Bharatmala Project

Why in news?

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The Union government recently launched Bharatmala project.

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What is Bharatmala?

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- It is an umbrella project under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
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- The Public Investment Board has cleared the proposal for Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase-I.
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- Under the plan the government intends to develop 83,677 km of highways and roads at an investment of around Rs 7 lakh crore over the next five years.
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- In the first phase, the plan is to construct 34,800 km of highways at a cost of Rs 5.35 lakh crore.
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- It focuses on the new initiatives like development of Border and International connectivity roads, Coastal & port connectivity roads, improving efficiency of National Corridors, Economic corridors and others.
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What can be positive outcomes of the project?

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- It will subsume unfinished parts of National Highway Development Program (NHDP).

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- National Highways Development Project (NHDP) to potentially generate 10 million jobs and result in a 3 per cent bump-up in the gross domestic product.
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- In Bharatmala programme, the focus is on economic corridors (9,000 km) is expected to ensure that investments are targeted at economic returns.
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- The ambitious project also plans to create new industrial corridors and urban centres, which should enhance economic activity in the country.
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- Against the 300 districts that are linked to national highways at present, Bharatmala will connect 550 more to the national grid.
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- The government also expects that 70-80 per cent of freight traffic will move on national highways, up from 40 per cent now.
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What are the challenges?

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- Earlier similar plans execution suffered due to problems of funding and delays in approval and execution.
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- But typically, governments in the past have struggled with several operational issues such as land acquisition and other approvals.
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- The big concern is funding, the plan depends more on government funding, and as much as 15 per cent of the total investment is expected from the private sector.
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- Given the patchy record of public-private partnership schemes in India, there is no clarity on private sector investments.
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- Big construction companies such as Larsen & Toubro, GMR and GVK have been missing from auctions for highway projects.
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How the challenges can be addressed?

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- To speed up the process of approvals, the government has already empowered National Highways Authority of India to approve all engineering, procurement and construction projects.
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- To rope private sector in, the government need to draw a definitive road map for timely completion, fund mobilisation as well as streamline other bottlenecks in the form of land acquisition.
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- To achieve dramatic changes, the government will have to improve its execution skills manifold by working closely with state governments.
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- The plan should go a long way towards improving connectivity, not just to the coastal and border areas but to backward areas as well.
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Source: Business Standard

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