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BASAI WEEKLY NEWS UPDATES

OCTOBER 13-19, 2025

Cloud seeding plan ready, govt awaits nod from IMD

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NEW DELHI: The Delhi government is "fully prepared" to carry out cloud seeding in the Capital to induce artificial rain, environment minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said on Wednesday, adding that four days of trial flights have already been conducted over the "target area". The project, which the government has claimed will reduce air pollution around Diwali, now awaits a final go-ahead from the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

"Our aircraft is ready at Meerut. The pilots have familiarised themselves with the flight path. We're only waiting for IMD's green signal and the right cloud conditions. If all goes well, the first trial could happen even on the day-after Diwali or the following day, if conditions are suitable," Sirsa said.

Officials said that two experienced commercial pilots conducted the trial runs over northwest Delhi – the chosen zone for the pilot project – to prepare for the real operation. "The four-day trial was successful with no technical challenges," Sirsa said.

Cloud seeding, a weather modification process, involves dispersing substances such as silver iodide (AgI) into clouds to enhance their ability to produce rain. The Delhi project is being executed in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, which has modified its Cessna-206H aircraft specifically for this purpose.

According to IIT Kanpur scientists, Nimbostratus clouds, which typically form between 500 and 6,000 metres above ground level, are ideal for seeding, but they must contain at least 50% moisture. At present, Delhi's skies do not have sufficient moisture or cloud density for seeding to be effective.

"We are closely monitoring atmospheric conditions, waiting for the right window," said an IIT official involved in the project.

The theory is that the rain will reduce Delhi's air pollution; there is no clarity by how much, but rain usually sees a significant improvement in air quality, sometimes by as much as 50-80 points in the Air Quality Index (AQI).

"If the AQI is 'very poor', it may improve to 'poor', and if it is in 'poor', it may improves to 'moderate'. You are not likely to see a significant improvement," explained Dipankar Saha, former head of CPCB's air laboratory, adding that other factors – wind speed, the area of influence and the intensity of rain – would influence matters. "It if is a drizzle to light rain, it will not make much difference. One needs good intensity and strong rains to have a washout effect."

Officials said five trials are planned, all over northwest Delhi. Each test will be conducted at varying humidity levels – 50%, 70%, and below 50% – to assess the feasibility of artificial rain under different conditions.

The Delhi government had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IIT Kanpur on September 25 to conduct the trials, with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) granting permission a day earlier. The DGCA's letter, dated September 23 and seen by HT, allowed the use of IIT Kanpur's aircraft between October 1 and November 30, subject to conditions.

More than 10 other government bodies, including the Union ministries of environment, defence, and home affairs, as well as the Airports Authority of India, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), and the UP government, have cleared the project.

The Delhi Cabinet had on May 7 approved the ₹3.21-crore plan. Originally, the trials were scheduled for late May and early June, but were postponed due to the onset of the southwest monsoon. A revised window in August-September was also missed as the monsoon lingered until its official withdrawal on September 24.

Last month, Sirsa had announced tentative dates between October 7 and 9 for the first trial, with a backup window of October 9-11. However, unexpected showers from a western disturbance forced another postponement.

Sunil Dahiya, founder and lead analyst at the think-tank Envirocatalysts, however remained apprehensive. "We have seen such experiments in Dubai, where it was done to tackle droughts, not reduce pollution. In Pakistan, something similar was tried but the AQI rebounded almost instantly," Dahiya said, stating for it to make a difference in Delhi, the entire city needs to be seeded. "So far, we don't even know if it will lead to rain, let alone enough rain to bring down AQI."

Govt readies post-Diwali artificial rain plan

The government has claimed the project will reduce air pollution around Diwali

SANJEEV VERMA/ HT

WHAT GOVT SAID

- 4 days of trial flights successfully conducted over NW Delhi – the chosen zone for the pilot project
- Aircraft is ready at Meerut & pilots have familiarised themselves with flight path
- Project waiting for IMD's green signal and the right cloud conditions

WEATHER MODIFICATION PLAN

- In cloud seeding, substances, such as silver iodide (AgI), are dispersed into clouds to enhance their ability to produce rain
- The theory is that the rain will reduce Delhi's air pollution but it is not clear by how much

THE HOLD-UP
At present, Delhi's skies do not have sufficient moisture or cloud density for seeding

"If all goes well, the first trial could happen even on the day-after Diwali or the following day, if conditions are suitable."
— MANJINDER SINGH SIRSA, Delhi enviroment minister

Centre's panel proposes 100-metre slope as new definition for Aravallis

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NEW DELHI: More than a year after the Supreme Court entrusted the Centre with the task of defining the Aravalli hills and ranges to curb illegal mining, a high-level committee headed by the Union environment secretary has submitted its report to the court, proposing that any slope with a height of more than 100 metres, measured from the top, will qualify as Aravalli hills.

The report — the first such exercise to lay down a uniform definition for the Aravalli hills — further recommends that to ensure sustainable mining in the Aravalli hill and ranges, no new mining lease, except in the case of critical, strategic, and atomic minerals, should be allowed.

A bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Bhushan R Gavai and justice K Vinod Chandran agreed to consider the report on November 11 and take up objections raised by states to its recommendations.

The new definition has been prepared by an eight-member committee comprising forest department secretaries of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, along with representatives of the Geological Survey of India (GSI), Forest Survey of India (FSI), and the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), which assists the court on forest and environment issues.

The report states: "Any landform in the Aravalli districts having an elevation of 100 metres or more from the local relief shall be termed as Aravalli hills." For measuring this, the highest slope will be taken as a reference point, and the 100 metres will be measured from the highest point on the slope to the lowest contour line on the hill.

