

## Pamper Them Not

It is an intriguing coincidence that outsiders came in a group to carry out a rampage at the examination hall of the Teachers' Training College, Dhaka, on the same day that the students took to the street demanding changes in the examination system. We do not want to draw any conclusion about a possible link between the two incidents but we are surprised, even shocked, to see that the attack on the examination hall least bothered the students who seemed single-mindedly busy demonstrating against the examination system. The students' concern at the system's inadequacy or fallibility is pronounced to the extent they are unconcerned with the rampaging by outsiders during the examination.

Well, we admit that everyone has the democratic right to protest against anything and everything under the sun provided that something is suggested to either improve the system or bring a greater good for a greater number of people. Moreover, there is time for everything. Why the students of the Teachers' Training College — many of them are already teachers or prospective ones — came up with the protest right at the time of the examinations? What were they doing all through their academic years? Should we imagine that the students were ill-prepared for the on-going examinations and that's why there was this show of outsiders coming to spoil the authority's successful conduct of the same?

The students of Teachers' Training College made the examination system an issue — albeit vainly. They would have made a point if they had come up with a complaint during their course and communicated their grievances to the college authority. Still better, if they had placed suggestions for improvement — or in their absence — explained why the system was bad. That would have helped the college authority immensely in making a review of the system in a cool climate. There are procedures to bring changes — even if those would be for the better. To bring a new system in place, you need at least a year, if not years. Should not the trainee teachers be prepared to give it the time required rather than behave like juveniles?

We have seen the damage caused to education by student pampering. The introduction of question bank was one such grave mistake. If something is intrinsically faulty, let it be corrected by following the proper procedures. Any efforts to make light of education and examinations should be severely dealt with in order that the monstrous tendency is nipped in the bud.

## Project Implementation

In a recent report the World Bank went deep into our project implementation tangles adding that resolute government action was still lacking on the 'generic problems' responsible for the slow-down in and the quality of development work.

The WB sounds spot-on with its finding that the involvement from the political level has often been too little at the conceptual stage with the result that ministers could not be the true champions of projects conceived and implemented. In other words, it is a question of owning the projects from the beginning, feeling fully identified with it through the gestation period, in order that there is a seminal commitment displayed to the speed and quality of implementation. The recommendation is for the government to take a more pro-active role at the project conceptualisation and design stage. While there is scope for the ministers to reflect a hands-on policy towards project formulation by way of checking things with the technocrats they would still need a balanced relationship with the consultants who play a crucial role in the present scheme of things.

The WB seems somewhat assured of economic dictates getting precedence over any constituency-nurturing political considerations in the government's distribution and allocation of projects.

We find ourselves in agreement with the World Bank's stress on making the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) into a focal-point for ensuring timely and cost-effective implementation of the ADP.

For the IMED to enforce its views with the implementing ministries in respect of lagging project activities, procurement delays and expenditure-overruns it has to be an especially empowered body. Alternatively, it could be put directly under the Prime Minister's office after a close examination of the option.

## Onus on Israel

The Palestinians have been given 80 per cent control of the West Bank city of Hebron. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has almost made it look like a favour done to the Palestinians. For, he had worked up the revanchist temper to a new high in Israel and went through such a charade of hard-selling the concession to his own people that whatever trickled down took on the hue of being deceptively overmuch.

This is a ploy he has directed not only to the Palestinian leadership by way of what his ilk calls a 'reality check' on the progress of the Oslo accord but also to the US leadership by a deeper implication. Netanyahu is simply trying to convince Washington that peacemaking would be a belaboured undertaking for him, so he had better not be pushed around.

But we know for sure that the US had put its feet down on him for this de-control measure in Hebron. Clinton will hopefully keep the pressure on. Not only has he to live down the years of US image somewhat blackened by pandering to the Israelis to appease the Jewish lobby and vote-bank in his country but also to take forward the ME peace process behind which he has been the moving force. The US has levers to push.

The next steps envisaged in the latest agreement are talks on a permanent peace deal within two months and the beginning of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from rural areas of the West Bank not later than in March. The onus lies on Netanyahu to prove himself.

