

# Farmer suicides in Telangana down 686.5% from 2015 to 2022: NCRB data

Hyderabad: The number of farmer suicides in Telangana has seen a dramatic decline of nearly 686.5 per cent between 2015 and 2022. This significant drop is coupled with a reduction in Telangana's share of farmer suicides in India, from 11.1 per cent in 2015 to just 1.57 per cent in 2022. A study of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from 2015 to 2022 reveals that suicides among those in the farming sector, including farmers and tenant farmers, were alarmingly high in 2015. Nationwide, farmer suicides surged by 42 per cent between 2014 and 2015, largely due to severe drought conditions. In Telangana, the number of farming-related suicides increased from around 990 in 2014 to 1,400 in 2015.

According to the 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India' reports by the NCRB, 12,602 individuals in the farming sector, including 8,007 farmers and tenant farmers, died by suicide in India in 2015. Telangana accounted for approximately 1,400 of these deaths, with 1,358 being farmers and tenant farmers. By 2022, the number of farming-related suicides in India decreased to 11,290, with 5,207 being farmers and tenant farmers. In stark contrast, Telangana saw a remarkable decline to 178 suicides among those in the farming sector, all of whom were farmers and tenant farmers. This sharp decrease is especially notable given the increase in farmer suicides across the country during the post-Covid era.

NCRB data also shows that about 75 per cent of these suicides were among small and marginal farmers holding up to two hectares of land. The main reasons for these suicides were severe socioeconomic hardships such as bankruptcy, indebtedness, crop failure, and other farming-related issues, which accounted for over 60 per cent of the cases. Sharing his delight on social media, BRS working president KT Rama Rao described the decrease in farmer suicides as the biggest achievement of the K Chandrashekar Rao government. He emphasised that 'Farmer First' was more than just a slogan, as it was supported by revolutionary policies.

The sharp decline in suicides among farmers in Telangana was attributed to proactive measures initiated by the BRS government following the formation of the State. During its 9.5-year rule, the BRS government introduced several key schemes. The Rythu Bandhu scheme, India's first farm input assistance programme, directly deposited around Rs 73,000 crore into the bank accounts of approximately 70 lakh farmers over 11 consecutive crop seasons. Additionally, the Rythu Bima scheme provided Rs 5 lakh in life insurance coverage to every land-owning farmer. Other initiatives included a crop loan waiver totaling Rs 25,000 crore in two phases, uninterrupted and quality free



power supply, the rejuvenation of lakes, and the completion of major irrigation

projects like the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme. These measures have col-

lectively revolutionised the agricultural sector in Telangana.

## Here are the 8 reasons why Junior Doctors in Telangana are on indefinite strike

Hyderabad: With the indefinite medical strike of Telangana Junior Doctors Association (TJUDA) entering its second day in Telangana State, the State government is yet to fully address the slew of demands that were raised by the striking medicos. While some of the demands made by the medicos are related to the payment of their pending stipends, some other issues are related to public health and medical education. Here are the demands of the protesting medicos:

1. Green Channel-Timely Release of Stipends: T-JUDA has been consistently demanding for creation of a green channel (Budget relaxation) for timely disbursement of stipends of Junior Doctors (House Surgeons, Post graduates and Senior residents). T-JUDA demands for a G.O to be released on these lines to avoid financial strain to the Junior Doctors in the future and also a Circular from the finance department that the stipends should be credited by 10th of every month for all the junior doctors.

2. Honorarium for Super Specialty Senior Residents: The students who have completed their super-specialty should be appointed to contract assistant positions with a salary of Rs 1,25,000 from their date of appointment for compulsory government service i.e; 18.01.2024. Failing to implement this would not only compromise their one-year service but also deprive them of the monetary benefits they are entitled to.

3. 15 percent reservation in NEET UG Prospectus: Adherence to fair admission practices for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh students, AP students should not be allowed to join 15% seats increased in medical colleges in Telangana after June 2nd 2014.

4. Security Issues at Various Government Hospitals: Incidents of violence against doctors persist across hospitals, requiring immediate reinforcement of security outposts and strict law enforcement against assailants. We demand the allocation of police personnel and strengthening of existing out posts in all the medical col-

lege and hospitals.

5. Hostel Facilities: Non-commencement of new hostel constructions leads to accommodation shortages for postgraduates, contravening National Medical Commission mandates. We demand the allocation of a budget for these new hostels and the immediate laying of foundation stones for the buildings. 6. New Building for Osmania General Hospital (OGH): The protracted delay in constructing the new OGH building necessitates urgent action to prevent overcrowding and improve patient care standards. We demand the immediate laying of the foundation stone at the new site and the allocation of a budget for the new hospital building

7. Inadequate Infrastructure in Government Medical Colleges: A surge in Government medical colleges lacks essential basic infrastructure, while students in distant colleges facing difficulty in transportation for field visits and transport from hostel to college as they are not in the same campus.

# Paris Olympics 2024 | Eiffel Tower medals, swimming in the Seine and the idea of sport as a unifying force

On a visit to Paris last year, I saw little enthusiasm for the Olympic Games, starting in the French capital next month. “We are not looking forward to it,” said a baker, summing up the sentiment: it will be like the lockdown, we will have to work from home, going out will become difficult (16 million visitors are expected), we will be paying for the Games for years. A few, however, looked forward to renting out their apartments for a fortune during the event. According to The New York Times, “The Olympic Games Committee has issued assurance that Paris will be able to house 100,000 visitors during the Games... price boosting has already begun.” That is from a report ahead of the 1924 Games in Paris. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose, as the French say. The host city is seldom happy — succeeding in the bid is seen as the winner’s curse — but the world looks forward to the magic. You can be cynical or optimistic about the Games depending on which end of the metaphorical telescope you view it from, but magic it is.

