

EMBASSIES OF CUBA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



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ABSTRACT

Cuba's newly updated socio-economic model gets the coverage in our lead story, and we follow with analysis of the country's new provincial assemblies.

International diplomacy covers further dealings with Vietnam and comment on the expulsion of Russian diplomats from many Western embassies; then we move on to International Trade to cover a new Vietnam-Cuba entrepreneurial forum in Havana, the arrangements for the British contingent to contribute the final touches to the FitCuba trade show and to FECONS, the 12th International Construction Fair being held currently.

Arts & Culture looks at a new Cuban cultural evening in Washington DC, at the latest Cuban guitar contest, and finally, to International Sport where we find Cuba has been chosen to vice-chair the UN Education, Science and Culture's antidoping team.

INSIDE CUBA



The Party Central Committee, meeting in its Fifth Plenum, has analysed important issues related to the updating of Cuba's socio-economic model

The Party Central Committee Fifth Plenum, presided over by its first secretary, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, meeting over two intense days, has examined issues related to the updating of Cuba's economic and social model, a complex process which the country began in 2011, when the 6th Party Congress was held.

The first point on the agenda was the evaluation of policies implemented since that time, previously analysed on two other occasions by the Political Bureau.

Introducing the issue, Marino Murillo Jorge, head of the Implementation and Development Standing Committee, explained that taken into consideration for this analysis were those policies with legal norms established, which had been in place for a enough time to evaluate their impact.

This study was initiated on the request of the Army General Raúl Castro, given the need to review all policies, to be fully informed of what has worked, what needs to be rectified, and what questions created obstacles to the implementation of measures.

The first three years were characterised by the rapid pace of implementation of policies, which later slowed given the complexity of measures under consideration, and because of errors in the planning of processes and their control.

Also having an effect were economic and financial limitations that prevented adequate support for a series of measures that required investments.

During 2016 and 2017, efforts were primarily directed toward perfecting what had already been implemented.

Identified among the general conditions and causes of poor results, was the fact that the Implementation Standing Committee was not always able to involve bodies, agencies, organisations, and entities, so they could direct, train, support, control, and be held accountable for changes at the grassroots level.

Likewise, the lack of a comprehensive approach has been observed, a limited vision of the level of risks involved, and an incomplete appreciation of costs and benefits.

In some cases, deficiencies have been noted in follow-up and supervision of policies implemented, several of which deviated from their original objectives, and were not corrected in a timely fashion.

The Plenum recognized that the updating of the economic and social model has proven to be an issue of great complexity. Added to this is the strong commitment to never leaving any Cuban unprotected, which has had an effect on the pace of change. Currently being reviewed are all processes underway, and among priorities are the monetary issue, in particular studies on unification of the dual currency and different exchange rates; the National Economic and Social Development Plan through 2030; as well as the comprehensive examination and perfecting of required measures, with relevant proposals.

Cited as an example of this last priority was the self-employment policy, for which legal norms of a broad scope have been approved and should be rolled out following a training process that will include some 580,000 self-employed workers and more than 30,000 public officials.

Central Committee members also referred to the limited culture of paying taxes existent in the country; the still deficient use of accounting as a fundamental tool in any economic analysis; and difficulties in explaining policies, which has on occasion led to misunderstandings within the population, with regard to these complicated issues, generating misinterpretations because of a lack of information.

Finally, the 5th Central Committee Plenum approved the evaluation report and future actions to ensure progress in the updating of the economic and social model, via greater participation and responsibility on the part of Central State Administration Agencies, national entities, and other bodies.

The Party Central Committee's first secretary, Raúl Castro, commented that hard work had been done on the guidelines approved by the 6th and 7th Congresses, saying that despite the errors and shortcomings recognized, the situation is more favourable than it was several years ago.

He defined, as the fundamental task of all Communists, confronting problems without hesitation, right away; planning more carefully to direct resources to where they are truly needed; and not waiting for solutions from above, but rather contributing creative, rational ideas.

He reiterated the importance of the most minimal savings, adjusting ourselves to the reality in which we live. We must move forward on the problems, struggle resolutely and intelligently, maintaining the nation's unity, he said.