"The entire landform lying within the area enclosed by such lowest contour, whether actual or notionally extended, together with the hill, its supporting slopes, and associated landforms irrespective of their gradient, shall be deemed to constitute part of the Aravalli Hills," it adds.

The committee further defined the Aravalli Range as "two or more Aravalli Hills located within a proximity of 500 metres from each other, measured from the outermost point on the boundary of the lowest contour line on the two hills."

The report requires the concerned states to demarcate the Aravallis based on these criteria, with assistance from the Survey of India (SOI).

After marking the extent of the Aravalli Ranges, the committee recommended that to ensure "sustainable mining", no new mining leases — except for critical, strategic, and atomic minerals — be allowed within the designated Aravalli Hills and Ranges. It further proposed that core or inviolate areas be identified within these ranges where mining should be completely prohibited.

The committee said the mountain system plays a vital role in maintaining the environmental stability of northwestern India. The Aravallis, among the oldest fold mountain ranges in the world, originated more than 2.5 billion years ago during the Precambrian era.

A new definition

The definition was prepared by a panel comprising forest department secretaries of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, along with representatives of GSI, FSI, and CEC

WHAT THE REPORT STATES

"Any landform in the Aravalli districts having an elevation of 100 metres or more from the local relief shall be termed as Aravalli hills."

For measuring this, the highest slope will be taken as a reference point, and the 100 metres will be measured from the highest point on the slope to the lowest contour line on the hill.

Fertiliser use skewed towards nitrogen, urea lowering yields

Zia Haq

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NEW DELHI: Fertiliser subsidies and their use remain highly skewed towards nitrogen or urea, making agricultural chemicals less effective and stagnating yields, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has said in a new report amid a government push to ramp up output to cut imports.

Analysts have long held that lopsided pricing has led to soil nutrient imbalances as a result of over-use of urea because it is cheaper relative to phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) and so-called complex fertilisers.

Lower yields are one of the reasons India has to depend on overseas markets for pulses and oilseeds. Lower efficiency, meaning more chemicals are needed for achieving the same level of output, is concerning, the CACP report for the upcoming winter-sown season said. Modern technologies like drones and fertigation are also being leveraged to enhance fertiliser application efficiency. "Despite these efforts, the declining fertiliser response ratio remains a concern," the report added.

Lower yields have forced India to depend on overseas sources for pulses and oilseeds. AFP

Another pressing issue is loss of soil organic carbon content resulting in continuous depletion of soil fertility and lower yields, the CACP, a body that fixes minimum support prices, said in its report. "Micronutrient deficiencies are becoming more prevalent in the country and on an average 43% soils are deficient in Zinc, 12.1% in Iron, 5.4% in Copper, 5.6% in Manganese and 18.3% in Boron," it said.

Food security of the world's most populous nation is closely linked to the availability of fertilisers. The government subsidises a range of fertilisers to farmers through manufacturers and importers, who sell crop nutrients at a discount to cultivators through internet-enabled outlets. These firms are then reimbursed by the government. Urea accounts for about 70% of the overall fertiliser subsidy bill.

India aims to end urea imports when five new plants start production. Plants at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, Ramagundam in Telangana and at Talcher (Odisha), Barauni (Bihar) and Sindri (Jharkhand) are slated to together produce 6.5 million tonnes of urea each year.

{ CLIMATE CHANGE }

Biggest ever rise in atmospheric CO_2 recorded

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NEW DELHI: Carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels in the atmosphere soared to record levels in 2024, committing the planet to more long-term temperature increase, according to a new report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The WMO Greenhouse Gas Bulletin said continued emissions of CO_2 from human activities and from wildfires, and reduced CO_2 absorption by "sinks" such as land ecosystems and the ocean were responsible for this spike.

From 2023 to 2024, the global average concentration of CO_2 surged by 3.5 ppm, the largest increase since modern measurements started in 1957, WMO added. Growth rates of CO_2 have tripled since the 1960s, accelerating from an annual average increase of 0.8 ppm per year to 2.4 ppm per year in the decade from 2011 to 2020.

"The heat trapped by CO_2 and other greenhouse gases is turbocharging our climate and leading to more extreme weather. Reducing emissions is therefore essential not just for our climate but also for our economic security and community well-being," said WMO deputy secretary-general Ko Barrett on Wednesday.

Concentrations of methane and nitrous oxide – the second and third most important long-lived greenhouse gases related to human activities – have also risen to record levels.

WMO released the annual greenhouse gas bulletin to provide authoritative scientific information for the UN Climate Change conference in November. The COP30 meeting in Belém, Brazil, will seek to ramp up climate action.

"Sustaining and expanding greenhouse gas monitoring are critical to support such efforts," said Oksana Tarasova, coordinator of the Greenhouse Gas Bulletin. "The pre-industrial level of 278.3 ppm represented a balance of fluxes among the atmosphere, the oceans and the land biosphere. The globally averaged CO_2 concentration in 2024 was 423.9±0.2 ppm (Figure 5a), 152% of the pre-industrial level," the bulletin said.

The global temperature in 2024 was the highest recorded in the observational record dating back to 1850, breaking the record previously set in 2023. For the first time, it passed the significant 1.5 °C mark relative to the pre-industrial period, mainly a result of El Nino. The oceans may also have contributed to a small fraction of the additional carbon dioxide in 2024. But the majority of the 2024 anomaly arose from decreased net ecosystem carbon uptakes and increased fire emissions.

70,000 bags of DAP arrive in Yamunanagar district

SHIV KUMAR SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

YAMUNANAGAR, OCTOBER 15

Ahead of the sowing of wheat crop, the Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department has started making arrangements for DAP fertiliser in the district.

According to information, about 70,000 bags of DAP reached the district through rail transportation yesterday. The sowing of wheat will start after Diwali.