Even if that magic started off with a chuckle in Paris. The mascot of the Games, the Phryges, is being seen as “clitoris in trainers”, the feminist’s answer to the phallic symbol that is the Eiffel Tower. It is too, an inadvertent pointer to one of the issues facing the Games, and humanity in general — the matter of the gender spectrum. In fact, many of the world’s concerns — gender, environment, drugs, sexism, terrorism, cybersecurity, dislocation of communities, corruption in the establishment, financial overreach, excessive nationalism, racial inequity — can be seen in concentrated form at the Games over the years. If the Olympics are the best sport has to offer, they also display the fault lines in the real world. Sport and life are like facing mirrors, reflecting each other. Paris hopes the carbon footprint of the Games will be half that of London 2012 or Rio de Janeiro 2016. Construction has been minimal, with 95% of the venues being existing structures; equestrian events will be at the Château de Versailles, swimming in a cleaned-up Seine. President Emmanuel Macron — who announced that the national elections will be held in June-July, thus adding another degree of difficulty to the preparations — has pledged to swim in the river to show that it is clean. When it is clean. The Seine is the venue for what promises to be a most spectacular Opening Ceremony involving boats carrying the 10,500 athletes before an audience of three lakh on its banks. Winners will carry with them a sliver of history — the medals will have a bit of the Eiffel Tower in them, embedded from the iron that has been removed and conserved in the course of the many renovations of the 1889 structure. Bedside tables are made from recycled shuttlecocks, dinner plates can be repurposed for they will have no logos, and the Olympic Village will have no air-conditioning. This might be the greenest Games ever. Paris is Hemingway’s “moveable feast”, and so too are the Olympics. As an event, they might have lost some sheen — they are too costly (Greece went bankrupt after Athens 2004), disused stadiums abound, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is a law unto it-



self — but the Olympics as an idea we must cherish, believing its ideals are attainable. It is a necessary myth. It is also an important measure of who we are and what we can do. When Usain Bolt runs the 100 metres in 9.63 seconds, we are gratified — this is what we as a species are capable of. Bolt and Simone Biles and Michael Phelps and Elaine Thompson-Herah represent us, and we are relieved we don’t have to work as hard as they have. It is enough knowing their feats are possible, that our fantasies can be realised by others. Perhaps that is the way to reconcile the contradictory nature of the quadrennial event. The attraction is not the institution, but the individual athletes, their skill, their courage.

We might like to believe that under the banner of the Olympics, our similarities will be highlighted, friendship and commonality will be the theme. Perhaps, as the author Simon Barnes put it, “The torch should be lit, and one by one the flags of the nations should be cast into it.” Prestige of hosting We can dream, but that isn’t what the sports-entertainment-marketing complex is about. NBC didn’t pay \$7.65 billion (through 2032) to sink nationhood, however briefly. Triumphalism and jingoism are the keys to viewership. We will hear in Paris speeches about how we must give peace a chance. But Russia will continue to attack Ukraine and the war in West Asia will continue despite the so-called ‘Olympic truce’ being in place. The budget for Paris has already doubled — and counting — from its optimistic \$5 billion. The Tokyo Olympics were budgeted for \$7.5 billion but spent \$35 billion. This puts India’s dream for 2036 in perspective. Boston withdrew from the 2024 bid, the mayor saying he “refused to mortgage away the future of the city”. It will be interesting to see what Ahmedabad 2036 does if it wins the bid. In 2012, a study in Oxford found that there had been a 252% cost overrun since 1976, the year Montreal was host. It took Montreal

three decades to pay off its debts. Beijing’s Olympic stadium, the Bird’s Nest, cost \$460 million to build, needs \$11 million annually to maintain, and is now just a museum piece. There is a good argument for hosting the Olympics either in one city — Athens, where it began in 776 BCE suggests itself — or for using the same venues in different continents in turn. Financially and environmentally, that makes the most sense, but the IOC is only too conscious of the prestige attached to hosting the Games, by authoritarian regimes seeking the world’s approval. It is naive to believe that the Olympics are about sports alone. But, as the gold-winning hurdler Edwin Moses said, “Most people only care about watching the Olympics every four years and couldn’t care less about how they operate.” The IOC has shown in recent years that it is suspended between morality and human rights on one side, commerce and dictator-pleasing (the Games in China, Russia) on the other. Pure coincidence, of course, but Albert Speer Jr., son of Hitler’s chief architect, was the lead designer for the Beijing Games 2008, and created the central axis. Still, the Olympics, despite everything, continue to have mean-

ing and relevance. They are a reminder of possibilities, a tribute to the human spirit. ‘Faster, higher, stronger – together’, the new motto contemporises the old one, bringing it in line with the concept of inclusivity. After all, to paraphrase poet Robert Browning, our reach should exceed our grasp. The Olympics are magical. Or why would we stay awake till the early hours watching sports we have no idea about, cheering the winners, and just as importantly, those who tried and failed? Paris 2024 will be the third edition of the Olympic Games to be held in the French capital after the first one in 1900 and the second, exactly 100 years ago, in 1924. Dubbed as Games Wide Open, the International Olympic Committee has taken some initiatives to set new benchmarks and emerge as a sensitive and responsible Games towards future generations. Fielding a Refugee Olympic Team for the third time in a row, comprising athletes from various conflict zones, underlines the need for a humanitarian approach in a world full of crisis. Highlights from the upcoming Games and a reminder of some of the all-time greats from previous years:

## Retired employees’ fear about issue of financial bonds in lieu of retirement benefits

Hyderabad: Is the government planning to issue financial bonds, in lieu of the cash payment of benefits for those retiring from service on superannuation? Employees circles are agog with speculation that in a bid to tide over the financial crisis, the government was planning to do so. A sense of fear has gripped the employees who are due to retire. The bonds that are likely to be issued to the retiring employees will have to be encashed after a stipulated pe-

riod of time. But many employees, who had just retired from service and those those who are about to retire fear that their retirement benefits could be delayed. K Bhiksham Naik, a Record Assistant in Revenue department is set to retire from service on June 29. He is already tensed about his retirement benefits. “There are reports that government may issue financial bonds with a period of two or three year time for encashment for people like us. This will be against rules.

# Xiaomi India marks 10 years in India; announces breast cancer screening initiative with Yuvraj Singh Foundation

Marking a decade of innovation and contribution to community welfare in India, Xiaomi India, a global technology leader, has announced a landmark partnership with the Yuvraj Singh Foundation (YouWeCan), a non-profit organization established by cricketer and cancer survivor Yuvraj Singh. The 'Swasth Mahila Swasth Bharat' project aims to screen 1,50,000 women for breast cancer over 12 months across 15 states, focusing on under-represented and under-resourced communities. This initiative represents Xiaomi's most extensive effort in India so far, in terms of impact and reach.

