

Pakistan, India to restart train link

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India yesterday signed an agreement to restart a second cross-border train service next month, the latest step in peace talks between the nuclear-armed rivals.

The leaders of Pakistan and India agreed to reopen the rail link -- which was severed during a 1965 war between the countries -- in New Delhi in April 2005. Since then, officials from the two sides have met several times to iron out the details.

"The two sides signed the agreement on the establishment of rail link via Zero Point Railway station near Khokhrapur (Pakistan) and Munabao (India)," stated a joint meeting following a two-day meeting of senior railway officials from the two countries in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

The "Thar Express," named after a Pakistani desert in the region, will leave Mirpurkhas in southern Pakistan on February 18 and pass through the border town of Khokhrapur on the way to Munabao in India's western state of Gujarat. It will run every Saturday and return the same day.

Pakistan will operate the service for the first six months of the year,

then India for the other six months.

It will be the second train to operate between the two countries, who have fought three wars since gaining independence from Britain in 1947. A rail link between Lahore and New Delhi was restarted in 2004, weeks after the two nations began peace talks.

Earlier this month, India and Pakistan agreed to open a new bus route between their parts of the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir, the focus of two of their three wars.

The peace talks have seen the two countries restore transportation, diplomatic and cultural ties, but progress has been slow on resolving their bitter dispute over Kashmir. The massive October 8 earthquake that killed more than 80,000 people on both sides of the border was expected to spur further peace gestures, but steps to open the border in Kashmir to allow survivors to cross has been mired in bureaucracy.

A fierce insurgency has raged in Indian-held Kashmir since 1989, with more than 66,000 people killed in the fighting. India accuses Pakistan's government of harboring and training some of the militants on its soil, a claim the Pakistanis deny.

Forget internal feuds

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district Saiful Islam Nilu and its former secretary Fazlur Rahman joined the AL with large number of followers.

Hasina also asked her party leaders and activists to be aware of 'ill motives' of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government in the next election.

The ruling alliance government earned a huge amount of money illegally in last few years and will try to manipulate the next election with that money," she said.

About the preparation of the fresh voter roll, she said the election could never take place with the voter list that is currently being prepared by the Election Commission (EC).

Regarding BNP's Senior Secretary General Tarique Rahman's comment on 65 lakh fake voters in the existing voter list, the AL chief said, "If such a number of fake voters had cast their votes in the 2001 election, then the election was obviously illegal. And if it was so, then the present government should step down from power immediately."

She said the Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz is suffering from 'a disease of stealing votes for the ruling alliance in the next election', which the physicians could not identify.

The alliance government has been playing games with the people regarding the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC), she said. "The BNP-Jamaat men will be found guilty of corruption in the commission is activated, and if that is the only reason to keep the ACC inactive."

The ACC should find out how a number of television channels have got licenses and the source of income of the channels' owners, who are mostly ministers of the alliance government, she said.

Hasina urged the people who live in villages to be united to launch movements in every village for electricity and to protest the killing of ten people in the recent police shooting at Kansat in Chapainawabganj. She said the BNP government killed 17 labourers and 18 farmers during their 1991 to 1996 regime and this time they killed ten innocent people who were demonstrating for adequate electricity supply.

She also said the coalition government has politicised the Election Commission and the administration to fabricate people's mandate in the next election. "They know very well that people would not vote for them in the next election for their immense corruption, torture and harassments and for this they have finalised everything to rig the election."

Hasina also criticised the gov-

ernment bigwigs for creating 'artificial crisis of diesel and oil to make their fortunes'.

The programme was also attended by AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Obaidul Qader, Aktheruzzaman and Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan.

Shyamoli traders

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may attack any of us to avenge the arrest of their leader," said a local businessman seeking anonymity.

They demanded deployment of adequate law enforcement forces in the area to ensure their safety.

Officer-in-Charge of Mohammadpur Police Station Shaharun Khan said they have taken adequate security measures. "If extortionists enter the area they will be arrested," he said.

The Mohammadpur police arrested Pintu on Sunday night from Adabor after another alleged gang member arrested on charge of shooting at a private car showroom on Ring Road on January 26, named Pintu as their leader.

A gang opened fire on the car showroom, Top Corporation, and vandalised four cars after the owner of the showroom had refused to pay the gang a toll of Tk 10 lakh.

Defence lawyers in the case, filed in connection with the shooting, did not plead for bail for Pintu during the scheduled hearing of the bail petition yesterday. Instead they asked the court to reschedule the hearing on Thursday, which the court agreed to do.