As per instructions of the government and the Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department, the distribution of DAP will be done through Meri Fasal Mera Byora (MFMB) portal.

"A consignment of about 70,000 bags of DAP has reached the district," said Aditya Pratap Dabas, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Yamunanagar. He said 50 per cent fertilisers would be distributed through the cooperative sector and the remaining through private retailers.

"In the cooperative sector, fertilisers will be sold through IFFCO and KRIBHCO, which have three retail outlets at Jagadhri, Vyaspur and Pratap Nagar," he said.

Availability of fertilisers to farmers would also be ensured through Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS). "All farmers are requested to procure DAP from their nearest sale points only and complete the registration and purchase process as per the guidelines laid down by the government," he said.

According to information, wheat will be sown in about 2.65 lakh acres in the district in the current rabi season.

BKU (Charuni) chief slaps food and supplies officer, booked

NITISH SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KURUKSHETRA, OCTOBER 15

Unprecedented scenes were witnessed at the Mini Secretariat after BKU (Charuni) chief Gurnam Singh Charuni slapped a District Food and Supplies Controller (DFSC) on Wednesday.

Alleging irregularities during procurement, Charuni accused officials of forcing farmers to sell paddy below MSP. Addressing union members, Charuni, who also has a commission agent shop at a purchase centre, alleged that since he refused to give unauthorised cuts, there was no lifting from his shop.

Demanding smooth procurement, they have been staging a dharna at the Mini Secretariat since Tuesday. On Wednesday, more farmers started reaching the dharna site. "We have made requests to the administration and the government but to no avail," he claimed.

DFSC Rajesh Kumar reached the spot to pacify the protesters. However, infuriated over the delay in lifting, Charuni allegedly slapped the DFSC. He and other union members were taken to Jhansa police station. After getting information, a large number of farmers gathered outside the police station. Later, they were taken to City Thanesar police station and a case was registered against Charuni and 15 others. They were released after they joined investigation.

Meanwhile, procurement was suspended to mark resentment against the incident. In the evening, Charuni said, "Grain markets and purchase centres are allotted to rice millers, who create a monopoly and impose cuts on farmers. The millers should be free to purchase paddy from any grain market. There are already 20 cases against me, I am not afraid of FIRs. We demand that the DFSC be suspended and a new officer be appointed. A state body meeting will be held on October 25, and if our demands are not met, we will intensify the agitation."

SP Nitish Agarwal said, "A case was registered on the basis of the DFSC's complaint. Further legal course of action will be taken accordingly." DC Vishram Kumar Meena said, "The demand of issuing the release order for lifting was already fulfilled and the DFSC had gone to hold a dialogue."

BKU (Charuni) chief Gurnam Singh in Kurukshetra on Wednesday.

'CHARUNI COMMISSION AGENT, NOT FARMER'

The DFSC said the district was leading in the lifting of paddy and payment. So far, 85% of the total procurement (6.67 LMT) had been lifted and 96% payment had been cleared. Charuni was raising issues related to his shop only, he claimed. "He is a commission agent, and not a farmer. I went there to discuss the issue but he started manhandling me. He had been threatening officials through videos. Employees are worried about their security. He has been hampering procurement. He should be arrested, I have raised the issue with the higher authorities," he said.

Turning smoke into success: Farmer finds gold in stubble

PARVEEN ARORA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KARNAL, OCTOBER 15

Anuj, a progressive farmer from Dabkoli village in Karnal district, is showing the way to others by turning crop waste into wealth through innovative residue management. Once struggling with the problem of stubble disposal, he is now an entrepreneur, earning a steady income by making and selling bales to industries.

Driven by the belief that farming should be modern, profitable and environment-friendly, Anuj began using a stubble management machine two years ago. Instead of burning leftover straw, he started producing biofuel bundles and soon began baling straw from neighbouring farms as well — creating an additional source of income. "I want all farmers to utilise this sustainable farming method for extra income," said Anuj.

Every winter, Haryana's skies used to turn grey with smoke from stubble fires, making the air thick with pollution. While some farmers still find burning the easiest way to clear their fields, Anuj has embraced in situ and ex situ residue management methods that not only protect the environment but also add to his earnings.

His small step has now grown into a profitable model, drawing attention from other farmers who frequently visit his farm to learn from his techniques. Anuj points out that government subsidies make it easier to adopt such practices.

Punjab needs a food-processing push

VIKRAMJIT SINGH SAHNEY
RAJYA SABHA MP
FROM PUNJAB

WHEN the Prime Minister inaugurated World Food India 2025, the sheer scale was breath-taking: over 90 countries, more than 2,000 exhibitors and billions in investment pitches showcasing the future of food processing and value addition. Amidst this, one question stood out for us in Punjab: How can a state that feeds India remain a marginal player in food processing?

Punjab stands tall as India's breadbasket. It contributes nearly half of the country's wheat procurement, dominates basmati exports, leads in kinnow production and maintains strong yields in maize. Cotton, sugarcane, pulses and chillies add further depth to this rich basket.

Despite its agricultural abundance, Punjab processes barely 15 per cent of its produce. The gap is glaring: kinnows rot for want of juice plants, cold storage covers only a sliver of horticultural output and nearly a quarter of crops perish after harvest. Grains pile up in *mandis*; tomatoes get a fleeting 40-day window for survival; maize and cotton are shipped to processors elsewhere. Worst, 20 million tonnes of stubble goes up in smoke each year — enough fuel for a Rs 5,000-crore biomass economy.

Punjab's paradox is clear: it lacks not grain but the momentum to turn its harvests into value — and with that it loses value, GDP, jobs and the chance to move farmers from survival to surplus.