Muralikrishnan B, President of Xiaomi India, said, "In our decade-long journey in India, we have evolved beyond being a technology brand by leveraging our extensive network for meaningful social change. The stark reality that a woman in India dies of breast cancer every 6 minutes, with 70% of cases diagnosed in advanced stages due to lack of screening, underscores the urgency of our mission. We're proud to join forces with the Yuvraj Singh Foundation (YouWeCan), harnessing our technological expertise to drive large-scale impact. Together, we aim to break stigmas, spread awareness, and enable early detection - potentially saving countless lives. This initiative embodies our commitment to India, extending far beyond innovation to address critical health challenges and create lasting positive change."

Yuvraj Singh, Former Cricketer and Founder, Yuvraj Singh Foundation (YouWeCan), said, "The 'Swasth Mahila Swasth Bharat' campaign is a crucial step



in our fight against breast cancer in India. Despite limited awareness and access to screening, especially in rural areas, we're determined to make a difference. Xiaomi India's support is instrumental in scaling our efforts to reach 1.5 lakh women across 15 states. Their commitment is truly com-

mendable. Together, we're not just screening for breast cancer; we're empowering women with knowledge and early detection tools. We are grateful to Xiaomi for their partnership in this initiative."

'Swasth Mahila Swasth Bharat'

The initiative aims to provide access to safe breast cancer screening, create awareness about risks and self-examination techniques, and ensure early detection and timely treatment. It aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing health and gender equality.

# UN launches global principles to combat online hate and demands big tech take action now



The United Nations chief on Monday launched global principles to combat online hate and lies and demanded that big tech companies use their power to reduce the harm they are doing to people and societies around the world. Secretary-General António Guterres also demanded that advertising and public relations companies "stop monetizing harmful content" and strengthen information integrity. He urged media outlets "to raise and enforce editorial standards" and governments to commit to creating and maintaining a free and independent media landscape. Guterres said the principles, laid out at a news conference, are the result of consultations with the 193 U.N. member nations, youth leaders, academia, the media and civil society including tech companies. The principles call on tech com-

panies, advertisers, media and other key players to refrain from using, supporting or amplifying disinformation and hate speech. All parties involved in the development of artificial intelligence should take urgent and transparent measures to ensure that all AI applications are designed, deployed and used safely, securely, responsibly and ethically, and uphold human rights, according to the principles. They also call for tech companies to ensure safety and privacy and allow users greater choices and control over their online experience and personal data, and for all key parties to ensure special protections for children. Guterres stressed that big tech companies have "an outsized responsibility." "Take responsibility," he demanded. "Acknowledge the damage your products are inflicting on people and communities." Guterres demanded that the companies take action. "You have the power to mitigate harm to people and societies around the world," he said, "You have the power to change business models that profit from disinformation and hate." As for advertisers and the PR industry, the U.N. chief singled out the coordinated disinformation campaigns seeking to undermine action to address the climate

crisis. "Creatives - don't use your talents to greenwash," Guterres said. "PR agencies - look for clients who aren't misleading people and destroying our planet." He

called on the media to provide "quality journalism based on facts and reality" and find advertisers that are part of the solution, not the problem. And he urged governments

## "I would love to see Yashasvi Jaiswal," says Sreesanth for opening with Rohit Sharma at ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024.

Talking about the cricketing spectacles Sreesanth said "I would love to see Yashasvi Jaiswal, I said as it's a T20 format and Virat Kohli coming at no. 3, Yashasvi Jaiswal will have that freedom to express himself that Virat bhai (Virat Kohli) aa raha hai, Virat bhai (Virat Kohli) is there to bat after me, so Rohit Sharma can play the sheet-anchor role, Yashasvi Jaiswal can play freely and Virat Kohli can come and steady the innings and put the score on the board or if the chasing nothing like Yashasvi Jaiswal opening going after the bowling and Virat Kohli coming and finish-

ing the game with Rohit Sharma."

Disney+ Hotstar also streams an exclusive first-of-its-kind LIVE cricket show, 'Caught & Bold' featuring Harbhajan Singh, S. Sreesanth, Piyush Chawla, Ambati Rayudu, Sanjay Manjrekar and a host of other former cricketers from around the world with Varun Thakur and Rohan Joshi as hosts and Ocean Sharma, Arjun Pandit and Navneeth Krishna as co-presenters. Hosted for the fans, this show airs every match day and provides a fun take on cricket, enabling fans to share their opinions live and participate in quizzes.

# AAP alleges BJP of creating hindrances in the progress and development of Punjab



Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), June 25: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has alleged BJP of creating hindrances in the progress and development of Punjab. AAP spokesperson Neel Garg said that one by one, the centre is stopping all funds of Punjab, they do not want Punjab to progress and develop. The Aam Aadmi Party Punjab vehemently attacked the BJP government of the centre for stopping Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) fund of Punjab. The party said that the Modi government is already withholding NHM (National Health Mission) and RDF (Rural Development Fund) of Punjab and now they have stopped money which goes to the education of children in Primary schools, the BJP wants to stop the development and progress of Punjab.

Addressing a press conference at the party office on Tuesday, AAP spokesperson Neel Garg cornered the BJP government for having a step motherly attitude towards Punjab and urged the Punjab MPs and BJP leaders to raise this issue of pending funds with the central government. He was accompanied by AAP spokespersons Babbi Badal and Jasman Gill for this press conference. Neel Garg said that it is a matter of the education of young children and their future. The AAP leader said that the step motherly behaviour of the BJP towards Punjab is not new but what is more shameful is that this time they are putting the education of children at stake. Garg said that India has a federal structure and a constitution, through which central and state governments are supposed to work together for the development of the people but the Modi government is doing the opposite, they are creating obstacles and withholding funds of the state government to stop the progress.