In this sense, he recalled the difficult moments of the Special Period in the 1990s, when the country faced an extreme situation. Since then, he commented, the pano-

rama has changed, but we must recognize that we have much to do in terms of planning our economy, since wasteful attitudes still exist, when the line to follow is one of conservation and efficiency.

He remembered that the Revolution, which he described as our most beautiful work, has been obliged to face and overcome all kinds of obstacles, since its very beginnings, emphasising that, given new challenges, the spirit of determination and combativity that has characterized our people must prevail, without a trace of pessimism, and full confidence in the future.

HOUSING POLICY

Those attending the Plenum analysed in detail the country's housing policy program, on which work has been underway for some time, on the basis of the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines of the Party and the Revolution.

Minister of Construction René Mesa Villafaña insisted on the importance of addressing the issue of housing in a different way, using all resources available in the country, in an orderly fashion.

The program was developed taking into consideration the current condition of the country's housing stock, and the implementation of a strategy to halt deterioration, and then advance in repairs and resolving the problem.

In Cuba, a little more than 3,824,000 dwellings exist in the country, according to the last Population and Housing Census conducted in 2012, and other evaluations completed through June of 2017. Of this total, 39% are in average or poor technical condition.

Projections for the recovery of the country's housing stock indicate that an effort of at least 10 years is required, with priority given to the most seriously deteriorated homes during the first five years.

To undertake the task, significant investment will be made in the cement industry, with the remodelling of the Siguane plant, in Sancti Spiritus, as well as the modernisation of the ceramics factory in Holguín, which will substantially increase the volume of tiles and bathroom fixtures produced.

Along with these investments, projected is the development of local construction materials production, which in the last five years has grown annually between eight and 11 percent. At the close of 2016, a total of 57 product lines were being manufactured in 168 municipalities, using raw and recycled materials available locally.

This year, to be installed are 423 mini-industries in municipalities and People's Councils, which will join those already operational in provinces.

Participants in the Plenum underscored the importance of local production of materials, as the housing policy's fundamental support, since they provide solutions close at hand, allow for collective participation, and strengthen the role of municipalities in the solution of housing problems.

All actors possible will participate in the intense construction movement which the country will undertake, including families, state construction organisations, cooperatives, as well as construction companies affiliated with Provincial Administration Councils and the country's state enterprise system.

Army General Raúl Castro Ruz reiterated that the housing policy must include and promote respect for urban and land use regulations, demanding compliance from state institutions first, and then the population. It is not about prohibiting construction in any given place, he insisted, but rather doing so in an orderly manner, where elementary conditions exist to do so.

He called on members of the Central Committee to analyse the report presented more carefully and discuss it with other colleagues and specialists in their respective areas, with the purpose of going deeper and contributing new considerations before it is approved for implementation by the government.

STUDIES ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

At another point during the meeting, Council of State secretary Homero Acosta Álvarez presented a report to Central Committee members, approved by the Political Bureau, on studies underway concerning a future reform of the Constitution, which must reflect the principal economic, social, and political changes made in accordance with agreements reached at the Party's 6th and 7th Congresses, and the objectives of the First National Conference - and at the same time reaffirm the irrevocable nature of our socialism and the leading role of the Party in Cuba society.

The reform will reflect experience gained by the Revolution over the years, particularly in the organisation and functioning of People's Power bodies and the exercise of fundamental rights by citizens. It will have as references our constitutional history, as well as similar processes in other countries.

Granma, March 27

INSIDE CUBA



Dedication and commitment, pillars of 'People's Power'

The country's new Provincial Assemblies of People's Power began their term in office March 25, and have elected their presidents and vice presidents

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, first vice president of Cuba's Councils of State and Ministers, attended the constitution

of Villa Clara's Provincial, and noted to the press that he had observed much humility and commitment among the delegates elected and their leadership, saying that the process had been transparent and serious.

When you live moments like this one, he said, and see the way delegates defend candidates for President and Vice President, that they are persons who have come from among the people and are committed to their aspirations, you feel great pride in being Cuban and working for the Revolution, commented Díaz-Canel, also a member of the Party Political Bureau, adding that the event was evidence of the legitimacy of our democratic system.

