Status of Agricultural Stubble burning

Why in news?

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- The burning of crop residues may have declined a bit in Punjab and Haryana, but it now it extends to other states.
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- Economics is still loaded in favour of farmers burning crop residue. Subsidising farmers to use better technologies may be a solution.
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What is the background of the issue?

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- The primary thrust of the Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act is on industrial and automobile-related pollution.
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- But this doesn’t mean it can’t be used to curb the burning of biomass and crop residue.
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- In December 2015, the Ministry of Environment and Forests used Section 18(1)(b) of this legislation to issue directions for Delhi and NCR (National Capital Region), covering the burning of agricultural waste, crop residues and biomass.
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- NASA has released satellite images of some Northern and North-western states during October and November 2015, which reveal burning of crop residues in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.
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- NASA imagery further reveals that due to agricultural fires in some northern and north-western states, smog and hazy weather conditions formed in northern India, especially over Delhi and National Capital Region
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What are the steps taken by the government?

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- To ensure prevention of burning of crop residues, by incentivising purchase of modern machineries to minimise left-over crop residue in the field, in-situ conservation, mixing of residue in soil to increase fertility, multiple uses of crop residue, formulation of fodder pellets.
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- Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has formulated the ‘National Policy for Management of Crop Residues (NPMCR), 2014’ and circulated to all States/UTs.
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- The National Green Tribunal’s (NGT’s) direction is also from December 2015: The National Policy for Management of Crop Residue, 2014, prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture shall in conjunction with the Action Plan prepared by the States of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab be implemented in all these States now, without any delay.
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- Hereby Government prohibit agricultural residue burning in any part of the NCR Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana.
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What is the actual situation?

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- NASA images are less than comforting. The burning of crop residues may have declined a bit in Punjab and Haryana
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- But it now extends to Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, even bits of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.
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- It is all very well to say defaulters should be punished.
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- But this isn’t easy to enforce, though there have been instances of FIRs, prosecutions and fines against farmers in Punjab, Haryana and UP, and that does have a deterrent effect.
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- Ideal legislations, rules and directives are self-enforcing, depending on incentives rather than an iron hand.

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- Therefore, it is important to understand the economics of this.
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What is the way forward?

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- Agriculture is getting transformed, with irrigation and multiple cropping, plus more cultivation of wheat.
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- This squeezes the time available for manually taking out stubble, perhaps more serious in November-December, relatively less in April-May.
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- That stubble has value as fodder, more for wheat, less for rice.
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- Even for rice, it is possible to think of power from biomass and other uses.
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- However, right now, this isn’t viable because of assorted reasons, including the expenses of decentralised collection and aggregation.
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- One has to deal with fodder in the field in various ways use Stubble to mulch crop residue into the soil, introduce stubble distributors or straw management systems in combine harvesters or use happy seeders to plant through the residue.
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- Despite such possibilities, the economics is still loaded in favour of burning.
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- Burning crop residue has negative externalities, not factored into the private cost-benefit calculations.
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- Monetary penalties and subsidies align private cost-benefit numbers a bit more closely with social ones.
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Source: Indian Expres

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