The AAP leader said that the Modi government has stopped Rs. 380 crores of SSA, this money is for the education of young children in Primary schools, their books and their clothes. The central government was supposed to release this money in four instalments to Punjab where the first instalment was 170 crores but they are refusing to release this money. Primary Education is the right of every child and for SSA the centre gives 60% and the state contributes the rest 40%, but the Modi government is refusing to give their share for the education of Punjab's children. There are 3929 employees under SSA in Punjab, it will also affect their salaries. The AAP spokesperson said that the children of the poor go to government primary and middle schools, so by withholding this fund the Modi government is directly denying the education to the children of the poor. Garg said that the centre has brought a scheme named PM Shri, so they are forcing the Punjab government to close their schools of eminence and implement this scheme. He said that the AAP governments of Delhi and Punjab have done exceptional and unprecedented work in the fields of education and health. Our education model is better and already successful, why will we scrap it off now to implement something new. Garg said that the Mann government of Punjab has already put school of happiness and school of brilliance in their last budget. Garg said that the schools of eminence built by the Mann government already have modern facilities like transportation, wi-fi, smart classes, libraries and sports grounds.

Neel Garg said that before SSA, the Modi government is already withholding two other major funds of Punjab National Health Mission and RDF (Rural Develop-

ment Fund). He said that the AAP government has done revolutionary work in the health sector, we have opened 829 Aam Aadmi clinics in Punjab in just two years where 1.5 crore people got free treatment, medicines, tests and diagnosis. But after witnessing the success of our Mohalla clinics in Punjab, the central government stopped Rs. 600 crores of NHM. Similarly, the Modi government wants to end the government mandi system in Punjab and they are withholding Rs. 7000 crores of RDF and MDF (Mandi Development Fund). This money is used to maintain 60,000 kilometres of link roads in rural Punjab and mandis. The AAP leader urged all the MPs

of Punjab to raise this issue strongly with the central government. He also demanded the BJP Punjab President Sunil Jakhar to raise this issue with his top leadership that they should stop discrimination against Punjab. Garg said that the people of Punjab have utterly rejected the BJP, they are frustrated so they are stopping funds of Punjab. Garg said that with the GST, the central government collects all the money but it is the money of the people and Punjab should get its share regardless of their political preferences. The people of Punjab pay taxes, so the Modi government has no right to stop the money for education, health and development of Punjab.

## Battleground Mobile India Series 2024 grand finale to be held in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Krafton India is set to host the highly anticipated Battlegrounds Mobile India Series 2024 (BGIS) Grand Finale Hyderabad, dubbed as India's biggest battle Royale Esports event at Hitex, Madhapur from June 28.

The final 16 top-tier teams, comprising of young and talented players from across the country, will converge in the city, showcasing their skills and strategy to claim the championship title. These teams have been competing in several online rounds over the past months to secure their spot in the top 16. The tournament features a staggering prize pool of Rs 2 crore, which is a testament to the growth of India's Esports industry and Krafton's commitment to providing a platform for both amateur

and professional teams to show case their talent, a press release said. Hyderabad's emergence as a gaming destination receives a significant boost with BGIS 2024 Finale, promising a unique experience for the local gaming community. With free entry tickets already reserved, BGIS 2024 is set to captivate the city with three days of intense competition and entertainment. For fans seeking a premium experience, elite passes are also available for purchase, with perks including premium seating, meals, exclusive meet-and-greet opportunities with esports personalities, and special merchandise. Priced at Rs. 5,000 per day, all revenues generated from the sale of elite passes will be contributed to the Abhinav Bindra Foundation, supporting traditional sports.

# What is in Great Nicobar, site of NITI Aayog's mega project? | Explained

On June 17, the Congress party demanded an "immediate suspension" of all clearances granted to NITI Aayog's mega project on Great Nicobar island in the light of "violations of due process, legal and constitutional provisions protecting tribal communities, and the project's disproportionate ecological and human cost." The party also demanded a "thorough impartial review of the proposed project, including by the parliamentary committees concerned." Other political parties have also raised concerns about the project. In its 2024 election manifesto, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) promised to "scrap the environmentally disastrous and incorporate Islands Development Plan for Andaman and Nicobar". The Tribal Council of Great Nicobar and Little Nicobar and a host of environmentalists, wildlife conservationists, and tribal rights groups have also opposed the project.

Where is Great Nicobar and which are the communities living there?

The island of Great Nicobar is the southernmost tip of India and a part of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago that comprises 600-odd islands. It is hilly and covered with lush rainforests that are sustained by around 3,500 mm of annual rainfall. The rainforests and beaches host numerous endangered and endemic species including the giant leatherback turtle, the Nicobar megapode, the Great Nicobar crane, the Nicobar crab-eating macaque, and the Nicobar tree shrew. It has an area of 910 sq km with mangroves and Pandan forests along its coast. The island is home to two tribal communities — the Shompen and the Nicobarese. The Shompen, around 250 in total, mostly live in the interior forests and are relatively isolated from the rest of the population. They are predominantly hunter-gatherers and are classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group within the list of Scheduled Tribes. The Nicobarese community practices farming and fishing. It has two groups: the Great Nicobarese and the Little Nicobarese. They use different dialects of the Nicobarese language (the Shompen have their own unique language). The Great Nicobarese lived along the island's southeast and west coast until the tsunami in 2004, after which the government resettled them in Campbell Bay. Today, there are around 450 Great Nicobarese on the island. Little Nicobarese, numbering around 850, mostly live in Afra Bay in Great Nicobar and also in two other islands in the archipelago, Pulomilo and Little Nicobar. The majority on Great Nicobar comprises people who settled on the island from mainland India. Between 1968 and 1975, the Indian government settled retired military servicemen and their families from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, among a few others, here. Around 330 households were given around 15 acres of land across seven revenue villages on the island's east coast: Campbell Bay, Govindnagar, Jogindernagar, Vijaynagar, Laxminagar, Gandhinagar, and Shastrinagar. Campbell Bay is also

an administrative hub that includes local offices of the Andaman and Nicobar administration and the panchayat. There were also short-term and long-term migrations of fisherfolk, agricultural and construction labourers, businesspersons, and administrative staff comprising foresters, engineers, teachers, etc. from both the mainland and the Andaman Islands. The construction contractors came after the 2004 tsunami. Overall, the population of settlers on the island today is around 6,000. All population data is an approximation provided by researchers who have worked in Great Nicobar.

What is the NITI Aayog project?