This lag is not accidental; it stems from policy priorities, the Green Revolution legacy and structural hurdles that have limited diversification and private investments

For decades, Punjab's farm policy has revolved around free power, subsidies and the safety net of MSP. This has shielded farmers with stable yields and secure incomes, but has confined the state to a narrow crop mix. Wheat and rice, overwhelmingly bought by government, became both a lifeline and a limitation. MSP has created a closed market with slim margins for the crops covered under it; for other crops, it has meant neglect. Thus, diversification has stalled and Punjab's vast produce has remained raw, preventing it from taking the leap into processing and value addition.

Another hand at play was the Green Revolution, when Punjab stood at the cusp of transformation. The Green Revolution accelerated after 1966-67 with high-yield wheat varieties, MSP-backed procurement and subsidised inputs, making Punjab the breadbasket of India by the 1970s. Alongside, the Government of Punjab set up the Punjab Agro Industries Corporation (PAIC) in 1966 with the vision to promote agro-based industries, diversify crops and build processing and marketing linkages. While cultivation flourished, PAIC's mandate faltered, owing to weak infrastructure and low investor appetite.

GAP: Despite its agricultural abundance, Punjab processes barely 15 per cent of its produce. ISTOCK

At the time, this failure went unnoticed as stable yields and assured procurement kept farmers secure. But today, that missed opportunity of building a strong processing ecosystem is evident, with Punjab left merely as a producer state, rather than a value-adding agri-industrial hub.

> Punjab's paradox is clear: it lacks not grain but the momentum to turn its harvests into value.

Policy awakenings arrived late and shrinking landholdings blunted their promise. Fragmented plots blocked scale; projects faltered in the maze of licences, subsidies, tenancy laws and sluggish approvals. Safeguards strangled investment. While states like Maharashtra built fruit and sugar chains and Gujarat turned oilseeds into industry, Punjab's bounty stayed trapped in fields — a producer without the power of processing.

Recent policies, like the PMFME scheme (2020) and the State Level Upgradation Plan, and incentives like GST reimbursements, subsidies and single-window clearances are proof that processing and value addition have finally entered the policy vocabulary.

There are some success stories — Verka in dairy, Markfed in food products and a few private ventures in meat and poultry. Beyond these examples, the picture is stark.

The stakes are not just at the state level. The ICAR has estimated India's post-harvest losses at nearly Rs 92,000 crore a year. At a time when India is seeking export leverage, Punjab's weak processing ecosystem undercuts the country's strategic position.

Himachal and Uttarakhand have built apple and vegetable clusters and Amul has reshaped Gujarat's dairy through cooperative branding. Punjab, too, has shown flickers of this promise.

Punjab needs a food revolution, extending the legacy of the Green Revolution into value chains. For this, it is imperative to step in tandem with the Centre.

The most impactful step is to fully utilise PMKSY's Rs 6,520-crore allocation for 50 irradiation centres and 100 food labs while creating crop and district-specific agro-processing clusters with mobile cold rooms, irradiation units, grading, packaging and storage — allowing even small farmers to compete.

Unlocking the scale needs single-window clearances, faster certifications, concessional credit, grants and leveraging incentives under the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME), National Horticulture Board, Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), PLI, biomass.

Cooperatives and FPOs should be strengthened to build backward linkages and cooperative processing models. PAU must drive varietal innovation for high-Brix, processing-grade crops, supported by R&D into climate-resilient varieties to reduce dependence on outside sourcing. Green solutions like stubble pelletisation and renewable energy can keep the processing sustainable.

Equally vital is a tech-driven ecosystem — traceability, digital markets, AI supply chains, skilled workers alongside smart strategy for branding leveraging GI tags and ensuring quality compliance to capture premium markets.

The promise of agro-processing is nothing short of transformational. Wheat milled into flour, rice reimagined into signature varieties, fruits bottled into juices — each step lifts farmers' incomes by 20-30 per cent.

Beyond commerce, processing fulfils the SDGs - cutting waste, creating dignified work and promoting sustainable consumption. With IoT-enabled cold chains, AI supply networks and blockchain traceability, investment will follow. Backed by the PMFME scheme and Punjab's Industrial and Investment Policy, this pathway can multiply rural prosperity, steadying local economies.

The moment has come to move from fields to factories, grain to gain and from produce to prosperity.

DELHI POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, (GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI)

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visit us at: http://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in

PUBLIC NOTICE

Kind Attention: All industries involved in generation/ recycling/utilization/co-processing/pre-processing and/or disposal of hazardous waste in Delhi

Whereas, the Central Pollution Control Board has developed "**National Hazardous Waste Tracking System (NHWTS)**" for tracking generation, transportation, storage, recycling, utilization and disposal of hazardous waste across the country.

The NHWTS will have modules for registration, daily records, e-manifest, geo-tracking of HW movement, filling of annual returns and dashboard. This application will function as single application for tracking the movement of hazardous waste and resolves the issues pertaining to inter-state movement of hazardous wastes.

Module for registration of Industries can be assessed at **https://geo.nic.in/nhwts/** and also on the "E-Governance Portals" at the website of CPCB.

All the authorized industries involved in generation/recycling/ utilization/ co-processing/pre-processing and or disposal of hazardous waste should get registered on the portal mendetorly so that hazardous waste generated can be tracked for proper disposal through registered operators and at the designated site only.

Member Secretary

DPCC

Ambala hopes to end paddy season with no farm fires

Agriculture department officials and farmers work on crop residue in a paddy field in Ambala.

NITISH SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMBALA, OCTOBER 18

With over 70 per cent of harvesting completed, and no farm fire incidents reported in this season so far, the agriculture department aims to end the paddy harvesting season with zero farm fire incidents in Ambala this year.

As per a department official, no farm fire incident was reported up to October 18, while 71 cases were reported in the corresponding period last year. A total of 99 fire incidents were reported in Ambala in 2024.