# Good Sense Prevailed on Both Sides

We have reason to be inspired that the Speaker who has not only initiated the process of negotiation but has chaired the negotiating table has pledged to maintain his positive neutrality as does his British counterpart, writes M Arshad Ali.

'BLISS' was it in the 'dawn' to be alive to know that as per agreement reached on January 14, we were going to have a houseful Parliament from the first session of the new year scheduled to be held on and from January 15 and graced by the Presidential address. Let us bask in the sun shine — the sun shine that the 15th morning was showered upon with the dispelling away of the cloud that gathered over the political horizon following the boycott of the Parliament by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The people have a sigh of relief. The impoverished nation cannot bear the brunt of car-burning, road blockade and hartal, stoppage of port services, closure of mills and loss of production, prolongation of session jams and so many others that would have inevitably followed if the confrontation resulting from the boycott continued to attain fiercer proportions with the passage of time.

The nation cannot shoulder the enormous impact of the huge involvement of men and materials, time and energy, life and money required for by-elections or mid-term general elections as was hinted at in the event of the confrontation prolonging. For this might have been an unavoidable necessity which has been so sagaciously avoided.

With the agreement reached between the Awami League and the BNP at the initiative of the Speaker, the nation has been enthusiastic enough to note

that its representatives in both government and opposition have shaken off the inaction that have gripped them, because real action are those that translate popular hopes and aspirations into reality in stead of inciting negative hectic activities that tend to widen almost beyond bridgeability the chasm which, resulting not from really diametrically opposite views of things, causes irreparable damage to national interest which they are entrusted to safeguard and promote.

The reconciliation brought perhaps to a greater focus a proverbial element in the Bengalee character — its traditional love for delicious dishes. We are tempted to know the items that went into the composition of the dinners that the Speaker threw in the preparatory meetings — that sprang out our representatives with a jubilant mood and feeling for co-operation. The veteran diplomat turned politician Mr H R Chowdhury might have brought his life long experience savouring delicacies in the world capitals to bear upon the selection of the menu. The nutritional prescriptions that some food items have the power of generating the forces of production might also have been adhered to.

The nation was wistfully looking forward to this day of a long cherished dream-come-true. As the leaders of the two parties emerged out from the negotiating chamber after the agreement was reached, both equally victorious and joyous, the nation grew in strength and wisdom, hopefully on the basis of their new-found unity not at the cost of diversity. Let us be assured that gone are the days of politics of confrontations sake.

Really salutary it is that the government party and the main opposition have come to stress duly that they both constitute the essential elements that make the Parliament living and succeeding. Deprived of the due role of each of them, the nation's highest body is rendered ineffective and lifeless much to the disservice of the motherland. Let this intent which marked a mile stone in the history of parliamentary practices in our country herald a new chapter of co-operation between the two tone-setters in our national politics.

Parliamentary democracy presupposes the existence of opposition parties both in and outside the Parliament. Parties are integral part of the democratic fabric of our constitution and they supply the stimulus that keep the machine going. A look into the history of growth

and development of British Parliamentary system which is emulated all over the world reveals that the system grew out of parties. The differences between the Whigs and Tories gave birth to the mechanism of ministerial responsibility — a mechanism that provides safeguard to the right of the broad masses of people (the electorate) who constitute the ultimate sovereign, to think mundanely. In England Her Majesty's Opposition with the leader of the opposition at its head forms the 'Shadow Cabinet' as it is the prospective government, if and when the party in power is ousted from office. In short, political parties are the life-breath of the parliamentary system of government that we have chosen for ourselves, at a huge cost, to be best suited to our genius and aspirations.

Parties being so essential to the functioning of our system of government, it is desirable that there should be consensus among them on vital national issues that await immediate solution. The law and order situation and terrorism, two of the most gnawing problems of the nation, for example, cannot be brought under control and rooted out respectively unless the government party and the opposition join hands — an extension of what they have agreed upon in ending the im-

passee. And orderly social life that ensures production in agriculture, industry and education with the in-flow of expanded foreign investment will remain a far cry. The existence of the nation will be at stake, let alone gaining a respectful position for it in the comity of nations.

