

# ₹1,000-crore biogas projects stalled amid farmers' protest

Cabinet ministers Aman Arora, Harpal Cheema to meet today for a solution

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**CHANDIGARH:** Ahead of the paddy harvest, the ambitious plan of the Punjab government to set up 39 compressed biogas (CBG) projects costing ₹1,000 crore across the state to tackle paddy straw burning issues has hit a roadblock because of administrative and other reasons.

The five projects, which have started their operations, are also facing hurdles as farmer unions have been opposing the operation, claiming that the chemicals produced during biogas generation can be carcinogenic and contaminate the soil. Besides, three projects in the pipeline are also stalled.

Due to this, big companies, such as Indian Oil Corporation, Gas Authority India Limited and even Reliance, who had inked pacts with the Punjab Energy Development Agency (PEDA), are not going forward with their projects. Reliance is facing hurdles because of administrative reasons in Punjab as its power connection has not been released.

The state government was hoping that the seven projects, expected to process over 2.72-lakh-tonne paddy straw, would commence before the paddy harvest season. So far, only five projects, capable of producing over 85 tonnes of compressed biogas per day, have been commissioned for which around 1.70 lakh tonnes of paddy straw have been collected.

"As the Punjab government



**At least 39 compressed biogas projects have hit a roadblock amid farmers' protests and other administrative reasons.** HT FILE

failed to protect the CBG plants from irrational opposition, we have adopted a wait-and-watch policy. We will invest only once other plants become operational," said a senior official of a government sector company. He said they had planned to invest around ₹500 crore, but it's now on hold.

GAIL had promised to set up 10 compressed biogas (CBG) projects with an investment of about ₹600 crore, producing 35,000 tonnes of biogas and about 8,700 tonnes of organic manure annually. But the company didn't start work as it found that the earlier projects were not commissioned.

Admitting the same, Punjab renewable energy minister Aman Arora said, "I have no hesitation to say that projects of big companies, with whom PEDA had signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs), stalled their investment because of some protests over unfounded and unscientific reasons."

He said four meetings had been held with protesters. "I, along with finance minister Harpal Cheema, will hold a meeting tomorrow over the opposition by some farmer unions. We are finding a solu-

tion as Punjab needs such projects to handle paddy straw. I am not aware why the power connections of some CBG projects are stalled. I will take up the matter with the authorities concerned."

These projects will go a long way to solve the stubble burning problem in the state besides giving a fillip to the state government's efforts to make Punjab a leading state in green and clean energy production, he added.

Compressed biogas plants generate clean and green energy from paddy straw and other agro-residue while creating extra income sources for the farmer community, Arora said urging farmers and other protesters to not to oppose such projects.

These types of projects will be benefiting the farmers in multiple ways as these plants use crop residual as raw material and collect the paddy stubble from their fields without putting any financial burden on them, he added.

As many as 20 million tonnes of paddy straw is produced every year and the state frequently draws criticism over paddy straw burning.

## Subsidy okayed for 11k stubble mgmt machines : Khudian

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**CHANDIGARH:** With the paddy harvesting season ahead, the Punjab agriculture and farmers welfare department has issued 6,377 sanction letters for 11,052 crop residue management (CRM) machines so far to help farmers manage paddy straw effectively. Super Seeder appears to be farmers' favourite for which the department has issued nearly 5,000 sanction letters for its purchase.

Disclosing this in a press communiqué on Tuesday, Punjab agriculture and farmers welfare minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian said 5,534 CRM machines have already been acquired by farmers.

Of these, 4,640 machines were taken by individual farmers, 745 by registered farmer groups, 119 by cooperative societies and 30 by the farmer producer organisations (FPOs).

Notably, 50% subsidy is being given to individual farmers and 80% subsidy to farmer groups and cooperative societies on the purchase of CRM machines.

He further informed that the Super Seeder machine leads the pack among CRM machines, with 4,945 sanction letters issued for this equipment.

Additionally, 1,164 sanction letters have been granted for the Zero Till

**5,534 CRM MACHINES HAVE ALREADY BEEN ACQUIRED SO FAR BY FARMERS IN THE STATE**

Drill, 637 for the Hydraulic Reversible MB Plough, 630 for the Bailing Machine and 591 for the Paddy Straw Chopper.

The state government has devised a ₹500-crore action plan to equip farmers with machinery and implement strategies to curb stubble burning in the state, said the minister while adding that the department has received 21,830 applications from farmers, cooperative societies and panchayats seeking subsidies for different crop residue management (CRM) machinery during the kharif season 2024-25.

Khudian also mentioned that 163 customer hiring centres have been established across the state so far to facilitate small and marginal farmers in accessing CRM machinery.

Khudian urged the state farmers to take maximum benefits of the subsidy and ensure optimum utilisation of machines to curb the stubble burning menace. Paddy straw burning in Punjab and Haryana is considered one of the reasons behind the alarming spike in air pollution levels in Delhi-NCR in October and November.