

AP TO FAST-TRACK AIR TAXI INFRASTRUCTURE

- State plans Vertiports for electric air taxis and next-generation urban air mobility
- Sites to be identified for eVTOL landing hubs on land and rooftops
- Network expected to boost inter-city and intra-city connectivity within 150 km

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VIJAYAWADA

THE state government has taken a major step toward future air mobility by constituting a Vertiports Planning Committee to develop infrastructure for electric air taxis and next-generation aviation services.

The move follows a request from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to states to initiate planning for Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) systems. Now, the state government approved the formation of the committee and



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designated the managing director of APADCL as the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for coordination with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and other stakeholders.

The committee will be chaired by the special chief secretary or principal secretary of the Industries and Infrastructure Department. The committee's primary task is to plan and facilitate infrastructure for electric Vertical Take-off and Landing (eVTOL) aircraft, widely seen as

the backbone of future urban air mobility and air taxi services.

Officials said the panel will identify suitable locations for vertiports, specialized landing and take-off hubs for eVTOL aircraft, either on open land or rooftops in urban areas. These facilities are expected to improve inter-city and intra-city connectivity within a radius of about 150 kilometres while easing urban congestion. The committee will also examine the pos-

sibility of converting existing heliports into vertiports, provided they meet DGCA safety standards.

In addition, it will conduct technical feasibility studies on potential sites, assess building structures for rooftop operations, and evaluate environmental and noise impacts on surrounding areas. Another key responsibility is ensuring regulatory compliance with DGCA aerodrome guidelines and coordinating approvals with aviation authorities.

The panel will also plan supporting infrastructure, including high-capacity charging facilities for electric aircraft weighing two to three tonnes, and integrate vertiport development with urban planning and Smart City projects.

Officials said the initiative aims to build a network of vertiports linked with existing airports, paving the way for future air taxi services and advanced aerial mobility systems in Andhra Pradesh.

Minister sets May 15 deadline for irrigation O&M works

- Nimmala orders completion of all irrigation maintenance before kharif season
- States that the current govt spent Rs 878 cr in two years, far exceeding previous govt's Rs 200 cr over five years
- Farmers allowed desilted soil at Rs 1 per cubic metre to aid cultivation

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WATER resources minister Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu directed officials to complete all operation and maintenance (O&M) works across the state before the commencement of the ensuing kharif season, setting a strict deadline of May 15. The minister issued these instructions during a video conference held with irrigation department officials at his camp office here on Tuesday.

He said that while the pre-



Water resources minister Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu holds a video conference with irrigation officials on operation and maintenance works at his camp office in Vijayawada on Tuesday

vious government had spent less than Rs 200 crore on O&M works over five years, the present coalition government has sanctioned and spent Rs 878 crore within the first two years itself.

He stressed that massive investments in irrigation infrastructure would go to waste if proper maintenance is not carried out regularly. "Even if thousands of crores are spent on building irrigation projects, without timely O&M works, it would be a futile exercise," he remarked, underscoring the importance of annual maintenance.

Criticising the previous YSRCP government, the minister alleged that irrigation systems were neglected, with no desilting of canals and no repairs to shutters, doors, or gates. "Basic maintenance like greasing was also ignored," he said, adding that such lapses had adversely affected the irrigation sector.

The minister asked officials to restore irrigation systems to normalcy ahead of the 2026 kharif season by starting O&M work immediately and completing it as quickly as possible. He also

instructed that all emergency works be carried out to the highest quality standards.

In a move aimed at supporting farmers, he said that permissions have been granted to supply desilted soil from tanks to farmers at a nominal rate of Rs 1 per cubic metre.

Command Area Development Authority (CADA) commissioner Prasanthi, irrigation advisor M Venkateswara Rao, engineer-in-chief Narasimha Murthy, chief engineers from across the state, and other senior officials attended the meet.

Free FMD vaccination drive for cattle in state

- Animal husbandry director announces launch of National Livestock Disease Control Programme with 83.69 lakh vaccine doses
- Veterinary teams to vaccinate cattle and buffaloes above four months at farmers' doorsteps until April 29
- Initiative aims to prevent Foot-and-Mouth Disease, which reduces milk yield, weakens bullocks, and can cause calf deaths

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IN a bid to support livestock farmers, the state government has rolled out the National Livestock Disease Control Programme, offering free vaccination against Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) for cattle and buffaloes, including calves older than four months.

Director of animal husbandry T Damodar Naidu said veterinary teams are carrying out the vaccination drive right at farmers' doorsteps, and the campaign will continue until April 29. He urged livestock owners to take full advantage of the initiative to protect their animals.