As per information, nearly 2.46 lakh acres under paddy crop was registered on the Meri Fasal Mera Byora Portal in the district. As many as 37,061 farmers in the district had registered for the in-situ and ex-situ stubble management on over 2,20 lakh acres.

To keep a watch on stubble burning, over 630 nodal officers were deployed in the field. To encourage farmers for the in-situ and ex-situ management of paddy, the department provides an assistance of Rs 1,200 per acre to farmers. The registration for stubble management was received on over 2.20 lakh acres.

Deputy Director Agriculture (DDA) Ambala Dr Jasvinder Saini said, "Over 70 per cent harvesting has been completed in the district and no farm fire has been reported in Ambala so far. Besides the strict monitoring and action being taken by the government to discourage farmers from burning the residue, rising awareness among the farmers have helped the department in controlling the fire incidents."

Jasbir Singh, a progressive farmer from Hamidpur village, said, "I have been doing in-situ management in the fields for the past several years and it is a good option to manage the paddy residue. It also helps in improving the soil health and reduces the requirement of fertilisers for the next crop. The farmers are also aware of the ill-effects of the residue burning but the delay in preparing straw bales and lifting of the bales from the fields forces the farmers to burn the residue. The farmers can also get rid of this situation by getting some modifications in their equipment."

NO FARM FIRE REPORTED IN AMBALA SO FAR

While no farm fire incident has been reported up to October 18 in Ambala, as many as 71 cases were reported in 2024, 80 cases in 2023, 29 cases in 2022, and 54 cases in 2021, in the corresponding period.

ONLY ONE RECORDED IN KURUKSHETRA

In Kurukshetra, only one fire incident was reported in this season, while 89 cases were reported in 2024, 67 in 2023, 96 in 2022, & 205 in 2021 in the corresponding period.

Stop paddy, rice-laden trucks coming from UP to state: Gurnam Charuni to farmers

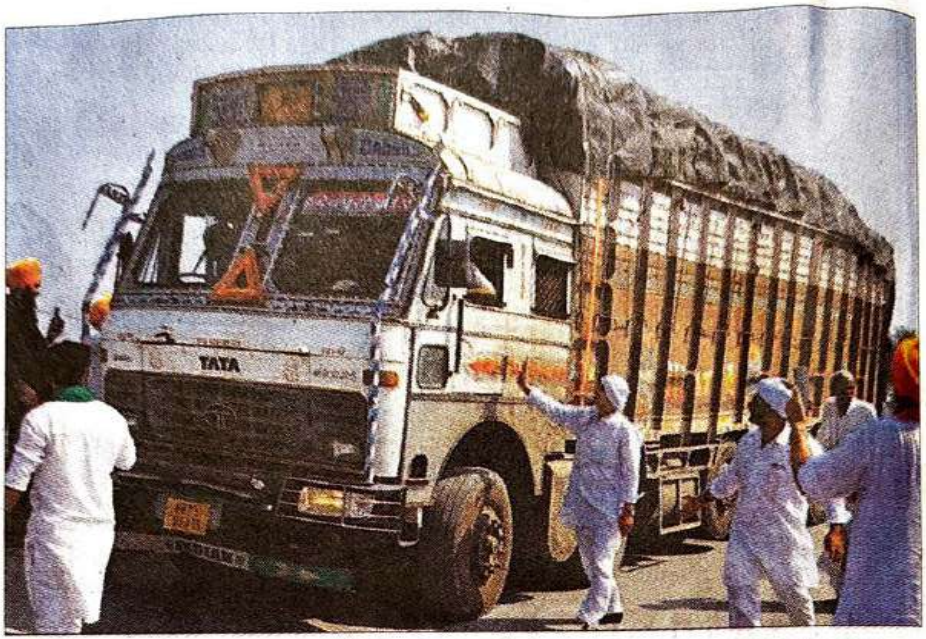
NITISH SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KURUKSHETRA, OCTOBER 18

Accusing rice millers of purchasing paddy and rice at cheaper rates from Uttar Pradesh (UP) and stocking in their mills to adjust against proxy procurement, the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Charuni) has called upon farmers to stop paddy and rice-laden trucks entering Haryana from the bordering state.

The BKU (Charuni) spokesman, Rakesh Bains, said, "Paddy and rice from other states are purchased at cheaper rates and then adjusted against proxy procurement with the help of bogus registrations on Meri Fasal Mera Byora (MFMB) portal and generating gate passes of the stock. The government is not taking adequate steps. A large number of trucks from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are reaching Haryana daily. Farmers have started catching these trucks and handing over these vehicles to the administration for action."

Union chief Gurnam Singh Charuni said, "We have been receiving complaints that hundreds of trucks laden with rice and paddy are entering Haryana daily from Uttar Pradesh. Due to the influx, paddy farmers from Haryana are suffering losses. We have repeatedly requested the government to stop arrivals of cheaper rice and paddy from Uttar Pradesh, but no action is being taken in this connection. Poor quality rice is provided to the government by millers after processing, causing losses to the state exchequer."



Farmers under the banner of the BKU check a truck loaded with paddy at Manglora naka on Saturday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

"We demand that the entire stock from Haryana farmers is purchased at the MSP first, and then millers should be allowed to purchase rice and paddy from other states for their business purposes. We also demand that physical verification of all rice mills should be conducted at the earliest and members of the farmer unions should be included in teams for verification. If irregularity and difference in stock position is found, action should be taken against rice millers, and FIR should also be registered against officials of the government procurement agencies", he said.

The union has asked its members to check trucks arriving from Uttar Pradesh and puncture their tyres if these vehicles are caught taking rice and paddy to rice mills in Haryana.

