Stubble Burning - An Economic solution

What is the issue?

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- The practice of burning crop residue is harmful.
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- As kharif harvesting season is approaching, the government is contemplating a new incentivise based approach to address this.
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Why is stubble burned?

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- There is usually an urgency to plant the next crop.
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- So, farmers generally do not have time to let the previous crop’s residue (stubble) to decompose in the field to turn into compost.
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- The high labour cost makes harvesting the stubble to clear the fields undesirable.
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- Burning them in the field itself is the quickest and the cheapest way to get rid of them.
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- Most farmers, therefore, prefer to defy the ban on burning and pay the penalty for it - which is usually less than the removal cost.
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What are its implications?

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- About 35 million tonnes of crop waste is burnt in Punjab and Haryana alone.
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- This releases enormous amounts of particulate matter, ash and environment and health injurious gases such as carbon monoxide.
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- These contaminants contribute majorly to air pollution in north India, including the national capital region of Delhi.
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- This happens during the early winter months of November & December which coincides with the kharif harvesting season.
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How has the government handled this situation?

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- **Monitoring -** Delhi High Court recently ordered concerned governments to use satellite imagery to prevent burning.
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- But despite collection of penalties imposed by governments, preventing burning has not been effective.
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- **Rewards -** Environment Pollution Control Authority – EPCA has conceived a new reward mechanism for not burning stubble.
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- EPCA is trying to get bio-power producers and other waste utilising industries to purchase this crop residue for use as supplementary feedstock.
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- The response from companies seems fairly encouraging with “National Thermal Power Corporation” - NTPC as well as some private entities having expressed willingness.
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- NTPC seems ready to even harvest stubble on its own cost and then pay the farmers an amount for the stuff collected.
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- Hence, instead being a legally barred activity requiring penal action, it is now expected to be viewed as an additional source of income.
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What are some noteworthy possibilities for the future?

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- **Mechanisations -** Machines that can gather the stubble and sow seeds in

one go are already available.
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- Some machines sow without even the removal of previous residue.
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- Such technologies need to be encouraged regardless of their high costs.
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- This is possible by facilitating the emergence of a vibrant services sector that provide such equipments to farmers.
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- **Targeted Subsidising –** Some states are already offering up to 40% subsidy currently on versatile machinery.
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- Such production enhancing incentives for bio-power producers and farm machinery manufacturers could also be considered.
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- The Centre should also contribute to this effort along with states as this would help protect both the environment and human health.
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Source: Business Standard

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