

35 birth waiting homes to boost maternal care in tribal areas

- Health minister says 35 new facilities are coming up across seven ITDA regions at a cost of Rs 12.25 cr; 22 to be ready by May/June
- Centres to provide safe stay, food support and medical access for pregnant women from remote tribal areas
- Around 13,000 women expected to benefit annually once all homes become operational

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VIJAYAWADA

HEALTH minister Y Satya Kumar Yadav announced the construction of 35 new birth waiting homes (hostels for pregnant women) to support pregnant women in tribal areas. These facilities are being developed across seven Inte-



grated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) regions to ensure safe and timely access to maternal healthcare.

According to officials, 15 buildings are being constructed in Paderu ITDA, while four each are coming up in Rampachodavaram, Parvathipuram, Chintoor, Srisailam and Kota Ramachandrapuram areas.

The projects are being executed at a cost of Rs 12.25 crore. Out of the 35 centres, 22 are expected to be completed by May/June, two by

July, and the remaining by the end of this year.

Currently, 76 birth waiting homes are operational across ITDA regions such as Seethampeta, Parvathipuram, Paderu, Rampachodavaram, Chintoor, Kota Ramachandrapuram, and Srisailam. Of these, 41 have permanent buildings, while the rest are under construction.

Each new facility will include eight rooms, with four rooms dedicated to pregnant women, each attached with a toilet. Additional infra-

structure includes a common kitchen, recreation room, reception area, and storage space.

Each building is being constructed at a cost of Rs 35 lakh under the National Health Mission, supervised by ITDA authorities. These centres are being linked to 27 Primary Health Centres, six Community Health Centres, and 2 area hospitals.

Pregnant women from remote tribal regions will be brought to these centres at least a week before delivery by ASHA workers and ANMs, reducing transportation challenges and health risks. Each beneficiary receives Rs 200 per day for food, Rs 200 for an attendant, and an additional Rs 200 as compensation for lost wages.

In 2025-26, around 11,000 women benefited from these services, with 9,500 already covered this year. Once all facilities are completed, nearly 13,000 pregnant women are expected to benefit annually.

₹300 cr AP-CMEP to boost MSME manufacturing, jobs

- New scheme targets 3,500 micro entrepreneurs and 17,000 jobs
- 175 MSME industrial parks planned across all Assembly constituencies

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VIJAYAWADA

THE state government has launched a new entrepreneurship scheme aimed at strengthening its manufacturing base and accelerating growth in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector.

Under the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's Entrepreneur Programme (AP-CMEP), the state will provide financial support worth Rs 300 crore to about 3,500 micro entrepreneurs, with the potential to generate around 17,000 jobs.

The scheme forms part of the state's AP MSME and



Entrepreneurship Development Policy 4.0 (2024-2029), which seeks to expand industrial activity and promote entrepreneurship under the government's broader "One Family One Entrepreneur" initiative.

Officials said the programme will prioritise entrepreneurs who establish manufacturing units in newly planned MSME industrial parks as well as on privately owned land. The state government has already

approved the creation of 175 MSME industrial parks and flatted factory complexes, with one park planned in each Assembly constituency to ensure geographically balanced industrial growth. The Andhra Pradesh MSME Development Corporation and the Directorate of Industries have been tasked with issuing detailed guidelines for the scheme to ensure early rollout.

As part of the initiative, the Ratan Tata Innovation

Hub will assist in designing the framework for financial support to knowledge-economy startups, aligning the programme with emerging technology-driven sectors.

The Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) has also been directed to notify the proposed 175 MSME parks, which are expected to serve as the core infrastructure backbone for the state's entrepreneurship push.

The government has earmarked a broader Rs 500-crore corpus under the MSME policy to promote entrepreneurship, strengthen the MSME ecosystem and improve fund utilisation over the five-year policy period.

Officials said the combined policy push, spanning industrial infrastructure, startup support and direct financial incentives, aims to position Andhra Pradesh as a major hub for MSME-led manufacturing and employment generation in India.

3 lakh MT LPG stranded at Hormuz

NEW DELHI: Nearly 3 lakh metric tonnes (MT) of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is currently stranded at the Strait of Hormuz, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said on Tuesday. During a key briefing, the senior government official said that multiple vessels carrying LPG are unable to move due to the situation in the crucial shipping route. He explained that six ships are currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz, with each vessel carrying around 45,000 metric tonnes of LPG. "Six ships are currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz, with each vessel carrying around 45,000 metric tonnes of LPG," Sinha mentioned. Together, this accounts for roughly 3 lakh metric tonnes of fuel that is yet to reach its destination.

