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It's been awhile since the last time I wrote. But I believe now is the best time to get back to it, with the future looking both exciting and uncertain. Geopolitics, technology, climate change, national security and economics are all rapidly changing. I'd be remiss in my duties if I didn't start writing again.

UN NEWS

War-driven energy price spikes highlight value of renewables: UN climate chief
By: Vladimir Filonov

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

BBC

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El Niño and La Niña are among the most important natural weather patterns on Earth, and can affect temperatures and rainfall around the world.

La Niña conditions are present at the moment, according to US science agency Noaa, but El Niño is expected to develop later in 2026.

What are El Niño and La Niña?
El Niño and La Niña are the two opposite states of a natural climate phenomenon called the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

El Niño and La Niña occur in the Pacific but can affect weather systems across the world.

The two states are often identified by sea surface temperatures in the tropical eastern and central Pacific Ocean. During El Niño, these waters are warmer; during La Niña, they are cooler.

The phases can also be distinguished by differences in atmospheric pressure. During El Niño, pressure is above normal at Darwin, Australia (western Pacific) and below normal at Tahiti, French Polynesia (central Pacific). For La Niña, the opposite is true.

In "neutral" conditions - neither El Niño nor La Niña - surface water in the Pacific Ocean is cooler in the east and warmer in the west.

Trade winds tend to blow east-to-west, and heat from the Sun progressively warms the waters as they move in this direction.

During El Niño, these winds weaken or reverse, sending warm surface waters eastwards instead.

In La Niña periods, the normal east-to-west winds become stronger, pushing warmer waters further west.

This causes cold water to rise up - or "upwell" - from the depths of the ocean, meaning sea surface temperatures are cooler than usual in the east Pacific.

The phenomenon was first observed by Peruvian fisherman in the 1600s, who noticed that warm waters seemed to peak near the Americas in December.

They nicknamed it "El Niño de Navidad" - Christ Child in Spanish.

How do El Niño and La Niña change the weather and environment?
Not every event is the same, and the consequences vary between regions and times of the year.

However, scientists have observed some common effects.

Temperatures

Global temperatures typically increase during El Niño, and fall during La Niña.

El Niño means warmer water spreads further, and stays closer to the surface. This releases more heat into the atmosphere, creating wetter and warmer air.

But the regional effects are complicated, and some places may be both warmer and cooler than expected at different points in the year.

The hottest year on record, 2024, was boosted by El Niño conditions, on top of long-term human-caused climate change.

The maps below show some typical effects, but they may only be true for parts of the year.

The way the two systems affect UK temperatures is complicated, and can vary.

But El Niño may increase the chance of a mild start and cold end to UK winter, according to the Met Office, whereas La Niña can make a colder start and mild end to UK winter more likely.

Changes to rainfall

During El Niño, the warmer water pushes the Pacific jet stream's strong air currents further to the south and the east.

This brings wetter weather to southern United States and the Gulf of Mexico.

Tropical regions like southeast Asia, Australia and central Africa typically experience drier conditions.

La Niña typically brings wetter conditions to parts of Australia, Indonesia and equatorial South America, and drier conditions to the southern United States.

Tropical storms

El Niño tends to bring more tropical storms in the tropical Pacific, but fewer in the tropical Atlantic, including the south-east US.

During La Niña, the reverse is typically true.

Carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels

Scientists have also observed that CO_2 levels in the atmosphere increase during El Niño events, possibly as a result of warmer and drier conditions in tropical regions.

If plants grow less quickly due to drought, they absorb less CO_2, while more wildfires in places like South Asia mean more CO_2 is released.

Why do the El Niño and La Niña climate patterns matter?
The extreme weather events worsened by El Niño and La Niña affect infrastructure, food and energy systems around the world.

For example, when less cold water comes to the surface off the west coast of South America during El Niño events, fewer nutrients rise from the bottom of the ocean.

That means there is less food available for marine species like squid and salmon, in turn reducing stocks for South American fishing communities.

The droughts and flooding caused by the extreme 2015-16 El Niño event affected the food security of more than 60 million people, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation.

Scientists have also found that El Niño episodes can reduce global economic growth.

How often do El Niño and La Niña episodes happen?
El Niño and La Niña episodes typically occur every two to seven years.

They usually last for nine to 12 months, although they can persist for longer, and they don't necessarily alternate.