"Farmers will stop trucks from Uttar Pradesh in Haryana and check paddy and rice stocks. If the arrivals of paddy and rice in not stopped, the union will be forced to take stern action," Charuni said.

Meanwhile, Jewel Singla, chairman, Haryana Rice Millers and Dealers Association, said, "Besides, processing paddy under the CMR (custom milled rice) scheme for the government, millers also process paddy for domestic and international markets. A huge quantity of rice is sold in local markets and also sent to Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir and other states for which basmati and other varieties are purchased from Uttar Pradesh."

"Farmers shouldn't have any objection with the purchase of paddy and rice arriving from other states. We have no objection with physical verification of rice mills conducted by the government. Action should also be taken if any irregularity is observed," he added.

The Sunday Tribune
GURUGRAM | SUNDAY | 19 OCTOBER 2025

Focus on increasing cane production:Rana

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, OCTOBER 18

Haryana Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shyam Singh Rana today said there was a need to focus on increasing sugarcane production and create awareness among farmers about using new technologies for sugarcane sowing. He directed officials concerned to ensure that cooperative sugar mills were equipped with modern machinery to enhance recovery and reduce losses.

Rana gave these directions while chairing the Sugarcane Control Board meeting held on Saturday. Co-operation Minister Dr Arvind Sharma also joined the meeting through video conferencing.

Rana said sugarcane seed varieties released by the Central Variety Release Committee for the north-western region would be recognised by the state government. There would be no need to seek separate approval from Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University for these varieties, he said, while adding that farmers should be informed about new sugarcane seed varieties so that productivity could increase and farmers earned higher profits. This, in turn, would lead to higher sugarcane and sugar production compared to the existing varieties.

The minister further informed that during the 2024–25 crushing season, various cooperative sugar mills in the state had purchased sugarcane worth Rs 1,278.50 crore for crushing, and the full payment was made to farmers.

Besides, the Naraingarh Sugar Mill in the private sector still had pending dues from the previous crushing season, which would be cleared by December 2025, the minister said. Rana further said sugarcane farmers should be encouraged to adopt modern machinery for sowing and harvesting to reduce their expenses and increase profits.

Pankaj Agarwal, Principal Secretary, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department, Rajnarayan Kaushik, Director, Agriculture, Shakti Singh, Managing Director, Haryana Cooperative Federation of Sugar Mills Ltd, and other senior officials of the department also attended the meeting.

Record 33 new cases, farm fire count nears 250

MOHIT KHANNA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PATIALA, OCTOBER 18

Saturday numbers highest this season, Tarn Taran most polluting

The state witnessed 33 stubble-burning incidents on Saturday, the highest this kharif season so far.

According to official figures, 241 incidents of farm fire have been recorded in the state till now, largely attributed to the delay in the harvesting of paddy crop.

Farm fires in Punjab and neighbouring Haryana are often blamed for poor air quality in the Delhi-National Capital Region during winter months.

Meanwhile, the air quality was the poorest in Mandi Gobindgarh among all major cities and towns of the state.

Mandi Gobindgarh's air quality index (AQI) reading touched 231, followed by Jalandhar (148), Ludhiana (116) and Patiala (101).

As per the AQI standards, the air quality between 0-50 is considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe'. According to health experts, the deterioration in air quality triggers breathing discomfort in people suffering from with lung, asthma and heart issues.

Farm fires are often blamed for poor air quality in the Delhi-NCR during winter months. FILE PHOTO

The second highest number of farm fires were reported on October 14, when 31 cases were witnessed. Of the fresh cases, 23 were reported from pollbound Tarn Taran, while three were recorded in Amritsar.

Tarn Taran also became the top polluting district with 88 incidents of farm fires followed by Amritsar, which has witnessed 80 incidents so far.

'Real challenge after Diwali'

However, there is 83 per cent dip in the stubble burning cases in the state when compared with the corresponding period previous years.

As many as 1,348 and 1,407 incidents were reported from September 15 to October 18 in 2024 and 2023, respectively.

Experts say a combination of factors, including delayed harvesting, availability of machines and strict penal provisions, have led to the drop.

However, state officials said the real challenge would be to keep the numbers low after Diwali. Meanwhile, the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) has imposed fines totalling Rs 5.15 lakh in 104 cases, recovering Rs 3.65 lakh so far.

The police have also registered 119 FIRs, including 36 in Amritsar and 49 in Tarn Taran, under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for the disobedience of orders related to stubble burning. The Revenue Department has also made 81 "red entries" in land records of violators, a move that bars farmers from availing loans, mortgaging or selling land, or obtaining gun licences.

'Period till Nov 15 crucial'

Officials said the period till November 15 would be the "most crucial" as the bulk of paddy harvesting takes place during this time. Based on data from the past three years, Punjab has identified 663 hotspots across eight districts — Sangrur, Ferozepur, Bathinda, Moga, Barnala, Mansa, Tarn Taran and Faridkot.

These eight districts together accounted for 6,815 of the 10,909 farm fires reported in 2024, nearly two-thirds of the state's total, respectively.

To enforce compliance, the state government has constituted a "Parali Protection Force" comprising about 8,000 personnel, including 5,000 nodal officers, 1,500 cluster coordinators, and 1,200 field officers across 11,624 villages.

