Rushing through “Ayushman Bharat”

What is the issue?

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- The proposed “Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission” might soon see a formal announcement.
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- But little preparation seems to have gone into it thus far.
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What is the current state of the scheme?

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- At least six states are said to be ready to roll out a pilot of the new health care scheme, but there is little clarity on the details.
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- It was earlier assumed that the scheme would be an insurance-based mechanism, but there are indications to the contrary now.
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- Government seems to have envisioned a greater administrative role in the proposed scheme through public-private partnership.
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- If so, this is a positive as it will provide welcome flexibility in the initial stages, and allow for experimentation across different designs.
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- Currently, the only thing clear about the scheme is that it would provide a health cover of up to “5 lakh per annum” to about 1o crore poor families.
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- But the beneficiary lists have not been prepared yet and the overall implementation seems to be rushed through by the government.
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- The realisation that a scheme with such a large scope cannot be properly implemented without adequate preparation is needed.
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What are the shortfalls in preparation?

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- A scheme for expanding access in tertiary health care cannot work without significantly widening the supply of hospital beds and specialist doctors.
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- This has not occurred thus far and there is a massive shortage in the supply of services — trained staff, hospitals and diagnostic centres.
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- The deficit in doctors is particularly wide, with India being at least 75% short of the number of qualified doctors it needs.
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- While the funds allocated to the scheme might generate a demand, it would be naive to assume that it would automatically generate its own supply.
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- Implementing the scheme now would cause an unplanned erratic expansion and the associated bottlenecks and inefficiencies.
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- Hence, the government must explain how it intends to fill the infrastructure deficit alongside the phased roll-out of Ayushman Bharat.
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- Further, if the government intends to have a properly working health system, it should ensure that primary healthcare apparatus is properly structured.
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- Notably, most Primary and community health care centres are understaffed, under-funded, under-trained and under-equipped.
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Source: Business Standard

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