In March 2021, NITI Aayog unveiled a ₹72,000 crore plan called 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands'. It includes the construction of an international transshipment terminal, an international airport, a power plant, and a township. The project is to be implemented by a government undertaking called the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO). The plan states: "The proposed port will allow Great Nicobar to participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming a major player in cargo transshipment. The proposed airport will support the growth of maritime services and enable Great Nicobar Island to attract international and national visitors to experience the outstanding natural environment and participate in sustainable tourism activity." Although NITI Aayog put forth the project in its present form, it has a long history. Plans for developing a port in Great Nicobar have been around since at least the 1970s, when the Trade Development Authority of India (now called 'India Trade Promotion Organisation') conducted techno-economic feasibility studies. The core aim has persisted since then — a port located near one of the world's busiest international sea routes (the Malacca Strait) which will allow increased participation in global maritime trade.

Why is there opposition?

The mega project has been heavily criticised for its ecological costs and for potential violations of tribal rights. The project requires the diversion of about 130 sq km of forest land and the felling of around 10 lakh trees. In January, 2021 the Indian government denotified two wildlife sanctuaries — the Galathea Bay wildlife sanctuary and the Megapode wildlife sanctuary — to make way for the project. In the same month, the government released a 'National Marine Turtle Action Plan' that lists Galathea Bay as a marine turtle habitat in India. The transshipment terminal is expected to be developed at Galathea Bay, one of the world's largest nesting sites for the giant leatherback turtle. Both this species and the Nicobar megapode are listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 — the highest level of protection for wild animals under Indian law (numerous species, especially endemic ones, are likely yet to be documented in Great Nicobar given the limited number of surveys conducted so far). In November 2022,



the Tribal Council of Great Nicobar and Little Nicobar withdrew the no-objection certificate (NOC) it had provided for the project stating the administration had concealed important information about the use of tribal reserve lands and that they had obtained tribal communities' consent in a rushed process. Some of the land classified as "uninhabited" in NITI Aayog's plan is also part of the Great Nicobarese's ancestral land. Since their post-tsunami resettlement, they have repeatedly sought to return to these lands — only to be met with administrative apathy. Today, the mega project also stands in the way of their demands to return. As for the Shompen, one of the biggest threats is disease. Since the Shompen have had little contact with the outside world, they haven't yet developed immunity to infectious diseases that affect

India's general population. Some Shompen settlements also overlap with the areas the NITI Aayog has proposed to be used for the transshipment terminal. Earlier this month, the local panchayat of Campbell Bay raised concerns over the social impact assessment process for land acquisition for the airport. Researchers who work on disaster management have also raised concerns that proponents of the mega project have failed to adequately assess earthquake risk. The Andaman and Nicobar archipelago is located in the "ring of fire": a seismically active region that experiences several earthquakes throughout the year. According to some estimates, the region has experienced close to 500 quakes of varying magnitude in the last decade. The area is in category V: the geographical zone with the most seismic hazard.

## UoH clarifies on suspension of students for protest over cultural festival

Hyderabad: The University of Hyderabad (UoH) administration on Tuesday issued a clarification over suspension of five students who according to the university tendered an unconditional apology in connection with their protest at VC's residence at 1 am on May 18 over Sukoon, an annual cultural festival. In a statement here, the UoH Registrar Dr. Devesh Nigam said students appealed for reconsideration of their punishment, which would be placed in the upcoming university's executive council meeting for a decision. The university recently suspended five students including students' union president Mohammed Ateeq Ahmed from the academics and hostel for one semester besides levied a fine of Rs.10,000 for the protest. Five more office bearers of the SFI UoH unit were also penalized Rs.10,000. The university's disciplinary action, including suspension of students involved, was taken after a series of events that unfolded over a significant period besides following due process and consultations with relevant university bodies, Dr. Nigam said. Despite the administration's repeated advisories

and efforts to coordinate suitable dates for the Sukoon festival, which would not disrupt academic activities, the students' union persisted in proposing dates conflicting with the university's academic calendar, the UoH said. The university authorities extensively engaged with the students' union to address concerns and explained reasons behind postponing the festival. The decision not to permit the event during the vacation period was based on logistical challenges highlighted by law enforcement agencies besides impracticality of enforcing required conditions put forward by the DCP Madhapur in view of the model code of conduct in force until June 4, it said. Extensive meetings with students were held on May 15. And on May 17 the VC himself engaged in extensive discussions with the students' union before a final decision was made. "Despite these efforts, the subsequent intrusion into the VC's residence at 1 am on May 18 disrupted the personal and professional lives of the VC and his family including his elderly 95-year-old mother, creating a distressing situation that warranted police intervention,"

# Why quiet luxury is the latest travel trend

In March this year, Lubaina Sheerazi did a polar plunge. Organised by Antarctica21, the fly-cruise expedition to Antarctica had experts leading a small group of travellers on the great white continent. "From transiting the Lemaire Channel, also known as the Kodak Gap because of its breathtaking beauty, and cruising on a Zodiac vessel to continental landing at Cape Perez, doing a polar plunge, and sailing through an active volcano, the itinerary was curated a day before, based on weather conditions," says Lubaina, CEO and co-founder of Mumbai-based tourism marketing agency, BRANDit. She also did a cruise aboard the Magellan Explorer where experts gave informative talks about Antarctica's history, expedition centres, The Antarctic Treaty, the region's wildlife, and more. "My co-passengers, some of whom were Indians, also had similar tastes and were very interested in learning more about the peninsula that we were sailing around," she adds. In a trend that is called 'quiet luxury' or 'stealth wealth, high net-worth travellers, including Gen Z and millennials are looking for remote offbeat locations, discreet getaways, and meaningful connections, instead of glitzy cities or casinos. Case in point is the Q Odyssey Private Jet Round the World tour, the latest offering from The Q Experiences, a luxury travel company launched in 2018. This 27-day journey of opulence and adventure takes one across six continents on a private jet, focussing on experiences rather than mere destinations. The trip also charts one of the most luxurious trains, The Rovos Rail, which traverses through the lush jungles of Africa, and to Victoria Falls and Pretoria, followed by a private jet ride that explores the captivating canyons and desert landscapes of Al Ula in Saudi Arabia. You will witness the mesmerising Northern Lights on Lofoten Island in Norway, ride a hot air balloon over the Teotihuacan Pyramids in Mexico, and unravel the mysteries of human civilisation on Easter Island, Chile. This luxury air travel experience unfolds aboard a chartered Boeing 757, where seats recline into fully lie-flat beds. With a dedicated crew, which includes two accomplished international chefs, voyage of opulence is priced at a whopping ₹99 lakh per traveller. "Today's travellers seek exclusivity, comfort, and a personalised experience that caters to their every whim. They aspire to embark on journeys that are thoughtfully curated to offer an unparalleled realm of opulence, with seamless access to the world's most remote and remarkable destinations," says Vasim Shaikh, founder and CEO, The Q Experiences. Take for instance, Sriram Krishnan, an IT professional based in Bengaluru. Every year, he plans a luxury annual getaway with his family to offbeat locations like Mongolia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. "We have stayed in a glass igloo in Finnish Lapland and glamped in Ladakh. The more offbeat and experiential, the better," says Sriram, who plans to explore Albania later this year. Regular travellers like Sriram aside, the pandemic was a watershed moment for many who realised their love for the outdoors during the lockdowns. "After Covid, we saw amongst our clients, a deep desire for connecting with and being one with Nature. A definite shift from "happening places" to