The defence counsels however refused to make any comment to the media about why they wanted to move the date of hearing of the bail petition to Thursday.

Kansat

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incidents will be given a compensation of Tk 5 lakh each, seriously injured persons would get Tk 1 lakh and those having minor injuries Tk 50,000 each.

On people's demands for cheaper electricity, he said the issue will be settled soon in a meeting with the power minister and officials of Rural Electrification Board.

Several thousand local people were still on the streets last night when this report was filed. Road communication with the Sonamasjid land port is yet to start as a large number of felled trees still remained on the road and a culvert was left broken.

The road communication with the land port is likely to be restored by this afternoon, said Shibganj upazila nirbahi officer.

The Awami League-led 14-party opposition combine yesterday staged demonstration in Rajshahi against the police atrocities on the rural power subscribers of Kansat and expressed solidarity with the people agitating for cheaper electricity.

LAWYERS PROTEST POLICE ATROCITIES
Lawyers in Chapainawabganj start a movement today protesting police atrocities on rural power subscribers in Kansat. They will refrain from attending courts today and stage demonstration demanding justice and uninterrupted power supply at cheaper rates.

The lawyers have demanded withdrawal of the cases filed against power subscribers association leaders and decided to file a case against the district and police administration for the police action on January 4 and 23 that left nine people killed.

They asked the local administration to form a medical board to investigate if the arrested leaders were tortured inside the jail.

The decisions came at a meeting of the District Bar Association held with its President Ahmadullah Chowdhury in the chair.

Tougher action

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long march.

Presided over by AL President Sheikh Hasina, the meeting also criticised the police excesses under government directive in the name of security measures.

Meeting sources said Hasina warned the alliance government of tougher movements if such harassment continues and any obstacle is created to foil the long march.

Talking to The Daily Star 14-Party Convenor and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the meeting discussed overall preparation for the long march.

Another 14-Party senior leader told The Daily Star that if the alliance government creates any trouble to foil the long march, they would go for the "final" anti-government movement that might include indefinite hartal across the country.

14-Party senior leaders including Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Abdur Razzaque, Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Nurul Islam, Dilip Barua and Bimal Biswas attended the meeting.

Beximco case

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It was stated in the case that Managing Director of the QC Container Lines Limited Jamaluddin Qader Chowdhury and its Directors Giasuddin Qader Chowdhury and Saifuddin Qader Chowdhury had misappropriated Tk 95 crore of the QC Container Lines Limited by showing additional fares from its four ships and siphoning off the money abroad.

Earlier, the High Court bench fixed January 30 for hearing the matter.

Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq will move for Beximco Holdings while TH Khan for three brothers of Saifuddin Qader Chowdhury.

Sunny

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officer (IO) of the Jatrabari bomb blast case to take necessary steps for producing Sunny before the court yesterday.

The two cases, one under the Arms Act and another under Explosive Substances Act, were filed with Sabujbagh Police Station on September 8 last year.

Judge Mohammad Monzurul Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed March 2 for framing of the charges against them.

Earlier, the same court directed the jail authorities twice to produce before it Sunny, who is also the younger brother of JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman, but the order was not complied with, court sources said.

As per law, if any court orders the jail authorities to produce an accused, the latter are to inform whether the accused is in jail or another place. But the court did not get any information about Sunny from jail authorities as of yesterday, said the same sources.

The other accused are AHM Shamim, 23, Zakaria alias Jewel, 21, Nur Azam Siddique alias Yeasir, 27, Belal Hossain alias Tamim, 21, Aleya Ferdous, 27, and Akramul Islam, 23.

The Rab on September 8 last year arrested five of the accused, including Aleya, at an East Basabho house in the city. Sunny had rented the house to coordinate the August 17 countrywide serial blasts.

In November last year, Rab arrested Sunny in Dhaka, and following his information, recovered huge arms and ammunition from South Manda in the city.

The Criminal Investigation Department on October 10 last year submitted the charge sheets of two cases to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka. All of the arrested accused except Sunny gave confessional statements to magistrates on different dates.

Govt seeks

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ministry Lokman Hakim, Badrul Alam Tarafdar and Md Abdur Rab Hawlader, its Deputy Secretary Md Abul Kalam Azad Chowdhury and Senior Assistant Secretary Md Khalilur Rahman, Deputy Secretary of the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry Shafigul Islam Talukder and his senior Assistant Secretary Mohammad Harunur Rashid, and Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet Division Md Fazlul Huq and Deputy Secretary of finance ministry AKM Motalab Hossain.

