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The Amazon Burned Less: What India Can Learn from a Good Year

 **DOWN TO EARTH**

23 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT**GS3**

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GS3
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THE LIFT LINE

Forest fires look like acts of nature, but their scale is an act of policy. When the Brazilian Amazon recorded its lowest burned area in four decades, the cause was not luck alone. It was reduced deforestation, better local fire control and a shifted burning season, and that is precisely why the story matters for India.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

A **MapBiomas** report found that the burned area in the Brazilian Amazon fell to about **3.1 million hectares in 2025**, the lowest since **1985**, down sharply from a record **15.8 million hectares in 2024**. The drivers were reduced deforestation, a shifted burning window caused by delayed rains, and improved local fire management. For a country like India, where a large share of forests are classified as fire-prone, this is a natural comparative case on how governance shapes fire outcomes.

The examiner values the candidate who reads an international event for domestic lessons. For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: **MapBiomas** reported Brazilian Amazon burned area at about **3.1 million hectares in 2025**, the lowest since **1985**, down from **15.8 million hectares in 2024**; the **Amazon** is the world's largest rainforest and a major **carbon sink**; the **Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO/OTCA)** coordinates the basin states; and the **Forest Survey of India (FSI)** issues fire alerts. **GS Paper 3:** conservation, environment and disaster management. For **Mains**, the argument is that fire outcomes respond to deforestation control, governance and community fire management.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **Amazon** is the planet's largest tropical rainforest and one of its most important carbon sinks, straddling several South American states coordinated through the **Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization**. Its fires are overwhelmingly human-linked, tied to clearing land for agriculture and pasture, and they spike when deforestation rises and dry spells lengthen.

The year 2024 was a disaster, with burned area at a record high amid drought. The turnaround in 2025 to the lowest figure since **1985** shows that the trend is not fixed. When deforestation slows and fire control improves, the burned area can fall dramatically even in a single year. That reversibility is the hopeful part of

the story.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Fire Follows Deforestation

The Amazon's fires are not spontaneous forest combustion so much as the burning of cleared land. When deforestation falls, the raw material for fire, felled and drying vegetation, shrinks with it. Brazil's better 2025 outcome tracked reduced clearing, confirming that controlling deforestation is the first lever on fire.

Weather Sets the Stage, Governance Decides the Outcome

Delayed rains shifted the burning window in 2025, but weather alone does not explain the scale of improvement. Stronger enforcement and better **local fire management** turned a favourable season into a record low. The distinction matters: governments cannot control rainfall, but they can control clearing and firefighting capacity.

The India Parallel

A large share of Indian forests are fire-prone, and the **Forest Survey of India** issues satellite-based fire alerts each season. India's fires differ in cause, often linked to dry-season ground fires, leaf litter and human activity, but the governance lesson transfers: monitoring, rapid response and community involvement decide how far a fire spreads.

FACTOR	BRAZILIAN AMAZON 2025	RELEVANCE FOR INDIA
Burned area	About 3.1 million ha , lowest since 1985	Shows outcomes are reversible
Prior year	Record 15.8 million ha in 2024	Bad years are not permanent
Deforestation	Reduced clearing lowered fuel	Control land-use change near forests
Fire control	Better local fire management	Strengthen community and FSI response
Coordination	ACTO/OTCA across basin states	Inter-state and inter-agency coordination

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use the **structural driver versus trigger** frame. Weather is the trigger that lights a season, but deforestation and land-use change are the structural drivers that decide how much there is to burn. Policy that chases only the trigger will fail; policy that addresses the driver can transform outcomes. A second frame is **governance and community as force multipliers**: satellite alerts from the **FSI** or **MapBiomas** are only as useful as the local capacity to act on them, so detection must be paired with response.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Deforestation and land clearing create fuel -> dry-season weather triggers fires -> strong enforcement + local fire management contain them -> monitoring by FSI or MapBiomas guides response -> burned area falls -> apply the same chain to India's fire-prone forests

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Attack the structural driver.** Curb deforestation and unregulated land-use change around forests, since reducing the fuel load is the most durable way to cut fire scale, as Brazil's 2025 turnaround showed.
- ❷ **Pair detection with rapid response.** Ensure **Forest Survey of India** fire alerts feed directly into equipped, trained ground teams under the **National Action Plan on Forest Fires**, so satellite data translates into fast containment.
- ❸ **Empower communities.** Invest in **community fire management**, including local watchers, controlled early burning and forest-dweller participation, recognising that the people nearest the forest are the first line of defence.
- ❹ **Strengthen coordination.** Build inter-state and inter-agency coordination for fire seasons, mirroring the basin-wide logic of bodies like **ACTO**, so fires that cross administrative boundaries meet a joint response.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Forest conservation, carbon sinks and disaster management are recurring GS3 themes. UPSC has asked about forest fires, the role of the Forest Survey of India, and the balance between conservation and development. The Amazon as a global carbon sink also links to climate-change questions.

Practice question: “Forest-fire outcomes are shaped less by weather than by governance, land-use control and community management.” Examine this statement with reference to recent global experience and India's forest-fire challenge. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: Down To Earth, Forest Survey of India

Source: The Amazon Burned Less: What India Can Learn from a Good Year — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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