Maha passes Freedom of Religion Bill

MUMBAI: The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill 2026 was passed by the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on Monday. The law is aimed at prohibiting religious conversions carried out through fraud, coercion, inducement or marriage-related deception. Speaking on the Bill, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, who also holds the Home portfolio, said the law is not directed against any religion and is meant only to prevent unlawful conversions. He said the Bill does not restrict a person's constitutional right to practice religion under Article 25 of the Constitution of India, but it does not include the right to convert others through coercion or deceit. According to the government, the law applies equally to all religions and its objective is to ensure that conversions are voluntary and transparent. Complaints can be filed by the affected person or close relatives, and authorities or police may take action on suspected unlawful conversions.

Mojtaba rejects ceasefire push

TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has rejected proposals for reducing tensions or for a possible ceasefire with the United States that were conveyed to Tehran by two intermediary countries, a senior Iranian official said on Tuesday.

The official claimed that Khamenei's position for revenge against the US and Israel in his first foreign policy session was "very tough and serious". However, he did not clarify if Khamenei attended the sessions in person.

Khamenei, in his first statement since his appointment, vowed to avenge those killed in the war and claimed that Iran would "obtain compensation" from its enemy. He said that if it refuses to do so, Iran will "take from its assets" or destroy them to the same extent.

"A limited amount of this revenge has so far taken concrete form, but until it is fully achieved, this case will remain among our priorities," he said. He said that Iran will never retreat and will resist with "full force" and will avenge not just the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei but every citizen who lost their life in the war. "We will not forget the revenge for the blood of the martyrs," he said.

Mamata locks horns with BJP's Suvendu again

KOLKATA

TRINAMOL Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will fight her protegee turned bitter rival, the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari, from Bhabanipur in Kolkata in the 2026 Assembly elections.

The ruling TMC announced its list of candidates for the upcoming polls, with Mamata Banerjee contesting from the Bhabanipur Assembly constituency.

Addressing a press conference in Kolkata, Banerjee said: "We will contest 291 of the 294 seats. The remaining three seats will be contested by our ally, Anit Thapa-led BGP, in the Darjeeling hills," Banerjee said, while announcing the names of candidates.

Banerjee expressed confidence that the Trinamool would retain power with a comfortable major-

ity in the 2026 Assembly elections. She predicted that her party would secure more than 226 seats in the elections. In the 2021 election, Adhikari defeated Banerjee in Nandigram by 1,956 votes, following which the Chief Minister had to shift to the Bhabanipur seat from where she won a bypoll and which she currently represents.

Asked about the challenge Adhikari, who was named the BJP candidate on Monday, will pose, Banerjee said, "We will win with the maximum number of votes from Bhabanipur." The Chief Minister also sought to reassure party leaders and workers who could not find a place in the candidate list, saying they would be accommodated in the organisation. "All those who could not be accommodated in the candidate list will be accommodated in the organisation," she said.

400 killed, 250 injured in Pak strike on Kabul hospital

KABUL

AT least 400 people have been killed and around 250 injured in a Pakistani airstrike at a hospital in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, a Taliban spokesperson said on Tuesday. Afghanistan's deputy government spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat said the airstrike hit the drug rehabilitation hospital at about 9 pm local time, destroying large sections of the 2,000-bed facility. Pakistan denied the Afghan government's allegations and called them "baseless", saying that no hospital was targeted in Kabul.

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid condemned the strike, accusing Pakistan of "targeting hospitals and civilian sites to perpetrate hor-

rors". "The Pakistani military regime has once again violated Afghanistan's airspace and targeted a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul, resulting in the death and injury of addicts who were undergoing treatment," he posted on X. "We strongly condemn this crime and consider such an act to be against all accepted principles and a crime against humanity," he further said.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said that the Pakistani military had "carried out precision airstrikes" targeting military installations in Kabul and the eastern province of Nangarhar. He said "technical support infrastructure and ammunition storage facilities" at two locations in Kabul were destroyed.

