

Deeper Issue behind Stubble burning

What is the issue?

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- The air pollution in Delhi is actually a disguise of water crisis in Punjab.

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- Unless the root issue is solved, Delhi will be covered with smoke every year during the harvesting season.

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What is the present situation in the National Capital Region?

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- Delhi's air quality has degraded from very poor to severe, In spite of discouraging private vehicles, shutting down coal-fired power plants or curbing heavy industries.

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- About one-third of the Delhi National Capital Region is engulfed with the harmful particulate matter derived from stubble burning in neighbouring states - Punjab and Haryana.

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- If there is no steps taken to curb the paddy stubble burning over 15 to 20 days, then the situation in Delhi would worsen.

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Why the farmers are resorting to stubble burning?

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- The farmers in Punjab and Haryana are using mechanised harvesters to harvest crops as there is scarcity of labour in the wealthy Punjab region and the sizes of farms are also huge.

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- The stubble and straw generated by using the mechanised harvesters are of little use as cattle feed.
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- If these stubble is left untreated, it uses up the nitrogen in the field and reduces the yield of next crop, i.e. wheat.
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- A Happy Seeder machine which plants wheat while mulching paddy stubble isn't cost effective for small farmers.
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- Gathering residue is also an issue, as most of the migrant labours return home to celebrate Diwali.
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- Therefore, burning the waste seems like the most logical solution to farmers, even though the villagers themselves are blighted by pollution.
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Why the issue behind stubble burning is deeper?

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- Paddy isn't a natural crop for the Punjab region and it consumes too much water.
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- There is an over reliance on the groundwater which has been rapidly depleting aquifers.
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- But the policymakers wanted farmers to grow wheat and rice in order to feed the growing population without relying on imports.
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- Only in the 2000s, the effect of their policy and the severity of burgeoning water crisis was understood.
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- Since then, the Punjab government has delayed the sowing of rice by setting a mandatory start date.
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- This year, it was postponed by another five days to save 2.4 trillion litres of water.
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- But later paddy sowing means even greater pressure after the harvest to clear the fields for wheat, and that's made Delhi's October-November air pollution even more concentrated, spoiling Diwali celebrations.
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Source: The financial Express

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