

The Amazon Inferno

The world's largest rainforest, the Amazon spans eight countries and covers 40% of the entire continent of South America. More than 30 million people live in the region along with millions of mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. The dense forests of Amazon produce about 20% of earth's oxygen, due to which they are often called "The planet's lungs". The engulfing fires, estimated to be around 80,000 in number (as estimated by the Brazil's National Institute of Space Research) are now threatening the well-being of the world. The European Union's satellite program shows that the smoke has already covered nearly half of Brazil and is now spilling over to neighbouring Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay.

Already, 20% of the wider Amazon biome has been lost to mining, logging, farming, construction of dams and roads. Currently, the Amazon is a 'sink' for carbon dioxide produced all over the world. Plants remove it from the atmosphere and absorb it for photosynthesis, releasing oxygen back to the air. However, the burning forests have turned Amazon to become a net source of carbon dioxide instead of acting like a sink. There are so many fires burning right now that smoke is visible even from space, as captured by the images sent from International Space Station.

Elected as president in October 2018, Jair Bolsonaro made campaign promises to restore the Brazilian economy by exploring Amazon's economic potential. He has cut the budget of the nation's environment enforcement agency drastically. His pro-business stand at the cost of environment has emboldened ranchers, farmers and loggers to seize control of Amazonia. The number of fires in the forests are up by 85% from last year. In addition to increasing emissions, this will contribute directly to a change in rainfall pattern, extending the length of dry season, further affecting the biodiversity and human health. Smoke from fires can now even be seen in Argentina.

If you wonder what you can do when there is a human-made catastrophe across the world then here are some suggestions for you. Irrespective of where the deforestation takes place, it is our responsibility to raise a good green cover. Plant more saplings and tend to them to create a natural ecosystem around you. Reduce your paper consumption. Always remember when you trash a paper, somewhere a tree is being cut. Reduce your intake of non-vegetarian food which has a larger carbon footprint. One tree planted and one tree saved by you can go a long way.

Sources- WWF, CNN, NISR, Greenpeace, NASA