Expressing annoyance over the government's delay in carrying out the directives of the court, the SC had refused to exempt nine bureaucrats from the contempt charge.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed Sunday told a press conference that the government would seek another four months to separate the judiciary in accordance with the SC directives.

"We will seek four more months on some technical grounds regarding separation of the judiciary on February 1. Separating the judiciary is an administrative and structural problem for the government," he said.

Separating the judiciary in line with the SC directives warrants some changes to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) and the government needs more time to make those amendments, said sources.

The Supreme Court Bar Association will stage sit-in demonstrations in front of the main entrance to the SC today in protest at the government's plea for further time extension.

The programme was announced at a discussion between SCBA and representatives of different professional bodies yesterday.

Next polls crucial

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ground, the prime minister accused the opposition of creating chaos and unrest at the "instructions of their guardians" to turn the country into a satellite state and a monopoly market of others.

"They are not joining parliament, they are conspiring to cripple the economy and push the nation backward at the directives of their masters and with the help of hirelings," she said.

Criticising the planned movement of the Awami League (AL)-led 14-Party combine, the prime minister said they (AL) may create anarchy with the help of their allies but will not be able to assume power and fulfil the aspirations of the people.

"They had given several ultimatums to the present elected government and demanded its resignation, but people did not respond to their movement," Khaleda said, adding, "When people are living in peace, a particular party lives in unhappiness."

On the opposition's reform proposal about caretaker government and the Election Commission, the prime minister said all political parties will contest the elections on a level-playing field under a non-party caretaker government. She claimed that the Election Commission is completely neutral and will be functioning impartially.

"If people do not want, the caretaker government or the Election Commission can not salvage you," she said, adding that they came to power seeking apology to the people but they could not keep their word while in power.

Referring to the last elections, Khaleda said they (AL) had appointed their own people as the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners despite objections of the opposition at that time.

"Since we have firm faith in Allah and the people, we have won with two-thirds majority in 2001, freed the nation from terrorism and ensured development," she told the rally.

Khaleda said all conspiracies against the nation were foiled through the elections in 2001. "We did not and will not allow Bangladesh to be a vassal state."

About JMB militancy, she said recently an outfit had unleashed bomb terrorism in the name of Islam. However, she said, some 30 lakh people attended the Akheri Munajat of Biswa Jtama peacefully and there was no disturbance.

Chaired by local MP Akbar Ali, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmud, State Minister for Education Ehsanul Huq Milani, Abdul Mannan Talukdar MP and Dr MA Matin MP.

Earlier, the prime minister laid the foundation stone of the academy building of Ulapara Science College and addressed the students of the college.

Addressing a public meeting at Sayedabad on the western side of Jamuna Bridge, the prime minister urged people to get ready to drive out the godfathers of a party, as they are trying to return to the country during the period of caretaker government.

"Their (indicating her political opponents) godfathers are not living in the country. They are trying to come back, but people will drive them (godfathers) out the way they did in the past," she said.

At Saydabad, the prime minister unveiled the plaque of the foundation stone of Sirajganj 450 MW power station, involving Tk 619 crore. The project is scheduled to be completed in two years.

Mahmoodur Rahman admitted the flight disarray, attributing it to shortage of aircraft and ageing of the DC-10s.

Biman officials however could not explain why Biman is operating so many domestic and international flights at the expense of taxpayers' money. With only 13 aircraft in its fleet, Biman is still showing the luxury of operating Dhaka-New York flight twice a week, incurring a loss of Tk 70 lakh each week.

Mahmoodur Rahman said the national airlines had put forward a proposal to the government months ago for procuring 10 aircraft with no response as yet. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman on several occasions stressed bringing management discipline in the overstuffed Biman first.

DC-10s are now used 12 hours a day on an average and Airbus A310-300s about 11 hours. Such high utilisation is impeding proper maintenance, resulting in frequent technical faults and flight disruptions, sources pointed out.

B Chy, Dr Kamal

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and elections from terrorism and illegally earned money, to ensure the accountability of political leaders and government officials and to give full independence to Anti-corruption Commission (ACC).

Oikya Mancha President Kamal Hossain called upon BDB leaders and workers to approach general people with the manifesto and unite them to bring a meaningful change in the country's politics.

Highlighting the people's demand for EC reforms, Kamal Hossain said the EC can not arrange free and fair elections as it is very clear the EC is running as per directions of the government.

"People will not be able to play the role as the owners of the country by voting unless the EC is reformed," he added.

Kamal also stressed the need for revealing the incomes of the country's politicians for which general people strongly demanded in the manifesto.

