The Transnational Challenge of Climate Change

What is the issue?

- The Amazon forest fires are getting to be a worldwide concern.
- It is high time that governments across the world deal with it as a transnational challenge and not let nationalism interfere in it.

What is the looming Amazon threat?

- Brazil's Amazon forests are ablaze with dozens of fires.
- Most of them are set intentionally by loggers and others seeking greater access to forestland.
- Many cities in Europe and elsewhere have seen high temperatures experienced never before.
- Heat waves have also accelerated melting of glaciers in Greenland.
- It is happening at a rate that was not anticipated by scientific models until much later this century.
- How long the Amazon fires can continue is unclear. But at the current scale, the fires are paving the way for a global climate catastrophe.

What are the countries' stances?

- European leaders and civil society in many places are organising protests to oppose policies that encourage the fires.
- However, the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has stated that they are an internal matter.
- He claims that they were actually started by the very non-governmental organisations that are now raising concerns.
- The American President Donald Trump has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement, saying that it was against the U.S.'s national interests.
- Across the Atlantic, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has spoken from both sides on climate change.
- He receives funding from climate science denial groups as well as says that he would lobby the U.S. to take climate change more seriously.
- The increasing importance of nationalist ideologies by countries are reflected in:
    i. the burning of the world's largest forest reserves
    ii. the withdrawal of the world's leading polluter from a major

international treaty (US from the Paris deal)
iii. the U.K.'s isolationist policies

- But these actions have consequences that far transcend national boundaries and impact all creatures that share life on the planet.

What are the causes for climate threats?

- Energy and transport are mainly responsible for the accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere.
- But, besides this, the changes in land use patterns too have played a role.
- Deforestation, industrial agricultural systems and desertification are major drivers of climate change.
- Agriculture, forestry and other land use activities accounted for a little less than a quarter (23%) of the total net anthropogenic emissions of GHGs between 2007-2016.
- A recent IPCC report on Climate Change and Land mentions desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security and GHG changes in terrestrial ecosystems.
- It notes that unless land is managed in a sustainable manner, the lean chance that humanity will survive climate change will become smaller still.

How has land management been?

- Land is part and parcel of people's lives as it provides food, water, livelihoods, biodiversity and a range of other benefits from its ecosystems.
- Decades of poor land management in the agricultural system are coming back as a threat;
  i. soils have become depleted with heavy use of chemicals
  ii. farms have few or no friendly insects
  iii. monoculture has led to a reduction in the use of indigenous crop varieties with useful characteristics
  iv. groundwater is depleted
  v. polluted farm runoffs are contributing to contaminated water bodies and destroying biodiversity

How should land management be?

- Managing land better for farming would entail implementing more sustainable agricultural practices.
- This would mean reducing chemical input drastically, and taking the practice of food production closer to natural methods of agro-ecology.
- These would reduce emissions and enhance resilience to warming.
- The IPCC report, in this regard, calls for -

    i. avoiding conversion of grassland to cropland
    ii. bringing in equitable management of water in agriculture
    iii. crop diversification
    iv. agro-forestry
    v. investment in local and indigenous seed varieties that can withstand higher temperatures
- It also recommends practices that increase soil carbon and reduce salinisation.
- **Food system** - Establishing sustainable food systems means reducing food waste, which is estimated to be a quarter of the food produced.
- It also necessitates eating locally grown food and cutting meat consumption.
- Alongside these changes, it is important to put an end to deforestation and conserving mangroves, peatland and other wetlands.
- **Measures needed** - Land use policy should incorporate better access to markets for small and marginal farmers, and empower women farmers.
- It should also expand agricultural services and strengthen land tenure systems.
- Sustainable land management helps reduce stressors on ecosystems, helps societies adapt better to warmer climates and reduce their GHG emissions.

What is the way forward?

- Dealing with the transnational challenge of climate change requires a vision broader than the current narrow approach of nationalism.
- There is a need for a new planetary ethics that supports alternative systems for the future, for a sustainable earth. This should -
    i. cultivate the growth of ecological sensibilities
    ii. support pluralism
    iii. enhances quality of life
    iv. shift values away from consumerism
    v. create new identities and cultures that transcend conventional boundaries

Source: The Hindu

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