going off the grid is happening," says Loveleen Arun, founder-director of Panache World, a luxury boutique firm in Bengaluru. Whether it is staying in a tiny lodge in the Finnish Lapland surrounded by acres of wilderness, or glamping on the quiet sands of the Thar, taking long flights to outer islands of the Great Barrier Reef or staying in obscure mountainsides in New Zealand, our clients have opted for the luxury of the untouched, says Loveleen, adding, "We have woven in shows of sunsets, instead of theatre and star gazing instead of shopping." Instead of heading to well-known destinations like the Swiss Alps or the French Riviera, many affluent travellers now prefer hiking in the remote Svaneti region of Georgia, gong on a safari in Botswana, or winding down in an exclusive wellness retreat in the Himalayas. Africa, with its wildlife and untouched landscapes and luxurious properties, is becoming a favourite with many high-end travellers. Immersive experiences like mushroom or strawberry picking, foraging on a farm, or taking a flamenco class add value to their trips. While this is gaining momentum now, the concept has been around for years. Launched in Chennai with just ticketing services, Baywatch Travels has now grown to have a boutique approach to luxury holidays. Manish Kripalani, managing director of Baywatch Travels, says, "There is a lot of change in the mindset of travellers. They don't want to stay at the Versace or the Ritz, but are willing to pay the same money for a luxurious cottage in the hills with all the frills. Many people want to go where others have not gone, for the brag value and of course social media." While his company offers luxury holidays, destinations weddings, and bespoke trips, they have now forayed into the luxury villas segment in South India. More recently, in India, many new ways of exploring the country have emerged. River cruises, for instance, offer an immersive experience with excursions to historical and architectural wonders, dance and music performances, a taste of the local cuisine, meeting with artisans and interacting with lo-

cal. "River cruising as a concept is relatively new to India, however it has great opportunities, especially given the culture and community, and history that developed and thrived around its river systems since time immemorial," says Raj Singh, founder-chairman of New Delhi-based Antara Luxury River Cruises, which offers cruises on the Ganges, with the longest one being between Varanasi and Dibrugarh that takes 50 days. Generally, a 7 night/8 day cruise costs around \$3,575 (base category), which is approximately ₹3 lakh per person on full board basis, including shore excursions, jetty transfers, and guides. They have also launched luxury catamarans in Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and its rivers. Secrecy and discretion is what many wealthy, high-profile travellers crave. In cruise ships like the NCL (Norwegian Cruise Line), there is a section at the top of the ship called the Haven that has the most luxurious, well-appointed and spacious accommodation with a 24-hour butler service, and a private sun deck and elevators.

What's trending At Mumbai based travel company, Destination Globe, popular destinations this summer include Svalbard in Norway, Iceland, and countryside villas in Europe. Founder Parul Mehta says, "Client requests change every season; last year we did lot of Africa, and this year a lot of Scandinavia. We cater to the age group between 30 and 70 years, and curate tours for families, honeymooners, as well as milestone anniversaries or birthday celebrations." Emerging as a top destination is Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean, says Parul. "It's ideal for people between 30 and 55 years of age. Iceland is ever-growing and it's open for summer and winter. Of course, such destinations are limited to a certain age, not for very young or for very old people," she says. So, how much do these experiences cost? A 10 day trip to Svalbard, Norway could cost up to ₹10 lakh per person and a holiday to Iceland for that duration could cost up to ₹8 lakh per person. "The definition of luxury has undergone a massive makeover in the couple of years,

thanks to the awakening of the revenge traveller. Travellers, who truly can be defined as luxury travellers, are looking now at experiences above and beyond the beaten path. They would rather opt for lesser known and lesser crowded destinations, which offer a more indigenous experience, rather than plan a trip to the "IT" destination of that year," says Saloni Mahajan Narang, a Mumbai-based luxury brand consultant. One of the many sides of this trend is that evolved travellers value aspects like sustainability and benefitting local communities. "Our clients enjoy a safari in Botswana at the Okavango Delta which begins at first light with a 10-minute helicopter flight, then saddling up for a guided horseback ride through the delta. They quietly move past wild dogs, elephants, buffalo, hippos and zebra in their natural habitat," says Kanan Fotedar, founder and CEO of TravelnLiving, a Mumbai-based luxury travel company, who works closely with partners like Great Plains Conservation "who refuse to make any trade-offs between offering a luxury safari and sustainability". "This ability to contribute and benefit the local communities by ways of their travels is a big draw for these discerning travellers," adds Kanan. Generally these trips cost between ₹6-12 lakh for a couple. But they are growing every year and by 30%," she says adding that popular destinations include Seychelles, South Africa, Greece, and Sri Lanka. One of the effects of this trend is that many prefer not necessarily big luxury hotels, but also high-end boutique properties like villas and bungalows, with personalised services and niche experiences. Coco Shambala in Sindhudurg on the Konkan coast, with luxury villas perched on a hill, has seen many HNI clients who want seclusion. "From its discreet villas blending seamlessly with the landscape to its farm-to-table dining experiences, puppet performances, and pottery classes, every aspect of Coco Shambala exudes a sense of mindful luxury," says founder Giles Knapton. Glenburn Tea estate is another exclusive boutique property located in a tea estate near Darjeeling,