He also stated that the coming period will be challenging for the new Assemblies and for the Cuban people, given the complex international conjuncture existent, which has a strong impact on the country's life. Given these challenges, he said, we must all come together and make the contribution we can.

During the constitution of the Havana Provincial Assembly's 12th legislature, Mercedes López Acea, first Party secretary in the capital and a Council of State vice president, said that the Assembly is charged with serving for a period during which the Revolution demands the best from every Cuban. That is why, she commented, every day this collective will assume the responsibility of directing, supervising, and demanding that continuing progress is made toward the construction of socialism, in an efficient and sustainable fashion.

"Let us make Havana a more beautiful, orderly, clean city. With our effort and attitudes on a daily basis, we will work tirelessly to rise to the occasion and fulfill the responsibility assigned us by the people," said Reinaldo García Zapata, reelected as President of the capital's Provincial Assembly. The session was also attended by Esteban Lazo Hernández, Political Bureau member and President of the National Assembly of People's Power.

During the constitution of Pinar del Río's Assembly, Gladys Martínez Verdecia, Party first secretary in the province, indicated that this general election's results demonstrate the virtues of a patriotic people, who know very well what their vote means

Cubans, she added, with the strength of our unity have confirmed that we are proud of the great work we have constructed, and intend to perfect it, following the teachings of our national hero José Martí, and of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Martínez Verdecia congratulated the candidature and electoral commissions, members of polling centre boards, the Ministry of Interior's identification and registry offices, and local People's Power bodies, for the work done to ensure the quality and transparency of the elections.

In Santiago de Cuba, the people's mandate was deposited for the first time in the hands of women. Beatriz Johnson Urrutia, a Party Central Committee member elected as President of the Provincial Assembly, said that the confidence shown in her and Vice President Odesa Méndez Medina is an indication of the conquests of the Revolution, ensuring opportunities for women.

Lázaro Expósito Canto, first secretary of the Party in Santiago and also a Central Committee member, called on all to work in unity with the people and remain loyal to the historic leadership of the Revolution.

HOW ARE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES OF PEOPLE'S POWER CONSTITUTED?

Within 15 days following the election of delegates to Provincial Assemblies of People's Power, on a date indicated by the Council of State, at a site determined by the exiting Provincial Assembly, new members meet on their own right, with their respective certificates of election in hand.

This session is opened under the leadership of the President of the Provincial Electoral Commission, and in order to be held, more than half of the delegates must be present. The Commission President reports the social composition of the Assembly and verifies that a quorum is present.

The validity of the delegates' election is declared and the National Anthem intoned. Immediately thereafter, with the delegates standing, a delegate designated by the Electoral Commission President reads the oath, which is ratified by all delegates. The Commission President invites delegates to sign the oath and then declares the Assembly constituted.

WHAT DO THE DELEGATES SWEAR IN THEIR OATH?

1-Remain loyal to the homeland. Respect and ensure respect for the Constitution, the law, and other legal norms.

2- Conduct themselves as a loyal servant of the people and the community, to whose control they are subject.

3- Fulfill the obligations expected of them in accordance with the office to which they were elected.

4- If they, in any way, fail to abide by this oath, those who elected them may demand that they do so.

HOW ARE THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT ELECTED?

Once the Provincial Assembly of People's Power is constituted, its President and Vice President are elected by the delegates, in a secret ballot vote. The proposed candidature includes the two nominated individuals, selected from among the Assembly's own delegates.

The proposed candidature is presented by the President of the Provincial Candidature Commission, who explains the criteria taken into consideration by this body. Next, the Commission President asks delegates if they would like to replace one or both of the nominations proposed. Replacement of either individual included in the candidature can only be accomplished with a favorable vote of more than a half of the delegates present.

The vote count is conducted by the Electoral Commission. Its President announces the results and declares the President and Vice President elected, if they obtain more than 50% of the valid votes cast. In case of a tie, a new election is conducted.

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORITIES OF PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES OF PEOPLE'S POWER?