Let this session that happens to be the first of the year 1997 conduct itself as one setting a new style in our politics — politics that helps persons and parties rise above petty selfish motives of personal or party interest and forge united move to fight poverty, illiteracy malnutrition with the ultimate object of ameliorating the lot of the teeming millions, thereby marking 1997 as the year of transition in national politics. The Speaker who has engineered the agreement will go down in history if the points agreed upon are strictly adhered to. The points are not beyond the power or achievement, rather they are indispensable for good governance, transparent administration and people's welfare that figured prominently in the election pledges of the major parties in Parliament.

We have reason to be inspired that the speaker who has not only initiated the process of negotiation but has chaired the

negotiating table has pledged to maintain his positive neutrality as does his British counterpart. He is no-party man and his only motto is that of an impartial and non-partisan presiding officer whose sole commitment is to protect the rights and privileges of each member whether he belongs to the party in-power or to the opposition. Cheers to him that he has butressed himself to refrain from displaying personal sympathies or partisan leanings and voicing any opinion on party issues. Democracy has won the battle, for its spirit of co-operation, moderation and toleration — an honest policy of give and take which is one of the most important prerequisites of its successful working — has finally come out victorious.

The nation is on its tip-toe to see how the parties that contribute to the victory and that take pride in being identified to be votaries of democratic politics continue to demonstrate the same spirit in days to come. Let democratic institutions flourish. Let the synergic power and collective wisdom of the parties come to full play to enable the nation to march forward with head erect into the 21st century. It is perilous to be oblivious that these powers and wisdom are of the people who have leased those out to them on certain conditions for a temporary period, the extension depending on the fulfilment of them.

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# Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

checking our bags, we were allowed in. As we caught sight of the Dome of the Rock, emotions overwhelmed us.

Jerusalem (Muslims call the city 'Al-Quds' or 'the holy'; to the Jews it is 'Yerushalayim') is sacred to Muslims for several reasons. The most important of these is Prophet Muhammad's miraculous nocturnal journey, or 'isra' to Bayt-al-Maqdis, 'the house of holiness', and his ascent from there to heaven — the 'miraj'. These events are mentioned in the holy Quran in the first verse of Chapter 17, titled 'Al-Isra'. Led by angel Gabriel, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) travelled in one night from Makkah to the site of the 'al-masjid-al-aqsa' or the 'furthest mosque'. There, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) led Prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others in prayer. Then from an adjacent rock, Prophet Muhammad was taken by Gabriel to heaven itself, to 'within two bow lengths' of the very throne of God.

About 691 AD, the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan's Syrian craftsmen built on the same location the earliest masterpiece of the Islamic architecture, the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra) — the octagonal sanctuary, centered on the rock, whose golden dome still dominates the skyline of Old Jerusalem. Abd al-Malik's son, al-Walid, who ruled from 705 to 715 AD, built the second major monument, the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Old City and its walls were built by Ottoman king Suleyman in the sixteenth century.

Jerusalem is also uniquely linked to one of the five pillars of Islam, the five daily prayers. The earliest Muslims, for a time, turned towards Jerusalem to pray. A later revelation transferred the 'Qibla' or the direction of prayer towards the Kaaba in Makkah. To this day, Jerusalem is known as the 'first of the two Qiblas'. And it was during the 'miraj' that the Muslims were ordered to pray, and the number of prayers were fixed at five.

These days, during Jumma, women pray at the Dome of the Rock, men pray at Al Aqsa mosque. At other less-crowded times, women too pray at Al Aqsa. For three days, we tried to make as many salaats at Al-Aqsa as possible, remembering that one Raka at this mosque is equivalent to 500 Raka elsewhere.

King Hussain of Jordan has renovated the exterior of the Dome by gold-plating it. The interior has also been renovated. The rock from which the ascension took place is the centerpiece of the dome. The Prophet prayed in the basement of the Dome and was lifted through the rock, making a hole in it.

The rock was soft; the Prophet's feet made marks on it. The worshippers are allowed to touch the Prophet's two foot-marks, which always give out fragrance. Two of the Prophet's hair are also in the same enclosure; they are opened only during the Miraj for public viewing.