The current La Niña episode began in mid-to-late 2024.

Is climate change affecting El Niño/La Niña?
In 2021, the UN's climate scientists, the IPCC, said the ENSO episodes that have occurred since 1950 are stronger than those observed between 1850 and 1950.

But it also said that tree rings and other historical evidence show there have been variations in the frequency and strength of these episodes since the 1400s.

The IPCC concluded there is no clear evidence that climate change has affected these events.

Some climate models suggest that El Niño episodes could become more frequent and more intense as a result of global warming, with greater swings between El Niño and La Niña.

But this is a complex and uncertain area of science and there is no clear consensus.

ECO BUSINESS

Saving seagrass meadows could protect the world's coastlines

By Sean Mowbray

Seagrass meadows might not catch the eye like coral reefs, but they play an important and often unsung role in coastal protection, particularly as climate change increasingly eats away at shorelines. Protecting and restoring seagrass meadows, experts say, is a key "nature-based solution" that can also soak up and store carbon.

Seagrasses reduce erosion and bind sediments with their roots, similar to how a forest stabilises soil, says Oscar Serrano Gras, a research fellow at the Blanes Center for Advanced Studies (CEAB) in Spain and Edith Cowan University in Australia. "They naturally have this capacity to protect the shoreline from erosion," he adds. That also means they are incredibly efficient at storing carbon dioxide.

Across the globe, the increasing strength and duration of storms, as well as their frequency, is chipping away at coastlines due to climate change. That's linked to flooding, damage to infrastructure, and potentially hazardous cliff falls. "The fact that we are losing this protection belt of seagrass along the shorelines also contributes to coastal erosion," Gras says.

Reducing waves, binding sediment

When seagrass meadows are healthy and abundant, they can form a belt along the coastline that helps slow down waves and reduce their height.

"Seagrass creates additional resistance to fluid motion, which reduces wave energy," says Heidi Nepf, professor of civil and environmental engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US "With lower wave energy reaching the shoreline, flooding and erosion can be reduced."

What's important is that seagrass are present in large, dense meadows. But size also matters, says Maike Paul, a senior scientist at Leibniz University Hannover in Germany. "Coastal protection really depends on the physical interaction of seagrass leaves with the water movement," she says. Larger, sturdier species reduce wave energy to a greater extent.

A species like the broad-leaved Neptune grass (Posidonia oceanica), for example, will slow waves more than, as the name suggests, dwarf eelgrass (Zostera noltii), which is rather "small and flimsy" by comparison, Paul adds.

Perhaps more important is their ability to stabilise sediments. By building up sediments, meadows can also counteract and lessen flooding to a degree. A paper in the journal Nature published in 2024 found that widespread loss of Neptune grass in the Mediterranean would lead to an extreme water level increase in some locations.

Though seagrass certainly plays some role in coastal protection, its extent has yet to be fully quantified by research for all species, Paul says. That means that engineered solutions are still required for coastal and storm protection. Simply relying on seagrass alone wouldn't be sufficient.

"We observe some sort of stabilisation," Paul says, but adds that further studies are required. "We don't have the measurements to back that up in a way that coastal protection agencies can actually work with that."

But seagrass provides so many other benefits and ecosystem services, she says, that ultimately makes it worth protecting and restoring. "It's not a superhero in a single one of them, but the combination of them all makes it a really valuable ecosystem," she says.

Nourishing and cleansing

On top of wave reduction and soil stabilisation, seagrasses harbour organisms that nourish and replenish beaches.

"Meadows are home to a plethora of organisms and heaps of them form calcareous shells," Gras says. "When they die, essentially, they leave sand behind."

He points to research that shows a single hectare of seagrass can produce several tons of calcareous sands per year, thanks to the life cycle of the marine organisms that it hosts. "This is food for the beach and the coastline," Gras says.

Having seagrass present can also benefit other ecosystems and habitats, experts say. Meadows act as filters and improve water quality by trapping sediment, reducing turbidity, and cleansing the water column of some pollutants.

Studies show that by trapping and accumulating pollutants (including microplastics, nutrients and heavy metals) seagrasses improve water quality. That can ultimately benefit coral reefs, which themselves play a large role in coastal protection. That's the case on the Great Barrier Reef off Australia, which continues to see large-scale losses of corals, says Will Hamill.