He explained that FMD mainly affects cattle and buffaloes above four months of age, often due to low immu-



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nity. Crossbred animals are particularly at risk, as the disease spreads through a highly contagious virus. Timely vaccination, he stressed, is the only reliable way to prevent it.

The disease can severely impact farmers by reducing milk yield, weakening the working capacity of bullocks, and, in some cases, causing death in calves. To address this, the government has arranged for the distribution of 83.69 lakh vaccine doses across districts.

Naidu pointed out that the infection spreads through contaminated feed and water, open wounds, and poor hygiene. Common symptoms include high fever, blisters in the mouth and between the hooves, excessive salivation, and difficulty in eating

or walking. In serious cases, secondary infections may develop, and pregnant animals may even abort.

Crossbred cattle tend to show more severe symptoms such as anaemia, breathing difficulties, weakness, and reduced tolerance to heat. Recovery can take up to six months.

The vaccination drive will be carried out in phases. The first round will cover eligible animals, followed by a second round for the remaining livestock, and a booster dose will be administered within the next 15 days.

Veterinary staff will provide the service free of cost, and officials have appealed to farmers to actively participate and safeguard their livestock from the disease.

Increase in polymer prices pushes construction industry into uncertainty

PRADEEP VENNELAKANTI
TIRUPATI

THE construction and real estate sectors are witnessing fresh turbulence as a sudden surge in the prices of key raw materials has significantly increased project costs, raising alarm among builders, manufacturers and traders nationwide. Industry stakeholders warn that if immediate corrective steps are not taken, the ongoing price escalation could slow down construction activity and affect employment linked to the sector.

Over the past few weeks, prices of essential construction inputs — particularly polymer-based materials — have risen steeply, disrupting market stability. Materials such as PVC, PP, PE, HDPE and LLDPE, widely used in pipes, fittings and plastic construction components, have recorded sharp increases within a short span.

Market sources indicate that polymer prices have jumped between Rs 25,000 and Rs 35,000 per metric tonne in just nine to ten days, placing unexpected financial pressure on downstream industries.

Data from trade circles shows that since early March, polypropylene (PP) prices alone have climbed by nearly Rs 35,000 per MT, while HDPE and LLDPE registered increases of around Rs 33,500 per MT. LDPE grades have also witnessed hikes ranging between Rs 25,000



and Rs 28,500 per MT. PVC prices, a critical input for construction and infrastructure projects, have risen by approximately Rs 25,000 per tonne in recent days.

Adding to the burden, petrochemical major Reliance Industries Limited reportedly implemented an additional Rs 6,000 per tonne increase in PVC prices effective March 16, further intensifying cost pressures.

Industry experts attribute the sharp price movement partly to global uncertainties, including ongoing tensions in West Asia, which have disrupted supply chains and in-

fluenced petrochemical markets. Domestic factors have also worsened the situation. Gas shortages in Gujarat's Morbi region — a major tile manufacturing hub — have reportedly forced several production units to suspend operations, tightening supply and pushing up tile prices.

The impact is not limited to polymers alone. Prices of copper wires and electrical components used in housing projects have increased by nearly 20 percent, while steel rates, freight charges and other construction-related expenses are also trending upward. Builders say these

combined increases are driving overall housing construction costs higher, making new homes less affordable for buyers and creating financial strain for small developers.

Market volatility has begun affecting manufacturing operations as well. Producers of pump sets, motors, HD pipes and agricultural plastic equipment are reportedly hesitant to accept fresh orders due to unpredictable raw material costs. Frequent price revisions have made production planning difficult, forcing some companies to delay business commitments — a trend that could soon impact both agricultural and infrastructure sectors.

Business associations, including traders from Tirupati, have urged the Centre to intervene and stabilise market conditions. Former president of the Tirupati Chamber of Commerce A Manjunath expressed the need for scrutiny of pricing practices, restoration of gas supply to Morbi's tile units, monitoring of steel and copper pricing, and measures to ease transportation costs.

He felt that continued price escalation could weaken the real estate ecosystem, potentially leading to job losses and reduced tax revenues for governments. With construction serving as a major driver of economic activity and employment, industry bodies are calling for urgent policy action to prevent further disruption and restore market confidence.

NACO targets AP in push to eliminate HIV

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THE National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), under the Union ministry of health and family welfare, will organise a state-level Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala here on Wednesday, as part of its intensified nationwide strategy to strengthen HIV response at the district level. The workshop will be chaired by Dr. Rakesh Gupta, Additional Secretary and Director General of NACO.

The event will bring together key policymakers and administrators, including Saurabh Gaur, G Veerapandian, and Dr K Neelakanta Reddy, along with district collectors, health officials and AIDS control officers from across Andhra Pradesh. The gathering aims to review current progress and develop actionable strategies to strengthen HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services.