"The general people want to know how the political leaders have become owners of private TV channels overnight," he said.

The government talks about democracy but its autocratic character is revealed," he observed.

For the first time in the country, Oikya Mancha and BDB have made a manifesto based completely on general people's opinion, BDB President Badrudzo Chowdhury said.

"For preparing our election manifesto we will obviously follow the mass-manifesto where the general people's expectation to the political leaders has clearly reflected," he added.

BDB Secretary General Abdul Mannan read out the manifesto in the meeting. Presided over by former whip Abdur Rouf the meeting was also addressed by BDB leaders Mahi B Chowdhury MP and Firoz M Hassan.

Galib cases

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Laxmikholia School ground in Shahjahanpur upazila of the district on January 14 last year that left one rickshaw-puller killed and more than 50 others injured.

The other was filed in connection with the seizure of huge explosives from the house of Zoynal Sarkar at Chaksovu village under Gabtoli upazila of the same district on January 16 last year.

The four other accused in the cases are Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh's spiritual leader Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Zoynal Sarkar, his wife Monwara, and Shafigulillah.

EC secretary

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Khan was the secretary of the health and family welfare ministry earlier.

Govt may import

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these measures in the wake of the price hike of sugar, now selling between Tk 52 and Tk 54 a kg in the retail market.

According to TCB, sugar price has increased by more than 60 percent in a year. The essential commodity was sold between Tk 32 and Tk 34 a kg a year ago.

Explaining the reason, the minister said sugar price in the international market has gone up unusually, reaching \$420 per tonne, which was \$193 one and a half years back.

The current import price of the essential commodity is as high as \$500 per tonne that includes carrying cost, insurance bills and other costs, he added.

Altaf also said the high price of dollar is another reason for the increase in sugar price.

The country is heavily dependent on import as the local sugar production is only 1.35 lakh tonnes against the total annual demand of 12 lakh tonnes.

Brazil and Thailand are major suppliers of sugar but production in these countries has been affected heavily this year, which has pushed the prices up, the minister explained.

Sugar import by private sector importers is less than usual as the importers have become shaky for the unusually high price. The importers may face loss if the price goes down in the global market, commerce ministry officials said.

Mirza Abbas

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was stayed for a long time.

The HC vacated the stay order on the case, clearing the way for starting its trial.

A lawyer for Shahab Uddin Laitu on July 4, 2004 submitted that his client had instructed him not to proceed with the rule. Accordingly, the bench comprising Justice Sheikh Rezwana Ali and Justice AFM Ali Asgar discharged the rule for non-prosecution.

Following the vacation of the rule, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka on December 18 last year directed the authorities concerned to send the case to the sessions judge's court for trial.

According to the prosecution, over 150 activists led by former Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mirza Abbas brought out a procession during a dawn-dusk hartal called by the (then) opposition party BNP at about 11:30am on February 13, 2001.

They attacked a procession of the (then) ruling Awami League near Razabagh Police Lines.

As the BNP processionists sprayed bullets at the police barracks, constable Abu Naser, 27, was bullet-hit when he was standing in the corridor adjacent to his third floor room at Rajabagh Police Lines. He died on the spot.

Constable Partha Roy was also seriously injured during the incident.

Subedar Jamal Uddin filed a murder case with Motijheel Police Station the same day. The investigation officer pressed charges against Mirza Abbas and five others on July 11, 2001.

Graft check

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encouraging the already significant contribution to the country's socio-economic development by private initiatives such as the Birdem hospital.

Meanwhile, increased donor interest led the Ecneec to widen both the size and the duration of the HNPSF. The allocation for the programme was raised from the current Tk 9,410 crore to Tk 32,450 crore.

The donors' contribution to the programme has been increased to Tk 10,793 crore, of which the World Bank alone accounts for Tk 1,950 crore and 11 other donor countries and organisations for the rest.

The programme that started in July 2003 now will continue up to June 2010 instead of June 2006 as scheduled earlier.

The Ecneec yesterday also revised the funding for 11 private higher secondary model schools at the six divisional headquarters at Tk 114 crore and approved expansion and modernisation work of Sylhet Osmani International Airport worth Tk 47 crore.

69 families

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people's repression of women fearing vote loss during elections.

President Hena Das, vice-presidents Bela Nobi, Selina Khaleda were also present in the conference among other members of the organisation.

The leaders demanded changes in the constitution to establish a more secular society as they think the existing constitution incite fundamentalism and repression of women.

The government should take initiatives to investigate these incidents through the concerned district commissioner (DC) and superintendent of police (SP). They also laid emphasis on the role of media in changing the mindset of people in this regard.

