



# **BASAI News Updates**

**Oct. 10, 2022**

# Darjeeling tea industry is in peril. Here's how to fix it

The British created the tea industry in India in the 1840s to counter the growing dependence on Chinese tea. What began with the great tea heist from China by Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, plant hunter and traveller, ultimately led to the dislocation of indigenous Lepchas from erstwhile Dorje-Ling and then the migration and oppression of Nepalis. These migrants were vital for creating engineering marvels such as the Toy Train, highways on the steep hills of Darjeeling, and the carving out of plantations on hills originally occupied by ancient forests. All this was done to quench the demand for tea back in London.

But despite its complicated history, fame, and the growing global demand for fine teas, Darjeeling's premier position in the trade is in peril today. Recent news reports have relayed what planters were warning: Over half of the 87 tea gardens are up for sale due to large-scale bankruptcy or out of fear of default. This is happening despite the demand for Darjeeling tea rising worldwide and its production reducing annually, pointing to structural problems rather than a bad business cycle.

A dangerous combination of factors has brought Darjeeling to the cusp of a crisis. The first is the inability to enforce the Darjeeling Geographical Indication Status. Even though the region of Darjeeling produces only about eight million kgs of tea annually, approximately 20 million kgs of tea are sold as Darjeeling Tea in the international market. Darjeeling suffers from the concerted illegal trade and smuggling of Nepal teas into India, and the fact that these spurious varieties find their way to the export market under the Darjeeling label.

Second, labour laws. Darjeeling and Nepal are not only separated by the Mechi river, but also by different tea traditions, seasons, and the quality of their products. Nepal teas are cheaper due to the absence of adequate labour unionisation rules. Indian planters are bound by law to implement these rules. As a result, Nepal teas sold as "Darjeeling" are cheaper and of much lower quality.

Third, in 2017, the 104-day Gorkhaland agitation strike prevented the production of Darjeeling teas during its primary harvest months. This created an opportunity for smugglers and unscrupulous tea traders to capture the domestic and export markets.

The pandemic further compounded the issue by keeping workers out of the fields.

Fourth, there has been a general lack of concern from local politicians, and the state and central governments. While progress was made on the labour organisation front, local politicians have led a negative campaign against plantation owners, labelling Darjeeling tea "blood tea" and calling for its boycott.

While much remains to be done to improve labour conditions and to make workers genuine stakeholders in the tea gardens, there is no denying that Darjeeling is a success story when it comes to unionisation and the reinforcement of welfare measures. Local leaders must realise that the tea industry remains the primary employer for people in North Bengal. Enforcing boycotts in a free-falling industry like Darjeeling will only lead to further closures instead of the intended wage hikes.

What is the way forward?

Consumers in India must become more conscious about tea sourcing. On the supply side, Indian producers require proper protection for their teas. We can start with more significant funding and a stronger mandate for the Tea Board of India, which needs to become the focal point for tackling the contraband tea problem. This effort must involve enforcing rules with local producers, traders and intermediaries, the national and international corporations that purchase tea, and most importantly, local tea shop owners.

In addition, producers and local elected representatives should join their efforts to support and defend this crucial industry rather than engage in bickering. This involves serious conversations around land rights, the climate crisis, and a radical reimagining of the space of the tea estate from the model of a plantation to a more just and inclusive garden.

Darjeeling has elevated tea production to an art form. Its name is as ubiquitous as Cuban cigars, French wine or Russian caviar. Losing this industry would be a tragedy, and an irreparable loss of heritage and identity for all.



Sparsh  
Agarwal

*Sparsh Agarwal is the co-founder of Dorje Teas and a member of the management committee of the Tea Research Association of India. The views expressed are personal.*

# Targeting govt, BJP leader tweets 'stubble-burning' video

Using baler to manage straw, minister posts 'counter-clip' | Tells farmers to store residue

**NEERAJ BAGGA**  
Tribune News Service

AMRITSAR, OCTOBER 9

Stubble-burning has become a hot topic after BJP leader Manoj Tiwari tweeted a video of one such alleged incident in Kathunangal village, on the city outskirts today.

The text mentioned that the video was shot yesterday.

BJP leaders are trying to corner the Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government for its failure to curb the stubble-burning menace in the state.

To counter this image, Agriculture Minister Kuldeep Dhaliwal was today seen using a baler in his field to manage straw. With a view to encourage fellow farmers with his personal example, he mounted a tractor attached with a baler for the crop



(Left) A video grab of 'stubble-burning' that was tweeted by BJP leader Manoj Tiwari; and minister Kuldeep Dhaliwal rides a tractor with a baler attached to it near Amritsar on Sunday.

residue management. He posted a three-minute-long video on social media.

