

# CEDI

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### Prospectors' victory is another step in genocide of Amazon Indians

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Jan Rocha in Sao Paulo

IN 1992 Spain, the Vatican and other interested or guilty parties will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the discovery of what is now Latin America. For the Indians who were already here it was an invasion that led to 500 years of physical and cultural aggression.

This week's events in Brazil's Amazon state of Roraima cannot shock the world with images like those of Tiananmen Square or Timisoara. The Yanomami Indians die more discreetly, hidden in the forest, or slowly, of TB, malaria and malnutrition.

Apparently the government is responding to the pressure of desperate men — the thousands of gold prospectors now threatened with forceful removal by the federal police, obeying a judge's order.

Then there is the problem of the governor of Roraima, Mr Romero Juca Filho, who wants to run for senator in this year's

elections. The prospectors have votes, the Indians do not.

For anthropologists who have studied the history of government Indian policy over the last year, however, it is not these immediate interests that have persuaded the Justice Minister, Mr Saulo Ramos, to back down, defy the court order, and decide that the prospectors will be merely transferred to areas of so-called national forest still within traditional Yanomami territory.

What is happening is part of a "systematic strategy to expropriate Indian lands in the northern and western Amazon border regions, aimed at consolidating the military and economic occupation of Brazil's Amazon belt," in the opinion of Mr Bruce Albert, a member of the independent organisation, the Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park (CCPY), set up in 1978.

This policy, originally defined by the military regime's National Security Council, was continued under the civilian government in 1985. The coun-

cil was renamed Saden — Secretariat for National Defence. The policy is expressed in two mega-projects for the region: Calha Norte, in the northern Amazon, which includes the Yanomami region, and Proffao, a programme for the development of the western Amazon border belt which includes the rubber-tapper Chico Mendes's state, Acre.

During President Sarney's government, which ends in March, Saden took over direct control of all Indian and environmental policy in the Amazon. The justification for this indirect military control is that in border areas national security and sovereignty are at stake. Indians are treated as potentially subversive anti-patriots. The defenders of Yanomami land rights were accused of wanting to create an independent Yanomami state.

Indian reserves are protected under the 1989 constitution, but Saden found a way round this by creating two new figures — Indian colonies, referring to the relatively small area where In-

dians actually live, and national forests, where economic activities are allowed.

Thus, in February 1989, President Sarney put his signature to a series of decrees dividing the Yanomami's already recognised territory of 9.4 million hectares into 19 small "islands" unconnected to each other.

Surrounding these islands, two national parks were created where the 9,400 Indians would have "preferential use." In reality these decrees reduced the Yanomami's land by 70 per cent.

Now the *garimpeiros*, or prospectors, are to be moved into three areas of national forest, and the destruction of the environment and the slow genocide of the Yanomami will continue.

### Battle for survival of Amazon Indians moves from rain forest to courts

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Jan Rocha in Sao Paulo

THE battle to save Brazil's Yanomami Indians from gold prospectors has moved from the Roraima rain forests in the northern Amazon to the courtrooms of Brasilia.

A senior public prosecutor, Mr Eugenio Araujo, has accused the federal police chief, Romeu Tuma, of disobeying a court order to remove the prospectors. The order required him to explain his actions on pain of imprisonment.

Federal police suspended their operation to remove the prospectors after the Minister of Justice, Mr Saulo Ramos, announced that they would be allowed to move into three areas of National Forest, also inside Yanomami territory.

The public prosecutor said: "The federal police chief's job was to remove the *garimpeiros* (prospectors) not sit down and negotiate with them. He had disobeyed a judicial order and that is a crime. The forest areas now being negotiated with the

prospectors are part of the Indians' territory, upheld by the courts."

The prosecutor said Mr Ramos had defied the judiciary "by throwing out this pearl of wisdom: no judicial decision can determine the impossible."

Another public prosecutor, Mr Carlos Vittor Muzzi, said that if the prospectors were transferred to the national forest area he would demand the arrest of the head of the National Indian Bureau, the Air Force Minister and the Federal Police Chief for disobeying court orders to expel the *garimpeiros* and close down their air strips in the forests.

This unprecedented clash between the Public Prosecutor's Office and the executive is a result of the independence conferred on them by the 1988 constitution. From being defenders of the state they have become defenders of citizens' rights, including Indians' rights.

The public prosecutors have also crossed swords with the Minister of Mines and Energy and the powerful mining com-

pany, Paranapanema, on a 20-mile road illegally built through the land of another tribe, the Waimiri Atroari. The tin company needs the road to transport cassiterite from a mine inside Indian land.

Yesterday, the Prosecutor's Office presented an injunction requesting the road's closure.

The head of the Environmental agency, Mr Fernando Cesar Mesquita, said the prospectors had devastated the rain forest in the Yanomami area. "It's not just the contamination with mercury which is bad for the environment," he added. "They work with dredgers that destroy the river banks, pulling down trees along them. If they are transferred to other areas there, it will be just as much a disaster because the prospectors leave a trail of destruction wherever they go".

Civil rights groups and anthropologists have also joined the protests. Anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro said: "It's time Brazil showed shame for the way it treats the Indians."

There have also been propos-

als to convene an international tribunal on the Yanomami Indians, in Brasilia before the new President, Mr Fernando Collor take office in March.

So far, the President-elect has made no comment on the case nor reviewed his plans for Brazil's 230,000 Indians.

President Sarney yesterday promised the pop singer, Sít that he would demarcate a land of the Kayapo Indians before he leaves office. He made his pledge after learning of the rain forest foundation he raised nearly \$2million to pay for the operation.

However, Mr Sarney remaining aloof from clashes within his own government about a solution for plight of the Yanomami.