Deforestation in Amazon Forests

What is the issue?

- Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil is increasing rapidly since January, 2019.
- It is a matter of global concern, and Brazil must recognise that the Amazon rainforest is a universal treasure.

How significant are the Amazon forests?

- The Amazon basin, spread across millions of hectares in multiple countries, hosts massive sinks of sequestered carbon.
- Significantly, the Amazon forests are a key factor in regulating monsoon systems.
- The rainforests harbour rich biodiversity.
- Moreover, about 400 known indigenous groups present there have prevented commercial interests from overrunning the lands.
- Much of the Amazon has survived, despite relentless pressure to convert forests into farmlands, pastures and gold mines, and to build roads.
- The legacy of the ecosystem and the indigenous groups are now under great threat.

What are the recent changes?

- **Deforestation** - The new Brazilian President Mr. Bolsonaro has spoken in favour of "reasonable" exploitation of Amazon forestlands.
- Although the forest code has not been changed, his comments have emboldened illegal expansion into forests.
- Armed gold-hunting gangs have reached tribal areas and the leader of a tribe has been murdered in an incursion.
- Satellite images show that about 4,200 sq km of forests have been destroyed up to July 24, 2019 under the new government (since January).
- **Brazil's stance** - Brazil is the custodian of forests in about 5 million sq km of Amazon land.
- Given this, it has everything to gain by engaging with the international community on meeting the opportunity cost of leaving the Amazon undisturbed.
- But Mr. Bolsonaro refused to host the annual convention of the UN

Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2019 (but did not exit the Paris Agreement).
- By doing so, he lost a valuable opportunity to seek higher funding for forest protection.

What shoud be done?

- Most nations tend to view their land and forests through the narrow prism of short-term economic gain.
- However, climate science data show that they play a larger environmental role.
- Globally, there is tremendous momentum to save the Amazon forests.
- So, Brazil must welcome initiatives such as the billion-dollar *Amazon Fund* backed by Norway and Germany, instead of trying to shut them down.
- Remedial funding, accounting for the value of environmental services, is the most productive approach.
- This is because forest removal has not helped agriculture everywhere due to soil and other factors.
- In all, Brazil's President must recognise that rainforests are universal treasures, and the rights of indigenous communities to their lands are inalienable.
- The international community must use diplomacy in convincing Mr. Bolsonaro at this front.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Fact

Amazon Fund

- The Amazon Fund was created in 2008 to receive donations for non-reimbursable investments.
- The objective was to prevent, monitor, and combat deforestation, as well as to promote the preservation and sustainable use in the Brazilian Amazon.
- It consists of money donated by Norway, the main donor, and Germany.
- The fund holds US$850 million, and is managed by the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) of Brazil.

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