

ECI holds first nat'l roundtable in 27 years

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday convened a National Roundtable Conference with State Election Commissioners at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, marking the first such meeting in 27 years.

The previous conference of this kind was held in 1999.

The day-long conference is being chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in the presence of Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi.

State Election Commissioners (SECs) from all States and union Territories are participating in the deliberations along with their legal and technical experts. Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) from all 36 States and union Territories are also in attendance.

According to the ECI, the primary objective of the conference is to foster greater synergy between the Commission and State Election Commissions in managing electoral processes and logistics within their respective legal frameworks.

Enthusiasm marks legislators' sports meet

HANS NEWS SERVICE VIJAYAWADA

THE Andhra Pradesh Legislators' Sports and Games 2026, titled 'Aatavidupu', commenced on a grand note on Tuesday at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada.

A total of 156 legislators, including MLAs and MLCs — among them several women representatives — are participating in athletics, indoor games and team sports. The competitions are designed to foster fitness, camaraderie and unity among elected members. Residents of Vijayawada turned up in good numbers to witness their representatives showcase sporting talent beyond the legislative arena.

The games will continue until February 26 at the IGMC Stadium and the Dandamudi Rajagopal Rao Municipal Corporation Indoor Stadium.



Assembly Speaker Ch Ayyanna Patrudu, Deputy Speaker K Raghurama Krishna Raju, Council Chairman Koyye Moshen Raju and others inaugurating the AP State Legislature Sports Meet—2026 at IGMC stadium in Vijayawada on Tuesday

Photo: Ch Venkata Mastan

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu, Legislative Council Chairman Koyye Moshen Raju, Deputy Speaker K Raghurama Krishna Raju, chief whips G V Anjaneyulu and Panchumarthi Anuradha, Saap chairman A Ravi Naidu, vice-chair-

man and managing director S Bharani, and Legislative Secretary Prasanna Kumar, among others.

Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammohan Rao and MLC Kavali Greeshma carried the sports torch into the stadium. The dignitaries unveiled the 'Kreedha Jyoti' and declared the games

open, while senior legislator Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary administered the sports pledge.

The opening tug-of-war contest set an energetic tone. Ayyanna Patrudu said the event helps legislators relieve stress, recalling it was first introduced by former Chief Minister NT Rama Rao.

Atchanna flays YSRCP, vows veterinary revival

- Minister alleges YSRCP left animal husbandry in collapse, with hospitals lacking medicines, equipment, and staff
- Says 3,176 centres became ineffective; 485 new buildings built under coalition, but 826 institutions still in poor condition
- Govt plans phased Rs 302.5 cr programme (2026–29) to rebuild veterinary infrastructure for farmers and livestock-rearers

HANS NEWS SERVICE VIJAYAWADA

AGRICULTURE and animal husbandry minister K Atchannaidu on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the previous YSRCP government, alleging that all departments were virtually “locked up” during its five-year rule, pushing the state into administrative disorder.

Replying to questions raised by MLAs in the Assembly regarding the lack of facilities and appointments in veterinary hospitals, the minister said the animal husbandry department was systematically weakened under the previous regime.

He stated that essential infrastructure for farmers and

livestock rearers was neglected, with veterinary hospitals reduced to mere namesake institutions. “There were no medicines, no modern equipment, buildings were in dilapidated condition, and staff shortages were rampant,” he said.

Although 3,176 centres function under the animal husbandry department across the state, many became ineffective due to alleged negligence. Even buildings constructed through farmers’ contributions were not maintained, he added.

The minister asserted that revival efforts began only after the coalition government assumed office. He revealed that 485 new buildings have been constructed so far with



Agriculture minister K Atchannaidu answering a question in the Assembly in Amaravati on Tuesday

assistance from RIDF–NABARD and ESVD funds. However, 826 institutions still remain in poor condition. Of these, 400 require new buildings at an estimated cost of ₹265.10 crore, while 426 need urgent repairs costing Rs 37.40 crore.

He said the government has prepared a phased plan under the RIDF–NABARD budget from 2026–27 to 2028–29 to strengthen veterinary infrastructure. The coalition government’s goal, he emphasised, is to rebuild the department to genuinely serve farmers and livestock rearers.

Kerala is now Keralam

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However, any such Bill can be introduced in parliament only after it is referred by the President to the concerned State legislature for its views. Once the Assembly’s views are received, the Union government may proceed to obtain the President’s recommendation and introduce the Bill in parliament.

The Cabinet approval marks the first formal step toward the proposed constitutional amendment.

In its 2024 resolution, the Kerala Assembly noted that the State was formed on linguistic lines on November 1, 1956, and that the name “Keralam” has long been used in Malayalam and during the independence movement to refer to a unified Malayalam-speaking region.