"Seagrasses play a really important role in supporting good water quality heading into the Great Barrier Reef," says Hamill, blue carbon director at the Great Barrier Reef Foundation in Queensland state. "That's the primary link between the two."

Turning up the heat

Across the globe, seagrass meadows are threatened and in decline. Since the 19th century, we have destroyed around 30 per cent of seagrass meadows. That's largely due to pollution from runoff and wastewater, coastal development and dredging. Today, climate change increasingly threatens seagrasses.

Though seagrass is often resilient, it's the combination of stressors that can lead to declines.

Shark Bay in Australia is a prominent example. Boasting one of the world's largest and most diverse seagrass ecosystems, it was struck by a devastatingly long marine heat wave during the Southern Hemisphere summer of 2010-2011 that hammered the meadows. That coincided with flooding that released nutrients into the bay, triggering an algal bloom that smothered the meadows.

"Anoxia [lack of oxygen] combined with the heat waves and stress caused a massive die-off of Posidonia in Shark Bay," Gras says.

More recently, another extensive heat wave off the state of Western Australia devasted meadows in Exmouth Gulf. That has had ripple effects that underline the importance of maintaining healthy seagrass meadows, experts say.

In Exmouth Gulf, two seagrass species favoured for foraging by dugongs were nearly wiped out, says Nicole Said, a research associate at Edith Cowan University. "How that's going to impact dugong going forward, we're not sure. I think we just have to wait and see," she says.

Meanwhile, in Shark Bay the loss of around 1,000 square kilometres (390 square miles) of meadows released an estimated 9 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

One study suggested that Neptune grass could die off in the coming decades due to climate change. But some seagrass species are proving tough. "The reality is that seagrass is resilient and has the capacity to adapt to change," Gras says.

Restoring what's lost

Efforts are underway to restore seagrass meadows around the world in an attempt to bring back their benefits to coastal areas. But returning meadows to their original state, or close to it, is a costly and long-term effort that is, unfortunately, beset with challenges.

"Sometimes you try exactly the same thing at the same location, and it works one time, but not the other time," says Fee Smulders, a marine ecologist at Wageningen Marine Research in the Netherlands. "Seagrass is really difficult to get back."

But experts say that doing so — and, even more so, protecting seagrass before it's lost — is important not only for its coastal protection role, but the numerous other "ecosystem services" it provides. Ultimately, whether the motivation is stabilising coastlines, providing habitat for marine biodiversity, or for its climate benefits, there are multiple reasons to both conserve and restore seagrass, Gras says.

But at the moment, seagrass restoration is a costly, labour-intensive job, Hamill says.

"The largest meadow we're working on is in Pelican banks [in Australia]. It's over 400 hectares [1,000 acres]," he adds, and that's largely dependent on volunteers and researchers planting

roughly 200 seeds per square meter, or about 19 seeds per square foot. “The trials are now at the scale of 1 hectare [2.5 acres] of active restoration within that meadow.”

Restoration projects are using multiple methods, from planting seed mats with adult plants to directly deploying seeds.

“Restoration with adult plants has higher rates of success, but it’s so much harder to do that on a really massive scale,” says Tadhg O Corcora, senior seagrass aquaculture technician at UK-based Ocean Conservation Trust. “There’s a lot of learning curves … We have very varying numbers in terms of germination rates once you plant them.”

To that end, conservationists are exploring new tools and methods to aid restoration and build resilience of meadows.

That ranges from using hydro marine seeding — directly planting seagrass into sediment using a caulk gun-like device — to building out automated robots to do that same job, which is undergoing trials on the Great Barrier Reef.

There’s also hope that meadows can be futureproofed against increasing temperatures. Research by Said’s team found that even within species, there are different heat tolerances.

“We’re trying to figure out how the thermal tolerance changes across species, how it changes across populations, across different locations,” Said says. “We can start to predict impacts before they actually occur, and where we should be focusing our conservation and management efforts.”

These findings suggest restoring seagrasses with those taken from a location with high heat tolerance could prove beneficial. “The idea is if we’re going to restore anyway, let’s choose those meadows that are more thermally resistant and use those for restoration efforts,” Said says.

Though that research has focused on temperate species, Said’s team is carrying out similar studies on tropical seagrass and believe it could prove to be a valuable tool in the restoration toolkit around the world.