- Abide by and enforce the law and all dispositions of a general nature adopted by higher state bodies.
- Approve and supervise the economic plan and ordinary budget of the province's income and expenses, in accordance with policies adopted by relevant national bodies.
- Elect and recall the President and Vice President of the Assembly.
- Designate and replace the Assembly Secretary.
- Participate in the elaboration and supervision of the budget and the state economic plan's implementation, as related to entities located in the province and subordinated to other authorities, according to the law.
- Direct and supervise the work of the province's administration, through its working commissions.
- Designate and replace members of the provincial administrative body, as proposed by its President.
- In accordance with principles established by the Council of Ministers, determine the organisation, functioning, and tasks of entities charged with carrying out activities in the economic, productive, service, educational, healthcare, cultural, sporting, environmental, and recreational arenas, subordinated to the provincial administration.
- Adopt agreements on administrative issues related to territorial demarcation, which according to law are not the responsibility of Central State Administration or municipal government bodies.
- Approve the creation and organization of People's Councils as proposed by Municipal Assemblies of People's Power.
- Within the framework of its authority, revoke decisions adopted by the province's administration body; or propose revocations to the Council of Ministers, when such decisions have been made on the basis of authority granted by Central State Administration bodies.

Granma, March 29

Vietnamese Party's leader accomplished extensive program in Cuba

The Secretary General of the Communist Party of Vietnam (PCV), Nguyen Phu Trong, made a state visit to Cuba last week during which he fulfilled an extensive program and spoke with the highest authorities of the country.

One of the first activities of the party leader was a tribute to the National Hero of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, in a monument erected in his honor last Wednesday in Havana.



On Thursday, Nguyen Phu Trong met with Cuban President Raúl Castro, who reviewed the state of bilateral relations and agreed to strengthen them. In addition, both attended the signing of nine agreements to strengthen government and business cooperation, which complemented others signed by officials of the two countries earlier in the same day.

Immediately afterward, the secretary general of the PCV deco-

rated Raúl Castro with the Golden Star Order, the highest distinction in Vietnam. After receiving the order, the Antillean president highlighted the ties between both nations. 'The close friendship between Cuba and Vietnam has passed the test of time,' he said.

Prior to the meeting, Nguyen Phu Trong paid homage to the National Hero of Cuba, José Martí (1853-1895), in the memorial that bears the name of the independence leader.

Earlier on Thursday, he talked to the island's parliament president, Esteban Lazo, participated in the closing of a forum of the communist youth of both nations and visited the Vo Thi Thang primary school in the capital, where he made a donation of resources and acknowledged Cuba's achievements in education.

He also received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa in Political Sciences from the University of Havana, in whose Aula Magna he gave a lecture.

The day before, the secretary general of the PCV traveled with President Raúl Castro to the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, where he paid tribute to the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro at the Santa Efigenia Cemetery. He also placed a wreath in that cemetery to José Martí.

Cuba and Vietnam established diplomatic relations in 1960, both of which are qualified as excellent links and enshrined in the common goal of promoting socialism and sustainable development.

Prensa Latina, March 31



Cuba deplores expulsion of Russian diplomats from the U.S. and other nations

The Cuban government on Wednesday expressed concern about the expulsion of a "large group" of Russian diplomats by dozens of Western countries, saying it may "threaten international stability."

In a statement, the press and communication director of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Alejandro Gonzalez, said these unilateral measures taken by Washington and other NATO member countries "are not responsive to dialogue, understanding and cooperation that should prevail in international relations.

"Cuba believes that cooperation should prevail over confrontation and rejects the application of unilateral measures that undermine international stability," Gonzalez said.

He added that these actions were even without waiting for the result of an impartial investigation into the attack of Russian ex-spy Sergei Skripal.

Former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal, aged 66, and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious on a bench outside a shopping centre in Britain's southwestern city of Salisbury on March 4.

Britain claims they were exposed to a nerve agent and holds Russia responsible, while the Russian government has denied any involvement in it.

Following the incident, Britain expelled 23 Russian diplomats, with Moscow expelling an equal number of British diplomats in response.

Earlier this week, the United States announced the expulsion of 60 Russian diplomats and intelligence officials, as well as the closure of the consulate in Seattle, a northwestern city of the United States.