The interior of the Al Aqsa is also being renovated, especially the windows and the domes. However, the exterior looks run-down. The whole mosque-dome compound is dilapidated and in need of urgent maintenance. Those who have seen the two holy mosques at Makkah and Medinah will be sorely disappointed. Currently, Al Aqsa is Islam's third holy place only spiritually, in terms of grandeur it is miles behind. Signs of occupation is everywhere. Imagine how the Israelis would feel, if the entrance to the 'Wailing Wall', which we visited, was controlled by the Muslims!

The Muslims of Jerusalem are depressed. Their spirits would be greatly lifted if more and more Muslims visited them. They are not used to Muslim tourists; once they find out who you are, they give you all their love. The Muslim youths are also depressed, in the aftermath of the 'intifada'. They do not go out at night for fear of being harassed. Many of the Muslims are hard up. It is a good idea to make a donation not only for the Mosque, but for the poor Muslims who live in East Jerusalem as well. They will not ask for it, but will be grateful for your generosity. The food in the Muslim quarter is tasty; our driver took us to the best, lafaleh restaurant in East Jerusalem! Another good place to stay, slightly more expensive than the Ambassador hotel, is the American Colony hotel in east Jerusalem. The food they serve is exquisite!

The inquisitive can do a few more things in Jerusalem. For instance, walk the 14 stations of Christ, on Via Dolorosa adjacent to the mosque compound and ending in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Catholics believe that at the first station a thorny crown was put on Christ's head, at the second he was put on the cross, at the seventh he fell down and at the 14th, inside the Church of Holy Sepulchre, he was crucified. Of course, Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion of Prophet Issa (pbuh). Before the first station, on the right hand side of the walkway, there is a small church/home called 'Bethesda'. This is where Bibi Mariam was born. One may want to go in and pay respects to her. Outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there is the mosque of Hazrat Omar (Rd). This is where he is said to have prayed when he

first visited Jerusalem. We prayed our Asr prayers there.

In addition to these Christian sites, there is, on the Jewish side of the walled city, the Citadel of David. The Jews say this is where Hazrat Dawood's kingdom was. They show a very interesting documentary film here on the history of Jerusalem, which is quite educational.

Outside the Walled City, one can take a taxi to the top of Mount of Olives and walks down, seeing the following:

a. At the Mount of Olives is the site from where Jesus had his spiritual ascension. It is now in ruins and controlled by the Muslims.

b. The Church where Jesus received divine revelations. It is a beautiful church and the Lord's Prayer (Our Father who art in Heaven) is engraved in all the languages then known to man.

c. The Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed.

d. At the foot of the Mount of Olives is Bibi Mariam's grave, inside a cave.

The graveyard adjacent to the Mount of Olives, and extending from the top of the hill to the wall of Al-Aqsa, is where many believe resurrection will take place on the Day of Judgment.

The next day (Saturday) the Jewish Sabbath, we rented an Israeli Arab's cab for a trip to Hebron. Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. It cost us 450 shekels (400 shekels in fare, 50 tips). As we left Jerusalem for Hebron, we noticed brand new, shiny towns called 'settlements' gliding on top of strategic hills.

This is all Palestinian land, stolen by Israel without paying any compensation, the driver explained to us. As we approached Arab towns, the American-style Israeli roads gave way to barely paved roads, laden with pot holes. On the way, we passed the notorious settlement called Qiryat Arba, from which Baruch Goldstein embarked on murderous rampage of Muslims praying the Fajr during Ramadan three years ago. Every armed male Israeli settler we saw looked like a mobile armored car! Hebron seemed like a fairly well-to-do Arab town.

We passed through three Israeli security check points in Hebron before reaching the Ibrahimi mosque. At each check point, our driver, who knew Hebrew, and the Israeli soldiers, seemed to be shouting at each other! I asked the driver what it was all about. He said that the soldiers were complaining, 'why are you driving, when the Jews are on foot going to the Tomb of the Patriarch?'

