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Government today launched National Water Quality Sub Mission on Arsenic and Fluoride to provide safe drinking water to about 28,000 affected habitations in the country by March 2021 with an outlay of Rs 25,000 crore. Inaugurating the mission here in collaboration with the States, the Union Minister for Rural Development, Drinking Water and Sanitation and Panchayati Raj Shri Narendra Singh Tomar said that while West Bengal is badly affected by the problem of arsenic, Rajasthan suffers from presence of fluoride in drinking water with serious health hazards. He said, there are about 17 lakh 14 thousand rural habitations in India, of which about 77 percent have been provided with safe drinking water of more than 40 liters per person per day and about 4 percent of the habitations are suffering from problems of water quality. The Minister assured the participating delegates that there will be no discrimination of funds against any state to address the twin challenges of drinking water and sanitation. Ministers of Drinking Water and Sanitation from 12 States participated in the National Workshop on Water for All and Swachh Bharat.

Shri Tomar said that Government is committed to providing tap water on a sustained basis in every household by 2030 as per the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for which Rs 23,000 crore of central fund will be required annually till the target is achieved. The Minister said that the dream of 'Har Ghar Jal' cannot be realized without the involvement of the citizens. He said that there are about 2,000 Blocks in the country with an acute shortage of surface and ground water sources and called for conservation of water on war footing through convergence of schemes like MGNREGA.

Dwelling on the issue of Swachhta, Shri Tomar said that sanitation coverage has increased from 42 percent to 62 percent since the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission, SBM in October 2014. He said, apart from Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala which are ODF (Open Defecation Free) States, 4 to 5 more States can become ODF in next six months. So far, 119 districts and 1.75 lakh villages have become ODF and the Centre has announced to incentivize the states for their timely progress. The Minister informed that since the launch of the SBM, more than 3.6 Crore toilets have been constructed in the rural areas and 16.41 lakh toilets were constructed under MGNREGA. He said, when we are seeking to transform India into a 21st century economic giant: open defecation and garbage cannot be part of this vision.

Shri Tomar along with the Minister of State for Drinking Water and Sanitation Shri Ramesh Jigajinagi launched Water APP on the occasion. The Minister also gave away prizes to various state governments for exemplary work done in the areas of sanitation and drinking water.

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