Meanwhile, Canada, Australia and up to 16 countries of the European Union have expelled Russian citizens and diplomats from their territories.

CubaSí, March 29

Vietnam-Cuba entrepreneurial forum in Havana

Cuban and Vietnamese entrepreneurs are meeting in Havana to consider new joint business opportunities, in the context of an official visit here by the general secretary of Vietnam's Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong.

According to the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, the meeting will include the signing of several documents after a presentation by the Cuban side of the portfolio of business opportunities in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and industry.



The Vietnamese visitors will make presentations about companies like Tin Thanh, Hanel, Viglacera, Viet-Jet Air and Thai Binh, this latest one with a project underway at the Cuban Mariel Special Development Zone to build a plant producing disposable diapers.

Vietnam is Cuba's second largest trade partner in Asia and Oceania and the major supplier of rice for the Cuban people.

In statements to this agency, Vietnamese ambassador to Havana Nguyen Trung Thanh stressed the negotiation of new bilateral trade accord which will favor the increase of bilateral exchange up to 500 million dollars by the year 2020.

The ambassador announced that during the visit here by the top Communist Vietnamese leader both sides will sign some 20 accords and memos of understanding in areas like the food industry, renewable energy, science and technology and construction materials.

ACN, March 29

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Cuban and British officials put last touches to FitCuba 2018

Cuban and British officials put the last touches on Santa Maria Key (north-central coastline) to the International Tourism Fair (FitCuba 2018), which will have as guest of honour the United Kingdom.



As part of the organisation check-ups there is a meeting in #CayoSantaMaria with British diplomats of the Embassy in Havana, attending to the details related to the country guest of honour to the event, says Janet Ayala, director of Communication of the Cuban Ministry of Tourism.

The #SercotelExperienceCayoSantaMaría recently inaugurated welcomes us with a careful service, she stresses.

Ayala also highlights the tour made by the new hotel La Salinas Plaza & SPA opening today and the Iberostar Ensenachos.

Also, it shares labels such as #CubaTravel and #CubaDestinoSeguro, together with images of the tour of the facilities.

From May 2 thru 6 will be open the 38th edition of FitCuba, dedicated to the promotion of the sun-beach product.

The Fair is considered the most important event of the smokeless industry in the Caribbean island which has positioned through this event to position the country worldwide as tourism destination.

Key Santa Maria is an island of 21.4 square kilometres (63.8 percent of it is emerged land and the rest marshes and swamps with mangle forests).

It is internationally known for its natural environment and the existence of numerous high-standard hotels. Together with its similar Ensenachos, Las Brujas, Frances and Cobos, among many others (about 500), it is part of the isle subsystem of Cayos de la Herradura (Horseshoe Keys) of which Santa Maria is the most important biologically and in surface.

It is connected to the island of Cuba together with Las Brujas, Ensenachos, Maja and Español de Adentro in the surroundings of Caibarien by a stone road 48 kilometers long.

CubaSí, March 31

INTERNATIONAL TRADE



Cuba hosts construction trade fair

The 12th International Construction Fair, FECONS 2018, will be an important specialised commercial showcase and an ideal space for exchanges between entrepreneurs and exhibitors, said the Ministry of Construction (MICONS) and being held from April 3 to 6 at PABEXPO exhibition site, under the slogan 'For better performance and the sustainability of our development'.

MICONS first deputy minister, Angel Vilaragut, explained that among the objectives are to analyse access to new technologies to increase efficiency in designs, constructions and the production of materials through the use of renewable energy sources and rationality.

It also seeks to encourage the construction of works in tune with the needs of the country, and expand exports of goods and services as one of the resources for the injection of foreign currency to the national economy, he remarked.

The biannual meeting involves 25 countries, among them, the most represented nations are Spain, Italy and Cuba and others such as Hungary, Brazil, Panama, Mexico and the United States, Vilaragut said.

About 148 companies will occupy an area that exceeds 4,000 square metres.

Parallel to FECONS 2018 will be the 12th Scientific-Technical Conference, an intellectual space that will delve into constructive solutions against extreme weather events and climate change.

