

World



Luene Karipuna, who lives in Amapa state in northeast Brazil, will travel 39 hours by river to attend Cop30 in Belem, above, to oppose oil drilling in the region

Lula doesn't practise what he preaches, say Amazon activists

Brazil's president agrees to oil drilling days before hosting global green summit, writes Stephen Gibbs in Belem

Luene Karipuna rarely saw the oilmen but she could hear them. For months, the indigenous woman had noticed an increase in aircraft buzzing over the remote riverside settlement where she lived in Amapa state in the northeast of Brazil, on their way towards the sea.

"Every four hours they would cross our territory," she told The Times. Now she knows why: the oilmen on board were making a final push for permission to drill for commercially recoverable oil offshore from the ancestral territory of the Karipuna people.

The region, a maze of mangroves where the Amazon spills into the Atlantic, has long been one of the most tantalising remaining frontiers for oil exploration. Interest has soared since Guyana and Suriname to the north both made vast offshore discoveries, transforming their economies.

The area is so environmentally precious, however, that it had, until now, been forbidden fruit to the oil industry. It is home to one of the world's richest marine ecosystems, as well as hundreds of indigenous communities, and no exploratory drilling has ever been allowed, even under the right-wing, proudly pro-business former president Jair Bolsonaro, who was called a criminal by environmentalists.

That changed on October 20 when the Brazilian environmental agency, Ibama, gave the country's majority state-owned oil giant Petrobras permission to perforate an exploratory well. The area, known as Block 59, is 100 miles offshore.

Only two years earlier, the same agency had declined to grant a licence, citing possible effects on indigenous groups and the sensitive coastal biodiversity. Since then, it has faced intense pressure from President Lula's government to reconsider. Petrobras has said drilling will start "immediately" and that its modelling had shown that the environmental impact, even in the case of an accidental spill, will be minimal.

The licence has angered the Brazilian



The environmental impact of drilling in Manaus, Amazonas. President Lula, below



green movement, which had been broadly supportive of the left-wing president, who was praised for slowing the deforestation of the Amazon. Suely Araujo, senior public policy specialist at the Climate Observatory and a former president of Ibama, said: "This is a historic mistake."

She and others point to the timing of the announcement, only days before Brazil hosts the annual United Nations climate change conference. Cop30 will bring together governments and environmentalists from almost every country in the world. One of its ambitions is to phase out all use of fossil fuels. The leaders' meeting on November 6 and 7, before the main conference begins, will be attended by the Prince of Wales, Sir Keir Starmer, President Macron of France and Friedrich Merz, the German chancellor, among others.

Belem, the colourful northeastern city where the conference will be held, was chosen by the Brazilian government partly because it sits photogenically on the edge of the Amazon forest. But that powerful messaging may now

be undermined by the fact that the city is about to be associated with offshore oil drilling.

Araujo, who is co-ordinating legal action to try to revoke the licence, said: "The government is sabotaging the leadership it should have at Cop30. How can our diplomats push for the shift away from fossil fuels ... when the country is at the same time intensifying fossil fuel exploration and production?"

Lula, 80, has insisted that both are possible. He says Brazil will use its growing oil revenues to invest in its energy transition. "Who is currently in a position to free themselves from fossil fuels? No one is," he told journalists last week. Brazil, he said, would "use oil money to consolidate the energy transition of planet Earth". His energy minister, Alexandre Silveira, was more direct, saying: "As long as the world demands oil, someone will supply it."

The apparent contradiction has enraged many environmental activists in Belem, who already suspect that Cop30 is little more than an exercise in greenwashing, more about the environ-

mental credentials of its participants than about any real achievements. Ariete Pastana, 32, grew up in a traditional community on the Tocantins river. "These speeches we will no doubt hear about caring for the Amazon, for riverpeople, for indigenous communities, are mostly untrue," she said. "The talk is always about protecting us, but the actions, by the same people, are predatory."

