Groundwater conservation gets PM push

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday launched the Centre’s ambitious groundwater conservation scheme — Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal) — and named the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass as ‘Atal Tunnel’ after former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

On the occasion which coincided with the birth anniversary of Vajpayee, Modi urged farmers to opt for less water intensive crops and irrigation methods that will help conserve water and ultimately fulfil the objective of ‘Jal Jeevan Mission’ to connect all 18 crore rural households across the country with piped water by 2024. The Rs 6,000 crore groundwater conservation scheme (Atal Jal) was approved by the Union cabinet on Tuesday. It will be implemented in 8,350 water stressed villages in seven states — Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — over five years (2020-21 to 2024-25).

The Centre and state governments together will spend more than Rs 3.5 lakh crore to implement the Jal Jeevan Mission over the next five years.

The PM also flagged a provision under the mission where the government will send money directly into the account of village-level special committee once the plan gets implemented in the village.

Villagers from the targeted villages under Atal Bhujal Yojana participated in the function at Vigya Bhawan through videoconference. Defence minister Rajnath Singh and Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat were also present.