Prensa Latina, March 30

Arts from Cuba in DC — a one-of-its-kind event

Washington D.C. will host the Arts from Cuba Cultural event May 8 to June 3 at the Kennedy Centre with the participation of some 400 Cuban artists in the fields of music, dance, visual arts, movie and theatre.

For renowned pianist Ernan Lopez-Nussa the event will mark a historic landmark bridging relations between both nations.

In statements to PL news agency, the pianist said the Cuban artists will be ambassadors of culture to pave the way for understanding between the two neighbor nations.

Lopez Nussa will offer a series of his works including Latin American and Jazz music.

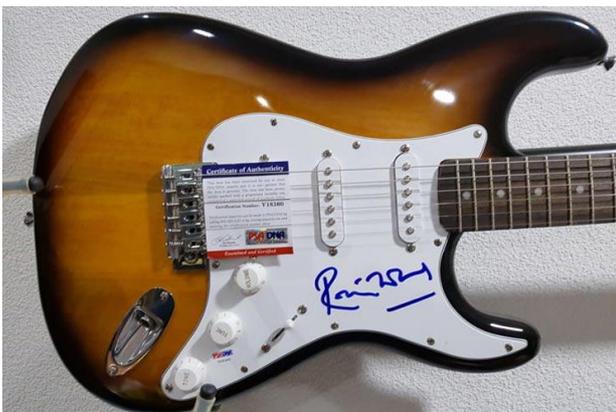
The Cuban delegation is expected to travel through Mexico in order to apply for visas at the US embassy in that country as stipulated by new measures imposed by Washington on Cubans who want to travel to the US, who can no longer do it at the American embassy in Havana.

It's a real shame to use resources and time to make a visit that could be resolved in Havana, where the US has an embassy, the pianist said.

Arts from Cuba event will include artists like Omara Portuondo, the Los Van Van band, Haydee and Pablo Milanés, the Cuban National Ballet, theatre companies, among many others who will take the island cultural expressions to the US people. Cuban artists residing abroad will also join the delegation.



ACN, March 29



Foreign participants confirmed at Cuban guitar contest

At least 15 musicians from different countries will participate from April 22 to 29 at the 15th Festival and the International Guitar Competition of Havana, the organisers of the event confirmed today.

The event will be attended by guitarists younger than 35 years from

Spain, Poland, Romania, Costa Rica, and the host country, Madelaine Masses, director of the National Concert Music Centre, told the press.

The contestants will have to present a demanding program by heart, which must include for the first round a work composed by a recognised Cuban musician, a piece from the Baroque period or movement of it, and a virtuoso study of any author or era.

For the second round, the candidates must perform in no more than 30 minutes a large sonata, of any era, style, and country, as well as one or several scores by any Latin American composer until completing the established time of a minimum of 25 minutes.

Those who reach the third round will have to perform the concert, in Re op 99 for guitar and orchestra by the Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

The three prizes of the contest grant the recording rights of the second and third rounds by the record company Producciones Colibrí, and the first place, in addition, will share a concert with the National Symphony Orchestra.

Prensa Latina, March 30

INTERNATIONAL SPORT



Cuba elected vice-chair of UNESCO anti-doping team

Cuba has been elected to vice-chair an anti-doping team with the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization in what was considered an acknowledgement of the good results of the island in this area.

Cuban Sports Medicine official Victor Cabrera told PL news agency that Cuba, Morocco and another three countries make up the specialised

team in charge of this important issue for the practice of sports around the world. Cabrera took part at a meeting this week at the Paris-based UNESCO office on the issue, which was also attended by the International Olympic Committee and the World Anti-doping Agency.

The expert stressed Cuba's outstanding work in meeting the International Anti-doping Convention, since "for us this does not only concern a single sports federation or association, because it is a state issue," he noted.

Cuba implements a preventive and educative approach to the issue, based on educating athletes and the people so that they do not fall in such trap, the expert explained and went on to say that the fight against doping goes beyond sports, it also concerns all the people.

ACN, March 29

Text edited by David Reade (www.netmedianz.com), on behalf of the Cuban Embassy, Wellington, from Cuban news agency sources.

Embassy of Cuba in New Zealand

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