A release issued the Public Relations Department here today said taking advantage of Sunday, a holiday, the Agriculture Minister went to work in his field located in his ancestral Jagdev Kalan vil-

lage. He tied the straw with a baler and stored it in bales.

In the video, he is seeing urging the state farmers to store the paddy stubble instead of burning it. He further said the Agriculture Department was ready to help the farmers in all ways.

Talking about the video

shared by Tiwari alleging the violation of the ban orders, DC Harpreet Singh Sudan said he could not comment on it as he was not connected to it. He said no new case of stubble-burning had been reported during the past four days in the district. "Before this, the Punjab Remote Sensing Cen-

tre had shared 452 farm fires with the administration online. Following field visits, the administration found 131 cases to be untrue while 141 sites are yet to be visited. Also, the department charged environmental compensation of Rs 2.5 lakh on the remaining 180 violations," he added.

# Punjab sees 714 farm fires, mainly in Majha

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, OCTOBER 9

With farm fires making a beginning after paddy harvesting in Ludhiana district, Malwa region is all set to witness a marked increase in the number of cases in the coming days.



Majha and Malwa belts will harvest their paddy crop.

“Ludhiana farmers have started burning stubble and in five days, we will see residue on a larger area being burnt,” said an agriculture officer. Though the government has come up with an ex-situ stubble management policy, the delivery of stubble management machines to farmers is quite slow.

Exhorting farmers to not burn paddy residue while it is wet, Samvidhan Bachao Manch, a NGO that works for the environment, said, “Instead of burning the residue immediately after the harvest, farmers must dry it for at least eight to 10 days.”

Manoj Tiwari, a BJP leader, shared a video on his Twitter handle of crop residue burning at Kathunangal village on the outskirts of Amritsar.

This year, the state — till date — has witnessed a total of 714 farm fires, mainly in the Majha belt. Experts pointed out that Malwa belt is the biggest area in the state and there would be no way out of a smoke-covered sky in the coming weeks.

Clouds may bring rain for a couple of days but after that, the sky will clear and farm fires are bound to happen.

Farmers’ discussions with the government on compensation for stubble burning have not yielded any desirable result. The farmers want at least Rs 2,500 per acre.

Data from the Punjab Remote Sensing Authority showed that farmers were now resorting to farm fires in the fertile Malwa belt. The cases are likely to see a rise in the next two weeks when the

# Malwa set to witness surge in farm fires, drop in air quality

Light rain brings temporary respite | Over 700 cases in state so far

AMAN SOOD  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PATIALA, OCTOBER 9

Already facing a spurt in farm fires in the border belt, the air quality in Punjab is sure to take a further hit with farmers starting to burn the stubble in one of the largest areas of paddy cultivation in the Malwa belt.

Despite some light drizzle in certain parts, the state has so far witnessed over 714 farm fires, with Ludhiana and Tarn Taran reporting two and one case, respectively.

Experts suggest that the Malwa belt consists of many districts, which are expected to start the farm fires in the coming week and there could be a steep rise in the cases. “There is nothing much that can be done as the farmers are adamant on Rs 2,500 per acre compensation and the government hasn’t agreed to it. As is the case every season, there will be farm fires to prepare fields for the winter

## OUR JOB IS TO MONITOR SITUATION: PPCB

“Our job is to monitor the situation and provide data to the govt and other authorities concerned for necessary action. We have tried to spread awareness and asked the district authorities to act against defaulters. PPCB official



crop,” they added.

“Cloud cover and some drizzle in the past two days delayed the farm fires. However, cases are going to surge in the next five days,” the experts warned.

The data from the Punjab Remote Sensing Authority showed that farmers were now resorting to farm fires in

the fertile Malwa belt and the cases are likely to see a rise in the next two weeks when the Majha and Malwa belts will cultivate their paddy crop. “Ludhiana has already started and in the next five days, we will see a larger area under fire,” said an agriculture officer.

Information gathered from

the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) and Agriculture Department officials confirmed that farm fires were fast spreading in the Malwa belt and would further affect the air quality index (AQI) of the state. “Due to clouds, many cases could not be reported, but there are ground-level reports that farm fires are now rising with each passing day,” they added.

Farmers are now resorting to stubble-burning as they have little window before preparing the fields for the next crop. Last year, Malwa fields were set on fire around October 15 and this year, it could start spreading a little earlier. “A majority of farm fires in the Malwa belt started two days ago and the number is only going to grow in the next 10 days,” said a top official.