As soon as we entered the mosque compound, an elderly Hebron gentleman appointed

himself our guide! The Ibrahimi mosque is a tiny mosque; its claim to fame is that Prophets (pbuh) Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yakub are buried there along with their wives Sarah, Rafiga (Rebecca) and Leqa (Leah) respectively.

The main entrance to the mosque is reserved for the Jewish settlers. However, they are allowed only to visit Prophet Yakub's grave. Muslims have to enter through a side gate; although they have access to all the other graves as well as the mosque. For 10 Muslim holy days of the year, including the two Eids, Lailatul Qadr and Meraj, the Muslims have access to all of the mosque all day.

As we were about to enter the mosque, a heavily-armed Israeli soldier demanded to see our passport, in a very rude and high handed manner, scolding my wife and the two kids. As he perused our US passports, I could have told him to kiss those passports, because the country it represents is the sole reason his country exists!

En route to Al Aqsa, Allah (SWT) asked Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to stop at Prophet Ibrahim's (pbuh) mosque and pay his respect. Here too the rock was soft, leaving the Prophet's foot mark on it. Worshippers are allowed to touch those foot marks, placed in a window just inside Prophet Ibrahim's (pbuh) grave. We prayed the salaats at Prophets (pbuh) Ibrahim and Ishaq's graves, as well as Bibi Sarah, Rafiga and Leqa's graves.

On that February morning, 1994, that will forever live in infamy, Baruch Goldstein entered the mosque through a door adjacent to Bibi Sarah's grave, positioned himself behind the congregation, and like the coward he was, opened automatic fire on the unarmed, unsuspecting worshippers preparing for a day's fast. He mowed down 29 Muslims, wounded hundreds of others before being overpowered. The section where most of the worshippers were massacred has not been re-carpeted yet. The Imam was spared, because he had bowed down before anyone else. Our elderly guide was also there, fortunately on the other side. At the Mehrib, we saw tens of bullet marks, legacy of Baruch Goldstein of Brooklyn, New York, USA!

Our next stop was Bethlehem. Before handing over the town to the Palestinian authority, Israel had constructed a modern Bethlehem bypass to get to their settlements. Although the road to Bethlehem from Hebron was nothing to brag about, there were signs of wealth in the town itself. Our driver told us that Bethlehem boasts of wealthy Christian Arabs. At the Church of Nativity, the crowd was far smaller than one would have expected four days before Christmas. No doubt because of security concerns. We did visit the stable where Prophet Issa (pbuh) was born and paid our respects to him.

Our last stop was Dead Sea, about 35 miles from Jerusalem. On the way we passed the sprawling settlement called Maale Adumim, which is home to the Israeli soldier Noam Friedman, who tried to 'kill as many Arabs as possible' on the New Year's Day 1997. The Dead Sea was a bit with our two boys. The water is salty and bitter. And one really does not sink! One can read newspapers floating on the water and view Jordan on the other side.

Tourism took a beating this year. Even when there are tourists, the Israeli guides skip Arab shops and takes them straight to Jewish shops, many of which sport recommended by the Ministry of Interior.

signs. Palestinians are furious with King Hussain's grand father King Abdullah for agreeing

with the Balfour Declaration that allowed Jews to immigrate to Palestine, and with King Hussain himself for being so generous with the Israelis, at the Palestinians' expense. Christian and Muslim Palestinians get along great (Yusuf Arafat's son Suha is a Christian Palestinian). They dislike the Jews. The Jews hate them right back! Arabs and Jews do not look at each other!

Jewish Americans have been instrumental not only in the creation of Israel, but in its expansion as well. They have lobbied hard to minimise American criticism of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza from 'illegal' during Jimmy Carter's time, to 'obstacle to peace' during Reagan's, and to 'complicating factors' during Clinton's. They have successfully controlled the US House and Senate vis-a-vis US Mid-east policy. Wealthy Jewish Americans, such as Dr Irving Moscovitz have offered Arabs preposterous amount of money to buy property so as to strengthen Jewish presence in Arab East Jerusalem. Moscovitz is the person who financed the so-called 'tunnel' in Muslim Jerusalem, and was present at its midnight opening, before the episode exploded in violence in September, 1996. American Muslims are but helpless spectators as their Arab brethren cry out for justice.

