ties with US President Donald Trump, Bolsonaro was emboldened and unapologetic for a worldview often criticized as sexist, racist and homophobic, as well as his disdain for the environment.

But two years later Argentina has replaced the market-friendly Mauricio Macri with center-left President Alberto Fernandez, while in the United States Democrat Joe Biden will succeed Republican Donald Trump as president next week. Yet Bolsonaro, often dubbed the "Tropical Trump", shows few signs of caring.

### 'Ever more isolated'

The Brazilian president remains unwavering in his support for neoliberal economic policies, social conservatism and provocative anti-establishment rhetoric. Diplomatically he's pushing Brazil ever further from its main economic partners: China, the United States, the European Union, and Argentina. "This aggressive stance against everything" aimed at "mobilizing his internal base" for his 2022 re-election bid will lead

him down a blind alley, says Oliver Stuenkel, a professor in international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

"In the long term this stance won't work because Brazil will become ever more isolated and it will take years for Brazil to recover its influence," he said. Bolsonaro was the last major world leader to congratulate Biden on his election victory more than a month after the event, and has backed Trump's unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud.

"Bolsonaro needs external politics to convince his base that he's not a traditional politician" since "he can no longer present himself as the person who's going to end corruption or old school politics" now that he's made overtures to traditional political parties, said Stuenkel. Bolsonaro has alienated China over his threat to exclude Huawei from the race to develop 5G in the country, and for disparaging remarks about the Chinese Coronavac COVID-19 vaccine.

His reputation among many EU countries and the incoming Biden administration has been tarnished by his poor record on containing deforestation and wildfires in the Amazon rainforest, as well as his threat to scupper the EU's trade deal with the South American MERCOSUR bloc. And just last week he hit out at neighbor Ar-



**PALM BEACH, Florida:** In this file photo taken on March 7, 2020, US President Donald Trump speaks with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro at Mar-a-Lago. — AFP

gentina for legalizing abortion - a bill that was supported by Fernandez. He said "the lives of Argentine children" were being extinguished "with State consent."

In a Cabinet meeting in April, Foreign Minis-

ter Ernesto Araujo, who has often spoken out against globalization, said he was convinced that Brazil could be sitting "at the table of the four, five or six countries that will define the new world order" post COVID. — AFP

## Turkmenistan and Afghanistan open new rail, power links

**ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan:** Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have inaugurated new transport, power and communications links, Turkmenistan said yesterday, as the ex-Soviet republic touts its role rebuilding Afghanistan's conflict-torn economy. A trio of Turkmen foreign ministry statements said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov had participated via teleconference in opening ceremonies for a new branch of the railway connecting the two countries, a new power transmission line and a fibre optic line.

The 500 kilovolt, 153-km power transmission line connecting Kerki in Turkmenistan to Sheberghan in Afghanistan is the first leg of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) power project part-financed by the Asian Development Bank. Afghanistan's fourth largest city, Mazar-i-Sharif, is among the cities slated to receive Turkmen electricity, according to the foreign ministry readout.

Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have been connected by rail since late 2016, and the latest branch extends the line down from the Afghan border settlement of Akina (also spelled Aqina) to Andkhoy, another Afghan town 30 km south. According to the Turkmen foreign ministry readout, the opening was "marked by the solemn dispatch from the Akina station towards the city of Andkhoy of a train consisting of 20 cars loaded with export products from Turkmenistan". — AFP

## Turkey launches vaccination drive with Chinese jab

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish doctors and nurses rolled up their sleeves yesterday as the nation of 83 million people launched a coronavirus vaccination drive with China's Sinovac jab. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca received the first shot of CoronaVac live on television after formally approving the vaccine Wednesday despite contradictory data about its efficacy rate. Preliminary studies involving more than 7,000 volunteers in Turkey showed CoronaVac to be 91.25 percent effective.

But a bigger trial in Brazil showed 50.4 percent efficacy and a third one in Indonesia pointed to a 65.3 percent success rate, raising concerns about transparency from the Chinese manufacturers. Turkish television was plastered with images yesterday of healthcare workers receiving their first doses as officials tried to raise awareness and acceptance of the vaccine.

"Our citizens should not worry," Professor Recep Demirhan, chief physician at a city hospital on the Asian side of Istanbul, told reporters as he received his shot. "We have conducted preliminary testing of all vaccines coming to Turkey and they are safe," he said. One opinion poll conducted in November showed about half of Turkish respondents unwilling to take the jab.

After covering Turkey's 1.1 million healthcare workers, the vaccination program will move on to essential workers and people aged 65 and above. "This vaccination drive is needed to return to our normal, old way of life," Koca said on Wednesday. "We see the light at the end of the tunnel and I believe the coming days will be bright."

Turkey has signed up for 50 million doses of CoronaVac.



**ANKARA:** A health worker receives an injection of the Chinese Sinovac vaccine at Ankara City Hospital yesterday. — AFP

Twenty million of them are due to arrive by the end of the month. The official Anadolu news agency reported that Turkey also sent 20,000 doses to the breakaway state of northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Ankara. In December, Turkey also reached a deal to receive 4.5 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab by late March. Officials hope to receive up to 30 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, although talks are still ongoing.

Turkey, which has registered 23,325 COVID-19 deaths and 2.3 million virus infections, has seen its official daily death tolls slip back down to under 200 after imposing weekend lockdowns and other daily restrictions in November. Last month, it began requiring passengers arriving from abroad to submit negative PCR tests. — AFP