Though the government has come up with an ex-situ stubble management policy, the primary focus is still on the in-situ technique.

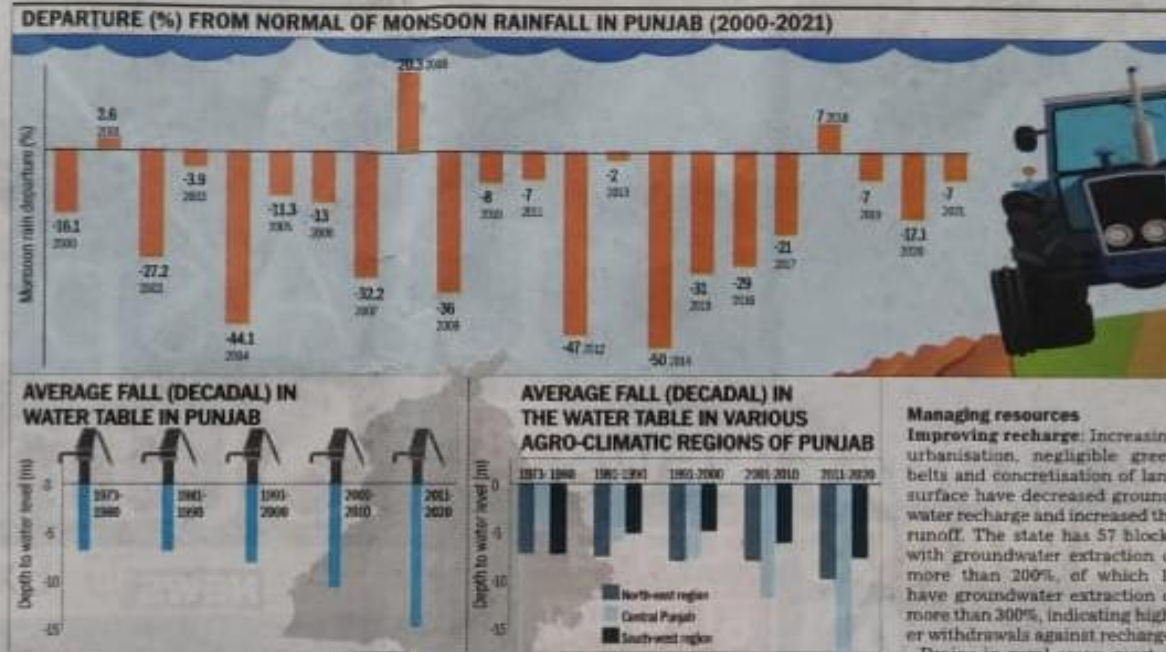
# Sensitise, incentivise farmers to conserve water

SURINDER S KUKAL  
AND PAUL S SIDHU

Farmers in some canal command areas, especially in central Punjab, prefer using tubewell water for irrigation. They have installed automatic starters on tubewells, leading to large-scale wastage of water. Farmers should be sensitised about the use of canal water, especially in the head and middle reaches of irrigation channels. Farmers who save irrigation water with techniques like micro-irrigation or through crop diversification should be given benefits.

**P**UNJAB is a water-stressed agrarian state. The water demand of the agriculture sector (86 billion cubic metres, or BCM) has surpassed its availability (52 BCM); this has resulted in excessive mining of groundwater resources. Of the total water use in the state, the agriculture sector consumes 94.3%, followed by the domestic sector (3.7%), industry (1.7%) and livestock (0.3%). Climate change resulting in rising temperatures and high frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and high-intensity rains, coupled with ever-increasing population, are expected to accentuate water demand of the industrial and domestic sectors at the cost of agriculture.

The average annual rainfall in Punjab decreased from 490 mm (1970-2020) to 444 mm (1996-2020); its temporal and spatial distribution became more erratic with prolonged dry spells. The average annual rainfall in the catchment area of the Bhakra reservoir has decreased from 1,124 mm (1983-2018) to 1,056 mm (2014-2018). Even with no reduction in rainfall, the actual evapotranspiration (water loss from soil, plant and other surfaces) is projected to increase by 5% and 8% by 2030 and 2050, respectively. Consequently, the water demand is expected to increase from the present 66 BCM to 70 and 72 BCM in 2030 and 2050, respectively. The popularity of the water-intensive rice-wheat system; inefficient use of water in agriculture, industrial and domestic sectors; non-recycling of wastewater; and 5.3 BCM rainwater going out of the state's



boundaries are the real challenges that have to be dealt with to ensure sustainable use of water in agriculture. This calls for a three-pronged strategy: (i) increasing water availability (ii) managing water resources (iii) judicious use of water and promoting sustainable use of water in agriculture.