'NOT FOR ALL LPG CONSUMERS'

GOVT CLARIFIES ON EKYC NORMS FOR LPG

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on Tuesday clarified that LPG biometric Aadhaar authentication (eKYC) is only required for unauthenticated LPG customers and not for all customers. The clarification came as some news report

have been circulating on the issue of biometric Aadhaar authentication for LPG consumers. In a post by the Ministry is a part of the ongoing efforts of the Government to encourage more LPG consumers to complete biometric Aadhaar authentication.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



LS revokes suspension of 8 Oppn MPs

NEW DELHI: The Lok Sabha on Tuesday revoked the suspension of eight Opposition Members of Parliament after the House unanimously adopted a motion moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijji following Question Hour. The motion to reinstate Gurneet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, Dean Kuriakose, Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, B. Manickam Tagore, Prashant Yadaorao Padole, Chamaala Kiran Kumar Reddy and S Venkatesan was passed with complete unanimity through a voice vote, reflecting consensus across party lines after days of disruptions. The breakthrough came a day after an all-party meeting chaired by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, where leaders from both the government and the Opposition agreed to resolve the impasse and restore normal functioning of the House during the ongoing Budget session.

'Can't support Iran war in good conscience'

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"I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran. Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby," he added. In a strongly worded message directed at Trump, Kent said he continued to support the President's earlier foreign policy approach. "I support the values and the foreign policies that you campaigned on in 2016, 2020, 2024, which you enacted in your first term. Until June of 2025, you understood that the wars in the Middle East were a trap that robbed America of the precious lives of our patriots and depleted the wealth and prosperity of our nation." "In your first administration, you understood better than any modern President how to decisively apply military power without getting us drawn into never-ending wars. You demonstrated this by killing Qasam Solamani and by defeating ISIS," he added. Kent alleged that the current conflict was driven in part by external pressure and a coordinated misinformation campaign.

CM to launch 'Diyang Shakti' scheme today

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These include City Ordinary, Metro Express, Pallo Velugu, Ultra Pallo Velugu and Express buses operated by the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation.

Earlier, free travel applied to only a few disability categories, while others received 50 per cent fare concession. With the Diyang Shakti scheme, free travel now covers all persons with disabilities with 40 per cent or higher disability. Attendants accompanying them will receive a 50 per cent concession. The scheme significantly expands eligibility, from four disability categories to 21. Beneficiaries include people with autism, neurological disorders, Parkinson's disease, thalassemia, hemophilia and sickle cell anemia, among others.

With this expansion, the number of beneficiaries will increase from 1.71 lakh to about 11.16 lakh persons with disabilities. The number of attendants eligible for concession will rise from 33,800 to 1.6 lakh. Overall, the total beneficiaries will grow from 2.05 lakh to about 12.76 lakh. People with dis-

abilities can now travel free on 7,264 buses, which account for about 73 per cent of the APSRTC fleet covered under the Stree Shakti scheme.

Existing disability passes issued earlier with three-year validity will continue to be valid. Beneficiaries can also obtain QR-code-based digital passes through the Mana Mitra and the APSRTC App. Since these platforms are linked with the SAD-AREM database, applicants do not need to submit physical disability certificates. Assistance will also be available at 134 designated counters at APSRTC bus stations.

The state government will provide an annual subsidy of Rs 207 crore for the scheme. Officials said the programme builds on the success of the Stree Shakti free bus travel scheme for women, launched on August 15 last year. In seven months, women passengers made over 52 crore free journeys, with the government spending Rs 1,826 crore. On average, 24.38 lakh women travel daily, accounting for 63 out of every 100 passengers on RTC buses.

Iran security chief Larijani killed in Israel strike?

JERUSALEM: Ali Larijani, Iran's security chief, was among those targeted in Israeli strikes on Iran overnight, according to Israeli media reports. It remains unclear if Larijani, a top figure in Iran's establishment, was killed or injured in the strike. Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, has also claimed that Larijani has been killed. Iran has, however, not yet commented the reports. Larijani, a former nuclear negotiator who serves as secretary of Iran's National Security Council, is widely seen as one of the most influential figures in Iran's power structure. If his death is confirmed, Larijani would be the most senior Iranian official to be killed after the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who died on the first day of the war.

6 LPG, crude oil ships to reach Vizag Port soon

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These apart, another four vessels carrying 4.5 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil are inching closer to Visakhapatnam Port. The crude oil is being shipped from different parts of the world, including two vessels from Russia, one each from KG Basin and Ravva Oil Field from Kakinada.