Iran threatens

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ingspot checks.

A joint statement issued after a late-night meeting in London of the foreign ministers of the big five plus Germany and the European Union urged Iran to restore a moratorium on all uranium enrichment-related activity, under IAEA supervision.

Iran, which says its nuclear program is purely peaceful, announced this month it was resuming nuclear research which had been suspended for 2-1/2 years. It removed U.N. seals on equipment at its Natanz plant on January 9, but diplomats said there was no sign it had begun uranium enrichment there.

"END OF DIPLOMACY"
Russia and China had resisted pressure from the United States and its European allies for swift recourse to the Security Council, which has the power to impose sanctions.

Involving the Security Council would mean "the end of diplomacy" to solve the crisis, Larjani told state television.

Russia had argued for the IAEA simply to inform the Security Council about Iran's case, avoiding a formal referral.

Bush to touch on Iraq, home issues

AP, Washington

US President Bush will deliver his fifth State of the Union address Tuesday after arguably the worst year of his presidency, looking to reinvigorate confidence in his leadership and the U.S. role in the world.

The speech gives the president an opportunity to lay out his agenda in this midterm election year directly to Congress and the American people. He will try to ease anxiety about continuing U.S. troop deaths in Iraq and the high price of fuel and health care that are dampening Americans' view of the economy.

He will argue that his program to secretly eavesdrop on communications between people in the United States and suspected terrorists overseas is not only legal, but necessary, despite the questions raised by legal experts. He'll urge Congress to renew the controversial portions of the anti-terrorism USA Patriot Act, set to expire Friday and blocked by lawmakers insisting on new privacy safeguards.

And he'll touch on ethics, declaring support for reform as a lobbying scandal threatens members of his own party on Capitol Hill.

The speech comes as Bush's job approval ratings have rebounded somewhat, but still hover in the high 30s to low 40s in most polls. About two-thirds of Americans say in recent polls that the country is headed down the wrong track.

The numbers give Republicans

'Meteor' falls on the ground

UNB, Thakurgaon

A 'meteor' from outer space fell with a big bang on a field in Singpara village of sadar upazila yesterday afternoon creating panic and curiosity among people.

No one was reported hurt. On information Superintendent of Police Chandker Golam Farooq rushed to the spot and asked his companions and villagers to dig the earth near the house of one Fazlur Rahman from where smoke was still emitting.

To their amazement they found a lead-like black material three feet below the earth. Hot and weighing 2.5kg, the triangular material looked like a mortar shell, witnesses said.

The meteor was kept in custody of the Thakurgaon Police Station.

Israeli army

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Hamis is committed to Israel's destruction and has carried out suicide bombings, urged Hamas and other armed factions to step up attacks on the Jewish state in response.

Israel has called for a boycott of any Palestinian government that includes Hamas, and said it expected to suspend monthly tax payments to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority, a severe financial blow.

Israel collects customs revenue on behalf of the Palestinians and hands it over to the governing Palestinian Authority each month.

The next payment is due today, and was expected to total about \$55 million (31 million pounds). The salaries of about 140,000 Palestinian employees depend to a large extent on the customs revenue, though Hamas may be able to find alternative sources of funding in the Arab world.

In a bid to keep aid flowing, Hamas leaders have suggested they might not have representatives in the government but rather put unaffiliated technocrats in the cabinet.

CALL TO ARMS
The two Islamic Jihad militants were killed in a raid in the West Bank village of Arrabe, near Jenin, the army said. There was at least one Israeli casualty, Palestinian witnesses said.

After the incident, Nafez Azam, an Islamic Jihad leader, called for other factions "to resume resistance against the occupation", a reference to attacks scaled back under a truce last year.

The Quartet of major powers trying to broker Middle East peace -- Russia, the European Union, the United States and the United Nations -- said earlier this week that Hamas must reject violence and recognise Israel or risk losing international aid.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday the world should not cut off funding to the Palestinians after Hamas's victory.

Hamas spokesman Moushir al-Masri called on other Quartet members to follow Russia's lead and "not to punish the Palestinian people for practising their democratic choice".

Jordan's ambassador to the Palestinian Authority also said on Tuesday that Amman "will continue to support the Palestinian people regardless of who is in government."

The Palestinian Authority faces a financial crunch if Israel withholds the tax money.

Unemployment in the Palestinian territories runs high, at 22 percent, and half the Palestinian population lives in poverty. In Gaza, many Palestinians live on an average of \$2 a day.

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