Farmers paid ₹7,472 cr for paddy, says Mann

CHANDIGARH, OCTOBER 18

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Saturday said payments amounting to Rs 7,472.2 crore had already been made to farmers for the procured grains. Chairing a meeting with IAS officers at his residence, the Chief Minister noted that despite massive devastation caused by floods in the state, Punjab was still expected to contribute 175 LMT of paddy to the national pool. — TNS

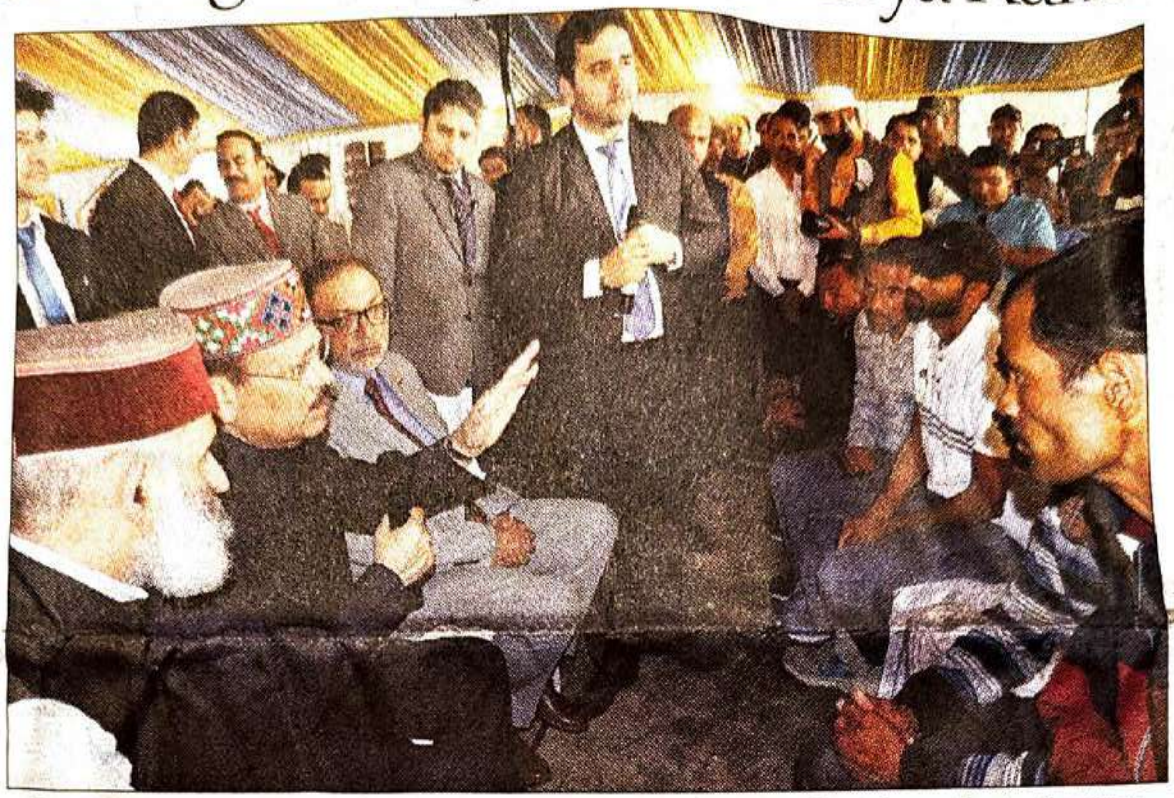
Nature-man conflict leading to natural disasters in mountainous regions, says Justice Surya Kant

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, OCTOBER 18

A Supreme Court Judge, Justice Surya Kant, today said that the conflict between man and the nature was one of the main reasons for the increasing frequency of natural disasters, especially in the mountainous regions, and experts should examine it to find solutions.

Justice Suryakant was the chief guest at a function organised by the Himachal Pradesh State Legal Services Authority in Mandi today. He also interacted with the disaster-affected families, especially from Mandi and Kullu districts.



Supreme Court Judge Justice Surya Kant interacts with disaster-affected people at a function organised by the State Legal Services Authority in Mandi on Saturday.

Justice Surya Kant said, "The conflict between man and the nature is having an adverse impact on the ecology due to the felling of trees, blocked water channels and construction in catchment areas that have obstructed the natural flow of water. This obviously has had a negative impact, triggering natural disasters." He added that there was an urgent need to look into reasons for the increasing frequency of natural disasters like flashfloods, cloudbursts and landslides.

He said, "I was keen to share the grief of the families, which had lost a family member or had suffered massive damage during natural disasters in the recent monsoon season. I have come here not as a judge but as your family member."

Justice Surya Kant expressed concern over rising drug addiction among the youth and sought the cooperation of villagers, who had information about people indulging in drug trafficking, so that this social evil could be curbed.

Justice Surya Kant urged the panchayat pradhans and other prominent people to seek the help of the police, Legal Services Authority and volunteers in combating the drug menace. He said that retired Army personnel could play an effective role in the fight against drugs. "I also pray to parents whose children have unfortunately fallen prey to drugs to not hide the problem but counsel their children with love and affection," he added.

He said that all possible legal help and counselling should be extended to the families of serving and retired Army personnel. He added that legal aid must be extended to all such families under the Veer Parivar Sahatya Yojana launched earlier this year.

Justice Surya Kant said that though governments extend help to disaster-affected people, at times there was an inordinate delay in the relief reaching them. "The help that is being given to you is not a favour but your right and paralegal volunteers must guide and help all such families that are not aware about the relief schemes of the government," he added.

The Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, Justice GS Sandhawalia, also stressed the need to combat the drug menace and environmental degradation that was resulting in devastating natural disasters, especially in all hill states. Justice Vivek Singh Thakur, who is also the Chairperson of the Himachal Pradesh Legal Services Authority, said that curbing the drug menace was not only the responsibility of the police but also the entire society. All judges of the High Court and judicial officers from the State Legal Services Authority attended the function.

A first, indigenous antibiotic drug developed for respiratory infections

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 18

India has developed its first indigenously discovered antibiotic 'Nafithromycin', which is effective against resistant respiratory infections, particularly useful for cancer patients and poorly controlled diabetics.

