Atal Bhujal Yojana

Why in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Atal Bhujal Yojana, or Atal Jal, a day after the Cabinet approved it.

What is this scheme about?

- Atal Bhujal Yojana is a **World Bank-funded**, central scheme aimed at improving groundwater management.
- It was approved by the World Bank Board in June 2018.
- The idea came up in 2015, in view of depleting groundwater resources.
- The government announced its intention to start a programme for management of groundwater resources in the Budget of 2016-17, with an estimated cost of about Rs 6,000 crore.

How scarce is water in India?

- India accounts for 16% of the world's population living in less than 2.5% of the global area, and has just 4% of the global water resources.
- According to the Central Water Commission (CWC), the estimated water resources potential of the country, which occurs as natural runoff in the rivers, is 1,999 billion cubic metres (BCM).
- Of this, the estimated utilisable resources are 1,122 BCM per year - 690 BCM per year surface water and 432 BCM per year replenish-able groundwater.
- **Water-stressed condition** - With the population rising, demand for water will increase manifold in coming years.
- As per the CWC, per capita availability in the country will decrease from 1,434 cubic metres in 2025 to 1,219 cubic metres in 2050.
- By CWC benchmarks, a water-stressed condition happens when per capita availability is less than 1,700 cubic metres, and a water-scarcity condition when per capita availability falls below 1,000 cubic metres.
- Some river basins are facing a water-scarcity condition.
- Water scarcity is most acute in the basins of the Cauvery, Pennar, Sabarmati and east-flowing rivers, and west-flowing rivers of Kutch and Saurashtra including Luni.

What is the groundwater situation in particular?

- **Water and Related Statistics 2019** - A report published by the CWC.
- This report says that the annual replenishable groundwater resources in India (2017) are 432 BCM, out of which 393 BCM is the annual extractable groundwater availability.
- 15 states account for about 90% of India's groundwater potential with Uttar Pradesh (UP) accounting for 16.2%.
- The current annual groundwater extraction is 249 BCM, the largest user being the irrigation sector.
- This is why the government has called for alternatives to water-intensive crops such as paddy and sugarcane.
- According to Jal Shakti Ministry, compared to the decadal average for 2009-18, there has been a decline in the groundwater level in 61% of wells monitored by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB).
- Among the states where at least 100 wells were monitored, the highest depletion has been in Karnataka, Maharashtra, UP, AP, Punjab.

What is the role of the CGWB?

- It monitors water levels and quality through a network of 23,196 National Hydrograph Monitoring Stations - 6,503 dug wells and 16,693 piezometers.
- It monitors every year during the month of January, March-May, August and November.
- A piezometer is a device placed in a borehole to monitor the pressure or depth of groundwater.
- The CGWB has classified the country's assessment units into **safe, semi-critical and over-exploited** in terms of groundwater resources.
- The Jal Shakti Ministry had said 14% of the country's assessment units are semi-critical, 5% are critical, and 17% are over-exploited, as of 2017.

How much of this does the new scheme seek to address?

- For now, the Atal Bhujal Yojana will be implemented in 7 states - Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and UP over five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.
- It is expected that it will benefit about 8,350 gram panchayats in 78 districts.
- According to Jal Shakti Ministry, if the scheme meets its objectives in water-stressed areas, it will be extended to other parts of the country.

How will these objectives be met?

- The focus will be on **arresting the rate of decline of groundwater levels** as well as **water consumption**.

- The scheme will seek to **strengthen the institutional framework** and bring about behavioural changes at community level for sustainable groundwater resource management.
- It envisages community-led Water Security Plans.
- There has been a Groundwater Management and Regulation scheme to manage the country's groundwater resources since 2013.
- The new scheme is an updated and modified version.
- Concepts such as 'Water User Associations' and Water Budgeting will be introduced.
- Better performing districts and panchayats will get more funds.

Where will this money come from?

- Of the Rs 6,000 crore, Rs 3,000 crore will be contributed by the World Bank as loan while the other half will be provided by the central government in the form of central assistance.
- All of it will be given to the states as grants.

Source: Indian Express

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