# MPs 27 times wealthier than an average urban household | Data

The 2024 general elections might have substantially changed the composition of the Lok Sabha in terms of party strengths, leading to a coalition government. However, candidates who thrived – even in the 2019 elections – were inevitably rich across most parties with assets equivalent to that of the top 10% of the urban households of the country. The median asset value of winning candidates in the 2024 elections was ₹7.4 crore and close to 92% of the winners had assets of ₹1 crore or more, while 75% of them had assets of ₹3 crore or more. The median asset value of runner-up candidates in 2024 was ₹6.25 crore, with close to 88% of them having assets worth ₹1 crore or more, and 68% with assets worth ₹3 crore or more. The numbers were similar in 2019. The median asset of a winning candidate was ₹4.8 crores, with close to 95% of the winners having assets of ₹1 crore or more, and 88% of them worth assets of ₹3 crore or more. The median asset value of the candidates who were runners-up in the 2019 elections was ₹5.4 crore with close to 85% of them having assets worth ₹1 crore or more, and 63% had assets worth ₹3 crore or more (Chart 1). Chart 1 | The chart shows the median assets of winners and runners-up in 2019 and 2024. Chart appears incomplete? Click to remove AMP mode

That candidates who were winners or runners-up had assets worth more than ₹1

crore was possibly due to parties fielding only rich candidates. The median assets of candidates of the top 27 parties each in 2024 was at least ₹1 crore. For the two major national parties, the BJP and the Congress, the values were ₹7.6 crore and ₹5.4 crore respectively (Chart 2). Chart 2 | The chart shows the median assets of candidates of the major political parties in 2024. We use “median values” to filter out outliers; if we used “averages”, the outliers – extremely rich candidates’ wealth – would skew calculations. For example, Union Minister Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani of the Telugu Desam Party has declared assets worth ₹5,706 crore. If averages, instead of median values of assets of winners in 2024 were taken into account, the figure would shoot up to ₹46 crore, in comparison to a median of ₹7.4 crore. That candidates are constituted from the elite segments of Indian society, in terms of wealth, is substantiated by a comparison of their assets with that of Indian households.

The All India Debt & Investment Survey- 2019 estimated that the average value of assets in an urban household was ₹27.1 lakh and the corresponding figure for a rural household was ₹15.9 lakh. These are “averaged” out numbers, meaning they could have been calculated as high because of rich outliers. Even then, the me-



dian assets of a winning candidate in 2024 was 27 times more than the average asset of an urban household, and that for a runner-up candidate was 23.1 times more. The average asset of the wealthiest 10% households in urban areas was ₹1.5 crore. This number (depicted in Chart 3) suggests that only someone from the elite, in terms of wealth, can meaningfully contest general elections in India which reflects, to a large extent, the cost of election campaigning and financing. Chart 3 | The chart shows the average value of household assets for different decile classes for rural and urban

areas in 2019 (in ₹ 1000s). However, there were exceptions: Jyotirmay Singh Mahato (of the BJP) who won from Purulia in West Bengal had assets worth ₹5.95 lakh, Mitali Bag (of the Trinamool Congress) from Arambag – ₹7.8 lakh and Priya Saroj (of the Samajwadi Party) from Machchilishahar in Uttar Pradesh – ₹11.25 lakh. In terms of parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party (₹47 lakh), the Peoples Democratic Party (₹87 lakh) and the CPI(M) (₹1 crore) fielded candidates with the lowest average assets. Only the CPI(M) among them had winning candidates (four).

# Climate change has made the Hajj pilgrimage more risky

Each year, millions of Muslims from across the world embark on the haj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The mass migration is unparalleled in scale, and pilgrims face numerous health hazards. Mecca is considered the holiest city for Muslims. And haj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, making it a mandatory religious duty for Muslims to perform at least once in their lifetime if they are physically and financially capable. The 2024 haj pilgrimage has been overshadowed by disaster/tragedy, with the death of at least 900 pilgrims, mostly due to heat exhaustion and related complications. This isn't the first deadly disaster during haj

One of the most devastating incidents occurred in 2015 during the ritual of “Rami al-Jamarat” in Mina, near Mecca. This ritual involves pilgrims throwing stones at pillars symbolising the devil. On that day, overcrowding and the movement of large groups of pilgrims in opposite directions led to a deadly crowd crush. More than 2,400 pilgrims lost their lives, making it one of the deadliest disasters in the history of haj or any mass gathering. Another mass casualty event occurred in 1990, in the Al-Ma'aisem pedestrian tunnel near Mecca, which led to the holy sites. A combination of ventilation failure and an enormous influx of pilgrims caused a suffocating crush

inside the tunnel; 1,426 pilgrims died. There have also been other incidents during the haj pilgrimage over the years. In 1994, a stampede near the Jamarat Bridge resulted in the deaths of around 270 pilgrims. The 1998 haj saw 118 pilgrims killed in another stampede. Over the past half-century, more than 9,000 people have died in mass religious gatherings, with more than 5,000 of these occurring during the haj in Saudi Arabia. India follows with at least 2,200 deaths across nearly 40 tragic events. These two countries are hotspots for such tragedies.

Why is the haj pilgrimage so risky?

With millions of pilgrims converging in a confined area, the potential for overcrowding and crowd-crush accidents is high. This situation is worsened by the high emotion and passion associated with the pilgrimage. Pilgrims perform rituals with intense devotion and enthusiasm, which can sometimes lead to overexertion. Another factor is the age of the pilgrims. Many are elderly, having saved for years to afford this spiritual journey. Their advanced age makes them particularly vulnerable to the harsh conditions and physical demands of the pilgrimage. The intense heat, prolonged periods of walking, and sheer physical strain of per-