At Visakhapatnam Port, the single point mooring system serves as an offshore anchoring point for the LPG, while it will be delivered to distribution points thereon later. Port officials mentioned that about 4.5 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil arriving from different places will be stored and distributed further.

After getting stranded in the Persian Gulf due to the ongoing war in West Asia, two India-flagged vessels are sailing out of the warzone to Visakhapatnam Port, while four others are reaching from other destinations this month.

PARL PANEL SUGGESTS RS7,500 EPF PENSION

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The Committee further take note of the submission of the Ministry of Labour and Employment that the Government of India is already extending financial support towards the Scheme, including the contribution of 1.16 per cent for currently serving members of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation and the budgetary support provided for ensuring the minimum pension of Rs 1,000 per month. However, the Committee stated that it is of the considered view that the existing minimum pension amount is inadequate to meet even the basic needs of pensioners, particularly in the present economic scenario marked by inflation and rising health care and living expenses.

The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry undertake an urgent and comprehensive review of the minimum pension under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995, with a view to enhancing it to a more realistic and dignified level.

The Committee further recommend that the Ministry explore the possibility of increasing budgetary support to the Scheme, so as to ensure that pensioners receive a reasonable minimum pension commensurate with present-day living costs, thereby providing greater social security and financial stability to lakhs of retired workers covered under the Scheme.

LPG situation a matter of concern, says govt

Continued from P1

"Petrol and diesel are available in sufficient quantity. Regarding natural gas, as I told you, the Government of India is making efforts, and it would be beneficial if all commercial LPG consumers shifted to PNG," Sharma said.

Sharma also warned against hoarding and black marketing, saying that adequate measures are in place to ensure smooth distribution across the country. "Regarding enforcement action, so far, about twelve thousand raids have been conducted in the last few days. About fifteen thousand cylinders have been seized... Yesterday in Delhi, about six hundred cylinders were seized. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, about four hundred and fifty inspections and raids have been conducted in the last few days. Meanwhile, various state governments are undertaking enforcement measures to prevent hoarding and black marketing of petrol, diesel and LPG. Raids are being carried out in several states to check hoarding and black marketing of LPG cylinders. Alternate fuels such as kerosene and coal have been activated for certain sectors, including hospitality and restaurants, to ease pressure on LPG supplies.

NO NEED TO PANIC ABOUT LPG SUPPLY: CM NAIDU

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Naidu reviewed LPG stocks, cylinder distribution and the piped gas network at a meeting held at the RTGS centre in the Secretariat. He directed officials to ensure that cylinders are not diverted to the black market by strictly implementing e-KYC and OTP-based verification systems.

The Chief Minister asked officials to examine alternative cooking options, including the availability of induction stoves, which could be made accessible to households if required. Naidu also reviewed the expansion of piped gas connections as a long-term alternative to LPG. He directed officials to speed up the rollout of the City Gas Distribution (CGD) network across the state.

He stressed the need to utilise natural gas produced in Andhra Pradesh and supply it to consumers

through a wider piped gas network.

The Chief Minister also asked officials to explore ways to expand the use of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Piped Natural Gas (PNG). Recalling earlier initiatives, he noted that LNG had previously been allocated to the state and pipelines were extended up to Kondapalli.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that natural gas is currently being supplied through CGD networks operated by AG&P Pratham, Bhagyanagar Gas Limited, Green Gas Limited, Indian Oil Corporation Limited and Megha Gas. They said the infrastructure currently includes 198 CNG stations and facilities to provide 1.68 lakh domestic piped gas connections.

Apart from energy issues, the Chief Minister also reviewed citizen services and governance

initiatives. He directed officials to create awareness among motorists on traffic violations through short messages and asked them to enable electricity bill payment links through mobile apps and WhatsApp governance platforms.

Naidu also instructed officials to expedite the launch of the AP One app and review how government departments are using the AWARE disaster management system and the state Data Lake platform.

With summer approaching, he directed officials to use AWARE to prepare in advance for drinking water supply, heatwave management and cattle fodder availability. The Chief Minister also called for strict action against crimes against women and stronger drug control measures.

Representatives from GAIL (India) Ltd, ONGC, and petroleum companies attended the meeting.