The Assembly unanimously urged the Central government to take steps to modify the First Schedule to the Constitution to reflect the name “Keralam”. Following the resolution, the Kerala government formally requested the Union government to initiate the constitutional process. The Ministry of Home Affairs examined the proposal after which the draft cabinet note was circulated to the Department of Legal Affairs and the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice. Both departments concurred with the proposal.

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Indian exporters set to gain as US customs rolls out 10% global tariff

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The transit time for the US ports ranges from 45-60 days. So, at any given point of time one-eighth of annual exports to the US of \$10-12 billion are on seas so the benefit could be considerable if importers share the benefit of lower duties, he added.

Tariffs on India remained at 50% from last week of August 2025 to February 6 this year. Both sides issued a joint statement that removed 25% tariffs related to Russian oil purchases and agreed to bring down

reciprocal tariffs to 18% from 25%. Before the order of Indian reciprocal tariffs came, the US Supreme Court struck down all country-specific tariffs.

The US Customs and Border Protection notified 10% additional duties on imported articles from all countries for a period of 150 days under the Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 just hours before the new rates came into force at 12:01 am eastern standard time on Tuesday (February 24).

IYC chief arrested

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Police also claimed that Chib’s associates raised “anti-national slogans” and “tried to incite riot-like situations” at the venue. They also claimed Chib did not cooperate with the probe and did not disclose names of other co-accused and the source of printing T-shirts used in the protest.

Chib, who was not present at the venue during the protest last Friday, was produced before a court here, which sent him to four days police custody after rejecting his counsel’s argument that he had cooperated with the probe and was not on the run. Police argued that the conspiracy went beyond printing the T-shirts with slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Well-organised ‘syndicate’ behind ghee scam: Naidu

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Naidu also referred to past controversies, including allegations about a “pink diamond” and claims of religious propaganda on RTC bus tickets to Tirumala. He said these were part of attempts to defame both TTD and his government. “This is not just about adulterated ghee,” he said. “It is about faith, governance, and the sanctity of Tirumala.”

AMID US STRIKE FEARS...

Iran set to buy Chinese anti-ship cruise missiles

TEHRAN

IRAN is close to a deal with China to purchase antiship cruise missiles, according to six people with knowledge of the negotiations, just as the United States deploys a vast naval force near the Iranian coast ahead of possible strikes on the Islamic Republic.

The deal for the Chinese-made CM302 missiles is near completion, though no delivery date has been agreed, the people said. The supersonic missiles have a range of about 290 kilometres and are

designed to evade shipborne defenses by flying low and fast. Their deployment would significantly enhance Iran’s strike capabilities and pose a threat to US naval forces in the region, two weapons experts said.

Negotiations with China to buy the missile weapons systems, which began at least two years ago, accelerated sharply after the 12day war between Israel and Iran in June, according to the six people with knowledge of the talks, including three officials who were briefed by the Iranian government as

well as three security officials. As talks entered their final stages last summer, senior Iranian military and government officials travelled to China, including Massoud Oraei, Iran’s deputy defence minister, according to two of the security officials. Oraei’s visit has not been previously reported.

“It’s a complete gamechanger if Iran has superperson capability to attack ships in the area,” said Danny Citrinowicz, a former Israeli intelligence officer and now senior Iran researcher at Israel’s Institute for National

Security Studies think tank. “These missiles are very difficult to intercept.”

Reuters could not determine how many missiles were involved in the potential deal, how much Iran had agreed to pay, or whether China would go through with the agreement now given heightened tensions in the region. “Iran has military and security agreements with its allies and now is an appropriate time to make use of these agreements,” an Iranian foreign ministry official told Reuters.

The Chinese delegation to

the United Nations directed Reuters to seek comment from the Foreign Ministry in Beijing. The foreign and defense ministries did not respond to requests for comment.

The White House did not directly address the negotiations between Iran and China over the missile system when asked by Reuters. US President Donald Trump has been clear that “either we will make a deal or we will have to do something very tough like last time,” a White House official said, referring to the current standoff with Iran.

Data of Andhra University students, staff on dark web

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The leaked information is believed to have originated from the Edusphere Platform, which is understood to be a technology partner providing digital services to Andhra University. Investigators and cybersecurity analysts pointed to the alleged vulnerability of the platform’s website, edusphere.in, whose SSL certificate had reportedly expired some time ago. An expired SSL certificate can make a website more susceptible to cyberattacks, data interception, and

unauthorised access if not promptly renewed.

If confirmed, the breach could have serious implications for thousands of students, alumni, and staff members. Experts warn that exposed personal and academic data can be exploited for phishing scams, financial fraud, impersonation, and other forms of cybercrime.

