Safe drinking water supply and management – Water crisis and management

Part of: GS-I- Geography and climate change (PT-MAINS-PERSONALITY TEST)

Recently, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has issued an advisory to state governments asking them to ensure safe drinking water supply and management during the nationwide lockdown that has been extended to 3rd May, 2020.

Imp Points

- **Advisory:** State governments need to assess the requirements of water purifying chemicals, including chlorine tablets, bleaching powder, sodium hypochlorite solution and alum and use them wherever necessary. These purifying products are classified under the list of essential commodities (Essential Commodities Act, 1955). For ensuring social distancing, states are recommended to increase water supply hours if demand goes up and people come to fetch water from the public stand post.

- **Reasons Behind the Advisory:** The urgent need to ensure the availability of safe potable water to all citizens, mainly in the rural areas where medical sanitisers may not be available, has been highlighted in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the list of preventive measures for controlling the spread of coronavirus, frequent washing of hands with frothing soaps is the most efficient and effective measure.

**Water Crisis of India**

- India has been facing the challenge of lack of access to clean water for several years. Falling groundwater levels, drought, increasing demand from agriculture and industry, pollution and poor water resource management are few other challenges which will intensify with the changing climate.

- According to the data of the Ministry of Water Resources in 2017, (merged into the Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019) average annual per capita water availability fell from 1820 cubic meters assessed in 2001 to to 1545 cubic meters in 2011. The data also highlighted the possibility of it reducing further to 1341 and 1140 in the years 2025 and 2050 respectively.

- The ministry also held that the water availability of water stressed/water scarce regions of the country is much below the national average due to the high temporal and spatial variation of precipitation.
  - Water Stressed Condition: Where annual per-capita water availability is less than 1700 cubic meters.
  - Water Scarcity Condition: Where annual per-capita water availability is below 1000 cubic meters.

- According to the Global Annual Report, 2018 by the WaterAid, the water and sanitation advocacy group, India ranked at the top of 10 countries with lowest access to clean water close to home, with 16.3 crore people not having such access.

- However, the government’s efforts (such as Jal Jeevan Mission) in solving the water crisis have been appreciated as well. It has been highlighted that despite facing several challenges, India is one of the world’s most-improved nations for reaching the most
people with clean water.

Jal Shakti Mantralaya

National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD) has been shifted from the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change to Jal shakti Ministry.

Move aims at consolidating administration and bringing water-related issues like conservation, development, management, and abatement of pollution under a single ministry. National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD) is responsible for implementing the centrally sponsored national river conservation plan for all rivers across the country except river Ganga and its tributaries (as issues related to Ganga and its tributaries are taken up by National Mission for Clean Ganga).

Jal Shakti Mantralaya: The government has created a new Ministry called ‘Jal Shakti’ after merging Ministries of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation along with Drinking Water and Sanitation. ‘Jal Shakti’ ministry will encompass issues ranging from providing clean drinking water, international and inter-states water disputes, to the Namami Gange project aimed at cleaning Ganga and its tributaries, and sub-tributaries. The ministry will roll out the government’s ambitious plan (‘Nal se Jal’ scheme under jal jivan plan) to provide piped water connection to every household in India by 2024.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) envisages supply of 55 litres from 40 Liters of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- JJM focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level.
  - Creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse, would be undertaken in convergence with other government programmes/schemes.
  - The Mission is based on a community approach to water and includes extensive Information, Education and Communication as a key component of the mission.
  - JJM looks to create a jan andolan for water, thereby making it everyone’s priority.
  - Funding Pattern: The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.
- The Central government has recently released the operational guidelines for JJM.

For the implementation of JJM, following institutional arrangement has been proposed (PT SHOT)
Every village will prepare a Village Action Plan (VAP) which will have three components:

- Water source & its maintenance
- Water supply and
- Greywater (domestic wastewater) management.

Water in the Constitution

- In the Constitution, water is a matter included in Entry 17 of List-II i.e. State List. This entry is subject to the provision of Entry 56 of List-I i.e. Union List.
  - Under Article 246, the Indian Constitution allocates responsibilities of the States and the Centre into three lists– Union List, State List and Concurrent List.
- Most of the rivers in the country give rise to inter-state differences and disputes (Article 262) on the regulation and development of waters of these rivers.