Odenira Correa Dias, 27, also spent her childhood in an Amazon village and is studying for a doctorate in Amazon agronomics at the Federal University of Para. She was equally cynical about the government's sustainability claims. Her community was still traumatised by its collective memory of the Tucuruí hydroelectric dam, the first mega-dam in the Amazon, which was opened in 1984 by the military government with promises that it would bring development to the region, she said.

The project led to the flooding of more than 1,000 square miles of rainforest and the destruction of hundreds of communities and their livelihoods. "Pollution of the river completely changed the life dynamics of these populations living on the riverbanks," she said. "In addition to the suffering, there was no reparation, no compensation at all. Even the energy generated by the hydroelectric dam was not distributed fairly."

Rafael Martins da Silva, a public prosecutor in Belem who is working on the case against the licence, said that taking on the oil companies, especially when they were backed by the state, was a "David versus Goliath challenge". He said: "We are fighting against big companies that are making big investments in the country." A big danger, he added, was that once one licence was awarded, the "floodgates" would open. Karipuna said that only those who lived in the region could fully understand what was being lost. "Sea birds make their nests here," she said. "The streams are full of fish, you can practically catch them with your hands."

She planned to travel 39 hours by river boat to Belem to attend the Cop30 conference and make her views heard. She was fully aware, though, that opposing the fossil fuel industry was a formidable challenge, "like swimming against the tide", she said. "Most often, the tide is stronger than us."

Additional reporting: Tiffany Higgins

Dutch centrist claims victory in tight election

The Netherlands Rob Jetten, the Dutch centrist, has claimed victory in a knife-edge prime ministerial election over the hard-right populist Geert Wilders.

The 38-year-old head of the D66 party is on track to become the youngest and first openly gay prime minister. ANP, a Dutch news agency that collates and distributes the vote tally, called the election for Jetten, saying he could not be overtaken.

With just one constituency and overseas postal votes still to be counted, Jetten holds a lead of 15,155 votes over Wilders and his PVV Freedom Party. Projections from the results so far put both parties on 26 seats in the 150-seat parliament but ANP said D66 could win a 27th seat.

Postal votes are already being counted in The Hague but that result will not be announced before Monday evening at the earliest.

Expats have historically voted for more centrist and left-wing parties. At the election in 2023, D66 outscored the PVV by nearly 3,000 postal votes.

The results will only become official when the Electoral Council declares them on Friday, but Jetten said there was no time to waste. Wilders retorted that Jetten had jumped the gun. "The Electoral Council decides, not ANP. How arrogant not to wait," Wilders wrote on X.

Storm death toll rises

Caribbean Hurricane Melissa's death toll has reached 49, as rescue operations in Jamaica and Haiti continue after the strongest storm to hit the region since records began. At least 30 people are confirmed dead in Haiti and 19 in Jamaica. Forecasters estimate up to £40 billion in damage was caused by the category 5 hurricane which made landfall in Jamaica on Tuesday.

Israeli lawyer resigns

Israel The Israeli military said its most senior lawyer resigned yesterday during an investigation into a leaked video appearing to show soldiers abusing a Palestinian detainee at the Sde Teiman military base last year. "The military advocate general, MG Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, submitted a request this morning to conclude her position," a military statement said.

Red wine saves cyclist

France A French cyclist survived for three days after a 130ft fall into a ravine, sustained by the bottles of red wine in his shopping bag, police said. The man, 77, missed a bend on a high road in the Cévennes region and careered down a rocky slope near Saint-Julien-des-Points. He was rescued after roadworkers heard him shouting for help.

Loo for sale, just \$10m

United States A solid gold toilet is to be auctioned in New York with a starting price of \$10 million. *America*, a functioning lavatory by the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, is made from 101.2kg of 18-carat gold and will be sold on November 18. A second, identical lavatory was stolen from Blenheim Palace in 2019 and has never been found.