This initiative is part of Mission AIDS Suraksha, a focused national drive by NACO to accelerate interventions in high-burden regions through targeted district-level engagement.

Andhra Pradesh, with an adult HIV prevalence of 0.58 percent and an estimated 3.1 lakh people living with HIV, has been identified as a priority state. As part of this effort, 23 districts—including Guntur, Krishna, Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, and Kurnool—have been prioritised for enhanced programme implementation and monitoring.

District teams will present progress reports, identify gaps, and formulate tailored action plans to improve outcomes on the ground. The workshop will also emphasise strengthening prevention strategies, expanding testing services, ensuring sustained treatment adherence, and improving viral load suppression among patients. The Karyashala is expected to foster coordinated planning among national, state, and district stakeholders, reinforcing a data-driven and collaborative approach. Through such focused interventions, NACO aims to accelerate progress towards the 95-95-95 targets and advance India's goal of eliminating AIDS as a public health threat.

- Association leaders meet civil supplies director, warning that 10-day shortages could force closures and drive away skilled migrant staff
- Director assures equitable distribution of limited 30-40% capacity gas to all eateries based on past consumption

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AMID a deepening commercial LPG crisis, hoteliers across Andhra Pradesh have urged the government to ensure uninterrupted supply of gas cylinders, warning that prolonged shortages could cripple the food service industry.

Representing these concerns, the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of the Vijayawada Hotels Association and AP Star Hotels Association met civil supplies director Nupur Ajay Kumar here on Tuesday evening.

The JAC highlighted that the industry is on the brink

Hoteliers demand urgent relief from gas shortage



Leaders of Vijayawada Hotels Association JAC and AP Star Hotels Association submit a memorandum to civil supplies director Nupur Ajay Kumar in Vijayawada on Tuesday

of shutdown due to severe shortages over the past ten days. Leaders including R V Swamy and Ramana Rao stressed the urgent need for at least partial supply restoration to sustain operations and retain workforce, particularly skilled migrant staff.

Responding to the concerns, the civil supplies director assured that available gas—currently at 30-40 per cent capacity—would be

distributed equitably among all establishments, from star hotels to small eateries, based on their past consumption patterns. This follows directions from Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to prioritise supply to the hospitality sector and prevent disruption of essential food services.

To manage the crisis, the government is considering temporary restrictions, in-

cluding mandating closure of hotels and restaurants by 10 pm to conserve fuel, potentially saving 10-20 per cent of daily consumption.

Authorities have also encouraged the use of alternative cooking methods such as charcoal and wood-fired stoves, while advising a temporary reduction in gas-intensive menu items.

Additionally, a zonal weekly holiday system may be introduced, allowing staggered closures across different areas instead of a complete shutdown. Officials indicated that a government order outlining these measures, in line with guidelines from Hardeep Singh Puri, will be issued soon.

The JAC reaffirmed its commitment to cooperate fully with the government to ensure continued food services without a complete industry shutdown.

Packaged drinking water prices set to go up

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AMID rising input costs, prices of packaged drinking water bottles are set to increase across the state, industry sources said on Tuesday.

Manufacturers said that production costs have gone up sharply due to a steep rise in the prices of raw materials and packaging components. With summer approaching, demand for bottled water is also expected to increase by 15-20 per cent, adding further pressure on supply and pricing.

The decision to hike prices was taken at a meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Packaged Drinking Water Manufacturers' Association held in Vijayawada, which was attended by manufacturers from Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam districts. According to the association, the price of plastic preforms has risen



Andhra Pradesh Packaged Drinking Water Manufacturers' Association president Pinnamaneni Dhanaprakash and general secretary A Srinivas addressing the media in Vijayawada on Tuesday

from Rs110 to Rs 190 per kg, while bottle cap costs have increased from Rs 0.22 to Rs 0.40 per unit. PVC sleeve prices have gone up from Rs 0.20 to Rs0.30, and label costs have increased from Rs 300 to Rs 430 per kg. Corrugated box prices rose from Rs 11 to Rs 14 per unit, while shrink film costs surged from Rs 115 to Rs 250 per kg. Adhesive tape prices have also increased from Rs 280 to Rs 400. Addressing the media, association president Pinnamaneni Dhanaprakash and general secretary A Srinivas said that

the cumulative rise in input costs has significantly impacted production. They advised members to increase prices by around Rs 25 per case. They added that the packaged drinking water market in the State is estimated to be over Rs.140 crore and plays a crucial role, especially during the summer when consumption peaks. The usage is higher in urban areas compared to rural regions. They said the price hike has become unavoidable and appealed to distributors and consumers to cooperate with the revised pricing.