As of now, there has been no detailed official statement confirming the extent of the breach or clarifying the immediate steps being taken to secure affected systems.

Cybersecurity professionals emphasise the need for a thorough forensic audit, immediate containment measures, password resets, and enhanced data protection protocols.

The incident underscores the growing vulnerability of educational institutions to cyber threats and highlights the urgent need for robust digital infrastructure, regular security audits, and strict compliance with data protection standards to safeguard sensitive academic records.

A Nobel laureate makes Modi’s vision a reality

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Most machines use the dew point, which is the exact temperature where air gets so cold that it can no longer hold moisture, forcing it to turn into liquid droplets, much like the fog we see on a cold window or a chilled soda can. This takes a massive amount of electricity.

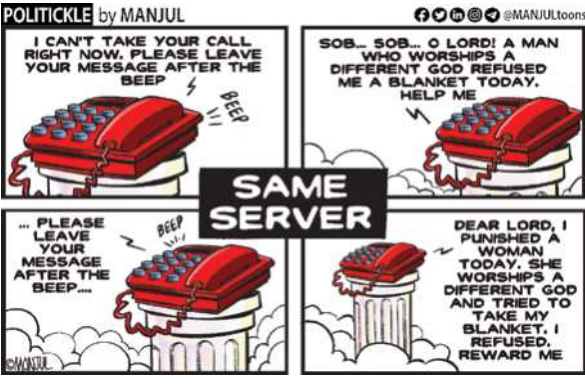
Adsorption, however, is a much more natural and elegant process. Instead of forcing the air to get cold, the water molecules are simply glued to the surface of a material because they are chemically attracted to it.

This shift in approach is the secret to the efficiency of Yaghi’s technology. By removing the need to refrigerate massive amounts of air, the system avoids the huge energy bills and heavy, noisy machinery that make old-

school water harvesters impractical.

Instead, these molecular sponges do the work for free, using their natural hunger to pull in water even when the air feels bone dry. It turns a forced, high-energy mechanical struggle into a quiet, natural chemical process.

The true struggle of previous atmospheric water generators has been their dependence on high humidity. Most fail when relative humidity drops below 45 per cent, leaving desert communities stranded. However, Atoco has designed its technology to be resilient, functioning efficiently even in environments with less than 20 per cent humidity. This means it can produce water in places where it almost never rains and where the air feels like a furnace.



Cabinet clears ₹2,387-cr chip project

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Compressed biogas plants and battery energy storage systems were also approved, reinforcing the state’s clean energy expansion plans. In the tourism sector, ultra-mega hospitality and convention centre projects were cleared in Amaravati, Visakhapatnam, Rajamahendravaram and Tirupati.

Incentives were extended to leading hospitality brands to strengthen tourism infrastructure and generate employment.

To support small enterprises, the Cabinet approved the AP Sick and Stressed MSME Revival Policy (4.0) 2026-31, aimed at reviving distressed units and promoting entrepreneurship under a “One Family, One Entrepreneur” model. Amendments to the AP Leather & Footwear Policy 2025-30 were also cleared.

On governance reforms, the government decided to reorganise Higher Education and Skill Development departments for better inter-

gration and establish a dedicated Science, Technology & Innovation Department. Administrative sanctions of Rs 424.34 crore and Rs 556 crore were approved for works related to the Assembly and High Court buildings in Amaravati.

Naidu emphasised faster project grounding and a shift from “Ease of Doing Business” to “Speed of Doing Business,” urging officials to adopt AI-driven tools to improve transparency and execution.

WITH an aim to further strengthen the safety standards of industries and enhance the ability to respond in a coordinated manner in emergency situations, a level-3 Emergency Response and Disaster Management Plan offsite mock drill was carried out at Narava village.

Jointly conducted by HPCL-Visakh Refinery, Visakhapatnam Dispatch Station, the mock drill included real-time situations. As part of it, response measures were demonstrated by simulating situations like fire and product leakage technically. Immediate identification of incident information and implementation of alert system, control of the affected area, fire control measures, evacuation of personnel and local people to safe areas were coordinated. Fire services, district administration, police



An Emergency Response and Disaster Management Plan offsite mock drill carried out at Narava village in Visakhapatnam

department, medical department, industrial safety teams and other emergency services departments coordinated in the drill, showcasing their response capacity.

Providing first aid to the injured, testing the effectiveness of communication systems and further improving coordination between various departments were demonstrated at the site. Speaking on the occasion,

officials said that level-3 offsite mock drills will enhance the preparedness of organisations to effectively deal with emergencies and strengthen coordination between departments.

HPCL chief general manager L.V. Nageswara Rao, HPCL deputy general manager Vikram Singh, Joint Chief Inspector of Factories J. Shiva Shankar, deputy chief inspector of factories B Suresh and other staff participated.