**Increasing availability**  
**Rainwater harvesting:** Harvesting of rainwater for storage, reuse and groundwater recharge, coupled with wastewater treatment and reuse for irrigation and/or non-drinking purposes, can increase water availability. More

than 90% of rainwater amounting to around 3 BCM in urban areas runs off the surface to join streams and rivers. This water needs to be harvested for groundwater recharge or storage.

A policy needs to be framed for mandatory harvesting of rainwater from rooftops in urban areas, either on an individual basis (larger buildings/houses) or on a community basis (smaller buildings/houses). The harvested rainwater can be used for non-drinking purposes. The rain-runoff water from open impervious (con-

creted) spaces needs to be diverted for recharging groundwater. This water can also be stored and diverted for various uses through separate supply pipelines.

Most of the rain-runoff water in villages accumulates in ponds. In pre-1960 Punjab, the pond-bed soil was excavated as it dried completely in May-June and acted as a groundwater recharge point. With the fast pace of economic development, these ponds are now no more excavated and the seepage from the pond surface is virtually nil. Through community action, the ponds should be renovated and maintained as quality water bodies.

**Managing resources**  
**Improving recharge:** Increasing urbanisation, negligible green belts and concretisation of land surface have decreased groundwater recharge and increased the runoff. The state has 57 blocks with groundwater extraction of more than 200%, of which 12 have groundwater extraction of more than 300%, indicating higher withdrawals against recharge.

**Judicious use**  
**Crop diversification:** A robust strategy needs to be developed and executed for the diversification of crops. A strategy at the micro-level (a block or cluster of blocks) needs to be developed for this purpose based on water availability, niche area crops (other than paddy) and market infrastructure in that unit. Based on this strategy, a block or block cluster-specific crop diversification plan should be developed. The economic benefit of alternative crops with or without value addition must be equivalent to that of paddy crop.

**Rationing and credits:** The consumption of ground- or surface-water should be rationed, based on good irrigation practices as recommended by Punjab Agricultural University. The quantity of water consumed above the recommended limit should be charged at higher rates as per this proposed scheme: Farms (above 12 hectares), 400% of the nominal rates; farms (4-12 hectares), 300%; and farms (up to 4 hectares), 200%.

Farmers who save irrigation water over and above the recommended allocation, either through innovative techniques like micro-irrigation or through crop diversification, may be credited for such savings at the rate of Rs 2/m<sup>3</sup> with a specified ceiling.

Thus, an integrated approach based on a three-pronged strategy, followed and executed with a dedicated timeline, can ensure sustained use of water in agriculture.

Kukal is Member, Punjab Water Regulation & Development Authority; Sidhu is former Senior Agriculturist, World Bank (South Asia Region)

# Eat green veggies to keep dementia away, says expert

**HAMAAD HABIBULLAH**

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 9

We must start taking care of ourselves from our late 30s to build cognitive reserves and guard against dementia," says leading Alzheimer's expert and neurology professor at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, Manjari Tripathi, flagging the challenges being posed by the disease that is

progressively expanding.

A dementia epidemic is looming with one in eight Indians suffering from cognitive decline as of 2021 against 1 in 25 in 1990.

The government data on Alzheimer's disease, the commonest form of dementia, shows a three-fold rise in the prevalence of cognitive decline over 1990, signalling the urgent need to address risk factors for the chronic

## Engaging with society is vital to keep brain active

neuro-degenerative disease which leaves patients and families broken on account of the massive psychological and medical costs.

Tripathi, associated with The Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARD-SI), an organisation that holds regular awareness workshops on the issue, defines dementia

as a "change in the baseline that causes a person to become cognitively dependent on another".

The AIIMS expert emphasises the importance of awareness noting that many cases of Alzheimer's are overlooked at the early stage, with people mistaking them for signs of ageing which these are not.

Listing actions necessary for avoiding dementia, Tripathi says lifestyle and daily routine play an important role in warding off the disease. She stressed upon the importance of social interactions. Engagement with society, according to her, is an important factor that can keep the brain active. Tripathi also says adequate sleep is important and so is controlling blood pressure and diabetes and eating healthy.

Delving into the role of stress in dementia progression, Tripathi says completely eliminating stress is not possible but she warned against 'toxic stress'.

The AIIMS expert also said home-cooked meals should be preferred, specially green vegetables. She says passive activities such as television-viewing and smartphone use should be avoided for extended periods of time.