There is a 5-square metre pottery shop the writer visited in front of the Ibrahimi mosque. A few days ago, a wealthy Jewish person offered the shopkeeper one and a half million dollar for the shop. When the owner was unwilling, the person gave him a blank check and asked him to write his price. The idea is not to merely buy the property, but to gain a foothold in front of the mosque, so as to lay Jewish claim to the Ibrahimi mosque itself for ever!

Allah (SWT) says in the holy Quran that if your enemy inclines towards peace, so should you. It was during Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres' genuine efforts to make peace with the Palestinians that the idea of visiting Jerusalem was hatched in the writer's mind. However, the intention of the present Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu seems anything but peaceful!

Israel should remember that its overwhelming military superiority over the Arabs and America's unquestioned support for Israel are not going to last forever. The only people who inhabited Palestine before the Jews came and left 2000 years ago, and have stayed put all these years, are the Palestinians. And ever since the second Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab accepted the surrender of Jerusalem from the Byzantines in 637 AD, except for a few years during the Crusades, and the British and the Israeli occupation recently, Jerusalem has always been Muslim. Muslim kings nurtured it. Muslim masons lavishly built it up. No amount of arrogance can alter these historical facts! If you take someone else's property by force, you are condemned to looking over your shoulder in fear all your life!

As we were departing Israel, once again we were asked a series of probing questions by an Israeli woman security officer. She wanted to see our hotel receipt, our American business cards, wanted to know where we went, who we met, whether our luggage was ever left unattended, etc. (It is a good idea to ask the hotel and shops to write the Value Added Tax separately in the receipt; that way one can get a refund for the VAT at the airport.) Although professionally very thorough, the woman was very pleasant, even helpful. One deeply wished one encountered such cordial behaviour upon entering the Kingdom!

The writer is a Rhodus Scholar from Bangladesh who currently lives in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, USA

## To the Editor...

### Discrimination

Sir, Here is one more instance of discrimination against women in a country whose Prime Minister and Opposition Leader both are women! I am a frequent passenger on the Jessore-Dhaka-Jessore Biman route. On a recent ATP flight when I requested for a seat on the 8th row (where the emergency doors are) I was told that Biman regulations do not allow these seats to be given to women and children.

The logic behind this being (according to the Biman official on duty) that women are not strong enough to open the emergency door. I can understand not allocating these seats to children but to claim that only men are capable of opening these doors is a gross generalisation and an insult to all women. After all, opening the emergency door of an aircraft is basically a matter of technique

and of following the instructions written on the door rather than of strength.

The stewards regularly open and close the doors of the aircraft and there is no male crew to help them. I was quite taken aback to hear of this 'new' regulation because until then I had been travelling frequently on this route and often had the 'privilege' of being seated on the 8th row.

I would like a clarification from the Biman authorities on whether this is a new regulation. If so, is it applicable only on domestic routes? Can a supposedly modern airline of international repute justify such absurd regulations?

Ms Firdaus Ahmed  
Khalidshur, Khulna

### "Tell me, who?"

Sir, This refers to the above captioned letter published in

your daily on 11.01.97. The writer mentioned about two guys. One is from an elite family whose parents are already (well) settled in the USA. And he is doing business over there without having any recognised degree. On the other hand, the other person is from an educated family. He is a master's degree holder from Dhaka University. And he is working with a multinational company.

But it is difficult for anybody to give any opinion on this issue, because the writer did not mention his auntie's family status, educational background and also her lucky daughter's qualification.

In that case my opinion is that it is the auntie who knows everything about her family and daughter. So she can better choose who is the eligible bachelor.

Shafkat Ameen  
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### Avoiding destructive programmes

Sir, To establish any right any group, party or institution may go for movements either in the form of processions meeting or strike and hartal. Hartal is one of the sharpest weapons that can exert serious impact.

But these days, hartal is often being called and observed based on only the individual and family interests. As the common people see no reflection of their rights and demands in such programmes, they are really unwilling to participate in these.

Let us put our head and heart together to avoid these types of destructive programmes

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