The information was shared by Union Minister Jitendra Singh, who said the antibiotic is the first molecule entirely conceptualised, developed and clinically validated in India. Naphithromycin, has been developed by the Department of Biotechnology in collaboration with private pharma house Wockhardt.

Citing this as an example of successful industry-academia partnership driving India's biopharmaceutical growth, the Union Minister emphasised the need to build a self-sustainable innovation ecosystem, so that India could reduce its dependence on government funding and create a culture of private sector participation and philanthropic support to achieve global recognition in research and innovation.

Inaugurating the three-day medical workshop on "Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Multi-Omics Data Integration and Analysis", Singh said India must develop a self-sustainable ecosystem to drive its scientific and research growth. He stated that most nations that have achieved global recognition in science and innovation have done so through self-sustaining, innovation-driven models with extensive engagement of the private sector.

Citing another successful story of government-non government collaboration, the minister also announced that India has achieved a major breakthrough in gene therapy, marking the first successful indigenous clinical trial for haemophilia treatment, the trial for which was supported by the Department of Biotechnology and done in Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Singh highlighted that artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most transformative tools of the modern era, reshaping healthcare accessibility, governance efficiency and decision-making. He mentioned that AI-based hybrid mobile clinics are already serving rural and remote regions, ensuring quality healthcare for all.

A new book on MS Swaminathan brings rare insights into the transformational work of the scientist who fed India

Seeds of change

PRIYAMBADA JAYAKUMAR

IT was this trio of the Ss — MS Swaminathan the scientist; C Subramaniam the politician and Minister of Agriculture; and B Sivaraman the civil servant (incidentally, all from Tamil Nadu) — who put together a plan that would turn India's fate from that of a begging bowl to a bread basket and from abject scarcity to one of absolute abundance.

The first thing Subramaniam did after he took over as the Minister of Agriculture and Food was to call about twenty agricultural scientists to Krishi Bhawan (offices of the Ministry of Agriculture) in New Delhi in August 1964 and ask them each how they proposed to solve the country's food shortage. He wanted to take India's most pressing problems to her scientists and get them to come up with solutions. He was the first minister to actively seek out the agricultural scientific community to provide him with answers.

When it was his turn, Swaminathan spoke powerfully about the new technology and hybrid seeds that they had at their disposal which Norman Borlaug had sent. He was convinced that based on their trials in IARI controlled plots, if these seeds could be sown in the fields of actual farmers, the yield stagnation in India could be overcome on a scale not witnessed before.

'What is stopping you then, Swaminathan?' Subramaniam looked intrigued.

'Money, sir. We don't have any!' came the prompt reply.

'I had submitted a proposal earlier which the Ministry refused to pass citing a lack of funds and more importantly, little belief in the new technology itself. The dwarf Mexican seeds provided by Dr Borlaug have proven they work but the Ministry had their doubts and that led to inaction on their part. Every year we are routinely humiliated by the import of PL 480 wheat from the United States. We need to break this debilitating cycle of our ship-to-mouth existence. Importing food is like importing unemployment. Seventy per cent of our people are employed in agriculture so when we import food, we are actually supporting farmers in other countries,' Swaminathan responded passionately.

'Developing a hybrid seed variety on our own is exceedingly time-consuming as well and not entirely feasible within our current timeframe. We have tried, I can assure you. It usually takes about a decade at least, if not more, to develop a new seed variety, which is essentially considered a scientific breakthrough, and which will yield more grain and will simultaneously also be disease-free. That is a tall order. We then need to have innumerable trials to disseminate this new information to the farmers and all relevant stakeholders concerned through various partner and extension agencies. We simply don't have that kind of time. Since Borlaug had the technology readily available, we asked to use it in our fields and he was magnanimous enough to let us use it. It took him a good part of a decade to perfect this technology. I wanted to use this opportunity to then "purchase time" to leapfrog in terms of spreading new varieties. But some in the government see it as an American ploy to control our fields and farmers. That is simply not true. They forget that we approached Dr Borlaug to share his miracle seeds with us and not the other way round. He finally visited India after several requests were made. There is also a fear that the new Mexican variants will bring with them new diseases. This is completely unfounded as we have sowed them in IARI plots nationwide and there hasn't been a hint of disease. We have every reason to believe that we are on the precipice of a massive breakthrough, but we require vital and immediate funding to take it to the farmers.' Subramaniam allowed Swaminathan to continue speaking without interrupting him.

'In my last attempt, we were just not able to convince the Ministry to get 1,000 National Seed Demonstrations approved at a cost of Rs 500 per hectare to prove to them the efficacy of this new scientific breakthrough in actual farmers' fields. If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right. We forget that farmers are often the best judges of the value of scientific work and scientific progress, especially if they are able to use it in their own fields. They can then see the magic unfold for themselves. They are not merely hapless beneficiaries of the state. I am therefore particularly keen to hold the demonstrations in the fields of resource poor farmers only as opposed to the rich landholders because anything demonstrated in the fields of rich farmers will then immediately be attributed to their affluence and not to new cutting-edge technology deployed in the fields.'

After a moment of silence following his speech, Swaminathan finally heard the words he had been hoping for from Subramaniam. 'Thank you for your thoughtful presentation, Swaminathan. I would request you to immediately hand over the file to young Venkatraman who is sitting here with us on this table and I shall see what I can do to help you.'

Two days later, to Swaminathan's immense surprise, the file was cleared unconditionally and the stage was finally set for the crucial National Seed Demonstrations in the fields of actual farmers — a turnaround in government attitudes Swaminathan hadn't expected quite so quickly. But then again, C Subramaniam was a negotiator like no other!

— Excerpted from 'The Man Who Fed India', with permission from HarperCollins

MS Swaminathan (left) with Norman Borlaug during the latter's first visit to India. PHOTO COURTESY: HARPERCOLLINS

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