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Nov 1 deadline over but Arogya Bhagya still not a reality

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Bengaluru: Slated to be rolled out on November 1, the government's ambitious Arogya Bhagya or universal health coverage programme has missed the deadline.

After the opposition alleged a Rs 400-crore scam in the issuing of health cards, the government reworked the scheme, allowing citizens to use Aadhaar/ration cards to avail of medical care. But with the transfer of principal secretary (health) Shalini Rajneesh to the education department in October, the programme has been further tweaked, said sources. The launch was possibly deferred due to ministers being engaged in Kannada Rajyotsava celebrations on Wednesday.

The scheme was envisaged by the Karnataka government to cover the entire six-crore population. It was approved by the cabinet in August this year, with health minister K R Ramesh saying the programme would be implemented from November 1.

"With the government already maintaining a database of the priority households (BPL families), any person can walk into the government hospital with the ration card or Aadhaar for free treat-

WHAT IT ENTAILS

- Free healthcare for priority households
- Non-priority households to pay Rs 700 per annum in urban pockets and Rs 300 in rural areas as insurance
- All citizens availing of the scheme should visit government hospitals the first time
- 1,500 secondary and tertiary procedures to be covered under scheme



ment," a source said. Once the citizen visits the government hospital and provides details, he/she will immediately get enrolled under the Arogya Bhagya scheme.

Above poverty line (APL) families in urban areas will have to pay Rs 700 per annum as medical insurance; rural families will have to shell out Rs 300. With revision of the finer details expected to be over by the month-end, the scheme is likely to rolled out by November-end or early December.

Pvt. hospitals on strike tomorrow

Move to oppose amendments to private medical establishments Act

STAFF REPORTER
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Over 45,000 private hospitals, diagnostic centres and clinics will down shutters on Friday against the Karnataka Private Medical Establishments (Amendment) Act.

While inpatient services (that is, continued treatment for those who are in hospitals) and ambulance services are expected to continue, out-patient and diagnostics services in medical establishments are likely to be hit, said the State unit of Indian Medical Association. All 177 branches of the IMA have been directed to ensure establishments of their members remain closed.

The anger of private doctors is against the Bill that will enable increased government regulation on private hospitals: including fixing of fees and cost of treatment, and a district-level grievance committee that can take action against erring hospitals.

"This is a warning to the government. If they do not address our concerns and demand, we will escalate the strike on November 10," said H.N. Ravindra, president-elect of IMA.

Alert to govt. hospitals

All government hospitals have been asked to prepare for an expected increase in



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patient load during the day of the strike. "We have directed all doctors and staff of district, taluk and primary health centres to be present to ensure that patients are not inconvenienced," said Ajay Seth, Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Welfare).

Moreover, while the legal position of imposing ESMA (Essential Services Maintenance Act) on striking doctors will only be known on Thursday, the State government is "continuing" talks with the protesters to explain the government's views on the amendments.

While private doctors have opposed the amendment, numerous activists and government medical associations have extended support to the Bill.