forming the rituals can exacerbate existing health issues and lead to new complications. The extreme congestion of people also amplifies health risks, particularly from infectious diseases. Communicable diseases such as SARS, avian influenza and meningococcal disease have posed significant threats during haj in the past. High temperatures make mass gatherings riskier. A study documenting deaths and injuries at mass gatherings up to 2019 shows that, while the 1980s saw most fatalities at sporting events, such events are now rare, while fatalities during religious pilgrimages, particularly in India and Saudi Arabia, are becoming more common. While most haj fatalities have been due to crowd crushes and stampedes, a new threat has emerged: extreme climate. Saudi Arabia's climate can be brutal. During this year's pilgrimage, temperatures soared to 50°C. Saudi Arabia is warming at a rate 50% higher than the rest of the Northern Hemisphere. The decade from 2010 to 2019 was the warmest on record, with more frequent and severe heatwaves. This rising temperature, combined with higher humidity, makes conditions increasingly unbearable without artificial cooling. The timing of the haj pilgrimage, dictated by the lunar Islamic calendar, means it shifts approximately 10 to 11 days earlier each year

in the Gregorian calendar. This means haj can occur in different seasons over a 33-year cycle. Currently, haj is being held during the summer months, leading to extreme heat risks. Saudi Arabia has also experienced an increase in extreme rainfall events in recent years, particularly towards the end of summer and into the fall. These torrential downpours and thunderstorms have caused significant flooding in regions such as Mecca and Jeddah. As climate patterns continue to evolve, the occurrence of such rainfall could align with the haj season, creating additional hazards for pilgrims.

What can be done to mitigate the risks?

Unlike concerts or sporting events, the haj pilgrimage cannot be rescheduled or relocated. Being outdoors is an integral part of haj. It's crucial for pilgrims to perform the haj rituals correctly for their pilgrimage to be accepted. According to Islamic teachings, the haj must be conducted with precise adherence to its rituals and timings. Any deviation or omission can render the pilgrimage invalid. The Saudi Ministry of Health has implemented various measures, including encouraging vaccinations, health checks and educational campaigns urging pilgrims to stay hydrated, use umbrellas and avoid prolonged sun exposure.

# Why India's recent Cannes glory is not just an occasion for celebration, but for introspection too



Every year, India's Cannes coverage typically follows a certain formula. First there's a slew of photographs of Indian celebrities and quasi-celebs posing on the red carpet and a gush of reports about their outfits. Then there's a stream of finger-wagging articles bemoaning the fact that none of the red-carpetbaggers was there to promote actual films, that the world's biggest film industry had again produced nothing that could be deemed Cannes-worthy. Finally, someone shares an old photograph of Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil and Shyam Benegal at Cannes when Benegal's *Nishant* (1975) was nominated for the Palme d'Or award and everyone wistfully sighs about the long-lost good old art-film days.

This year, India broke the jinx. The 'nishant' happened when Payal Kapadia took home the Grand Prix for her film *All We Imagine As Light*, and Anasuya Sengupta won the Un Certain Regard Best Actress prize for *The Shameless*. It led to widespread jubilation and social media celebration from Prime Minister Modi to Bollywood stars to former FTII chair Gajendra Chauhan. But as many pointed out, it was a little ironic for Chauhan to "feel proud" that he was "chairman at the time when (Kapadia) was doing the course there" given that Kapadia is still fighting legal cases stemming from her involvement in months of protest against his appointment. Chauhan, however, was an easy target for hypocrisy, a way to deflect attention from the rest of us. As filmmaker Anurag Kashyap said in an interview, In-

dia did not support these films. These "Indian" films were really French productions or self-funded or financed by the U.K. Film Lottery Fund. Even the Indo-French production is yet to receive its promised government rebate. Kashyap said Konstantin Bojanov, director of *The Shameless*, spent 10 years struggling with the film and chose Sengupta, an art director, as his lead after getting no interest from better-known actors. And the truth is, most Indians didn't even know these films existed before they won their awards. We were too busy Googling influencer Nancy Tyagi and her DIY red-carpet outfits. But while failure is an orphan, success has many mothers. Many Indians, especially movers and shakers, are patting themselves on the back about the Cannes success. It is proof positive of India's rising global star. But Cannes is just the latest example of an old phenomenon. Indians will routinely puff up with pride about desi entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, ignoring the hard truth that many of those super-achievers went to America because they felt stymied and stifled in India.

When 17-year-old Sameer Banerjee won the Wimbledon Boys' championship in 2021, a television channel in Assam called it a "proud moment for the Northeast" because his grandfather had been a general manager with an oil company in Assam in the 80s. That Sameer himself was actually American, the son of Indian immigrants, was an inconvenient fact that was brushed aside in the euphoria. When Nina

Davuluri faced some slurs after she won the Miss America title in 2014, a newspaper in India said, "Racist remarks sour Indian girl's Miss America moment." Davuluri had already categorically said she viewed herself as "first and foremost American" from Syracuse, New York and Oklahoma. No matter. Indians were ready to claim her success as their own achievement. But those were just stray strands of DNA pride and mostly limited to the media asking all-important questions like: 'Do you like Indian food?', 'Do you watch Bollywood films?', 'Who is your favourite film star?'. It was a way to claim our little corner in their global success story. The Cannes jubilation is more misplaced. As Kashyap and others have pointed out, these achievements belong to these indie filmmakers and actors alone. They struggled against all

odds to make the films. They didn't have the support of all those falling over themselves now to congratulate them. None of these people were rooting for them. Will their success make it easier for the next Payal Kapadia to make an offbeat film? Will another Anasuya Sengupta attract the attention of filmmakers despite not having the traditional film heroine looks? Indie films will always be niche but will that niche get 'un certain regard' in India without needing the chhappa of a foreign award for Indians to take notice? And when that film releases (and gets some godforsaken mid-afternoon or late-night slot), will we go to the multiplex to see it? That's if it gets a slot at all. The Oscar-nominated documentary *All That Breathes*, which won an award at Cannes in 2022, never even got a theatrical release.

## GHMC's EV&DM wing to get brand-new safety equipment

Hyderabad: Being one of the primary rescue teams in the city, the Directorate of Enforcement, Vigilance, and Disaster Management (EV&DM) wing of GHMC is soon expected to get brand-new equipment. As many as 119 equipment are on the list of requirements to help the Disaster Response Force (DRF) teams gear up to undertake operations. The department has recently published a tender for the supply

and delivery of disaster rescue tools, uniforms, and other items. Waist harnesses, safety nets, rope and telescopic ladders, life jackets, different kinds of axes and shovels, submersible pumps, fire proximity suits, medical kits, and others. With the last date for submission of bids being Friday, the quotes will be inspected by the technical team and contracts are expected to be finalized soon.