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Brazil, to Save the Indians, Will Blow Up Airs

By James Brooke

New York Times Service

RIO DE JANEIRO — After flying by helicopter over Yanomami Indian lands in the northern Amazon, Brazil's new president has ordered the police to dynamite all illegal landing strips carved out of the forest by gold miners.

By ordering the destruction of approximately 100 dirt airstrips, the president, Fernando Collor de Mello, says he hopes to block the miners from returning to the Indians' mineral-rich lands.

In the last three years, the arrival of 45,000 miners brought devastating diseases to the Yanomami, the last major isolated tribe in the Americas.

The ensuing damage to the Stone Age tribe caused an international outcry and prodded the Brazilian

government to start evacuating the miners last year.

On Wednesday, the authorities in Roraima State, home to most of Brazil's 9,000 Yanomami, announced that the evacuation was complete and that all the miners were out of the Indian areas.

Less confident that the evacuation was total, Brazil's Federal Police announced last week that any miner found in Yanomami areas would be arrested.

Since his election last December, Mr. Collor, 40, has sought to improve Brazil's international image on environmental issues. He ordered the destruction of the airstrips over the weekend.

Significantly, the trip to Roraima was the president's first out of Brasilia since he was inaugurated there on March 15.

Dressed in army-issue camouflage fatigues, the president toured the areas accompanied by almost all of his 12-member cabinet, including his secretary of the environment, José Lutzenberger.

"I was impressed by the destruction caused by the miners," Mr. Lutzenberger said. "I plan to review the decrees that created mining reserves in parts of Roraima National Forest."

Environmentalists and defenders of the Indians want Mr. Collor to revoke decrees issued by his predecessor, José Sarney, that permit miners to re-enter about 5 percent of the Yanomamis' 90,650-square-kilometer (35,000-square-mile) homeland.

But Roraima's settler population, which depends on mining for its livelihood, is overwhelmingly

opposed to any further limitation on their access to the land.

In last December's election, Roraima gave Mr. Collor his largest margin of victory of Brazil's 27 states and territories.

Saturday, Mr. Collor indicated that he wanted to balance the needs of the Yanomamis with the needs of the territory's non-Indian population.

"We can't separate the Indians' rights from the miners' rights," the president told 500 people gathered at a rally on Saturday in Boa Vista, the territory's capital. "We are all Brazilians and we will have to find solutions with intelligence and good will."

During his daylong tour, Mr. Collor visited Surucucus, an Indian village that has a Brazilian air force

landing strip a army post.

The development military programs, waters, which

Opposed by talists, the pro-million to build posts or installations along Brazil border from Colombia.

The outpost serve as centers the remote area.

Last Wednesday officials begin the program.

The president would continue priority is mental and economic