“The framework can be deployed globally,” she says. “We are still seeing a lot of loss in seagrass and large-scale mortality worldwide from climate impacts. I think there’s definitely a need for these proactive interventions.”

MIRAGE NEWS

Climate Change Hits Japanese Chum Salmon Numbers

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Today, most of the salmon consumed in Japan is imported from countries like Chile and Norway, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. But just two decades ago, Japanese chum salmon made up a much larger share of domestic salmon consumption. Their numbers have declined sharply in recent years, and new research from Hokkaido University suggests that this decline may be linked to the loss of their natural habitats along their migratory routes.

In findings first published in December 2025 in Scientific Reports, researchers show that marine conditions in the North Pacific have significantly reduced suitable habitat for Japanese chum salmon over the past 25 years.

Known in Japan simply as "shirozake," or salmon, chum salmon can be recognized by their faint vertical stripes and silvery sides. "Nowadays, they are almost entirely born in hatcheries across Japan," explains Assistant Professor Irene D. Alabia. "Each autumn, fishery workers collect eggs and sperm from returning adult salmon, and the fertilized eggs are carefully reared under controlled conditions. By early spring, juvenile salmon, or fry, are ready to be released into rivers."

Roughly 140 rivers across Hokkaido and nearby regions release about one billion juvenile chum salmon each year. From there, the fish migrate along the Pacific coast into the North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea, where they grow for several years before some return to their birthplace to spawn.

Researchers from the Arctic Research Center at Hokkaido University found that suitable marine habitats for chum salmon have shifted significantly over the past 25 years. By analyzing publicly available data and environmental records from 1998 to 2022, the team developed models showing how suitable habitats for Japanese chum salmon have changed.

"The results show that changing ocean conditions have altered where chum salmon can thrive. Suitable habitats have declined overall due to ocean warming, reduced zooplankton which are an important food source, and increasingly frequent marine heatwaves," notes Alabia. "Our results show broad-scale habitat loss in the North Pacific for chum salmon."

At the same time, the fish are moving northward, expanding into higher-latitude waters toward the Chukchi Sea as they lose suitable habitats along the southern edge of the North Pacific and the Gulf of Alaska. This "poleward shift" suggests that climate change is reshaping the marine environment on which chum salmon depend. This habitat loss coincides with the recent decline in Japanese chum salmon populations.

Marine ecosystems are particularly sensitive to climate change. Rising ocean temperatures, altered food webs, and extreme heat events are reshaping species distributions worldwide.

"Tracking the redistribution of chum salmon habitats is crucial for conserving the declining salmon resources," Alabia notes. Even intensive hatchery programs may not be enough to offset large-scale environmental change. As the North Pacific continues to warm, the future of Japanese chum salmon may depend on how quickly fisheries management and conservation strategies adapt to a rapidly changing ocean.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

UN exec: War-driven energy price spikes highlight value of renewables

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Speaking at the 2026 Green Growth Summit in Brussels, Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said the volatility underscored the strategic value of renewable energy.

"Renewables turn the tables," he said during a keynote address to the event, which brings together European climate and environment ministers alongside businesses, investors and other key stakeholders.

"Sunlight doesn't depend on narrow and vulnerable shipping straits, wind blows without massive taxpayer-funded naval escorts [and] renewable energy allows countries to insulate themselves from global turmoil and to side-step might-is-right politics."

Indeed, renewable energy also delivers on people's top priorities across the continent: security, well-paid jobs, better health and relief from rising living costs, he added.

"Fossil fuel dependency is ripping away national security and sovereignty and replacing it with subservience and rising costs," he said, adding that the reality is what most voters are demanding, climate action delivers at scale.

"Renewables and resilience keep bills down and create far more jobs," he said.

"Cutting out fossil fuel pollution cleans our air, improving health and quality of life."

"Some responses to the fossil fuel crisis, incredibly, argue for doubling down on the cause of the problem and slowing the shift to renewable energy even though it is clearly cheaper, safer, and faster to market," he said.

"This is completely delusional because history tells us, this fossil fuel crisis will happen again and again," Steill said, adding that fossil fuel dependency means economies, household budgets and business bottom lines are "at the mercy of geopolitical shocks and price volatility in a chaotic world".

His message to ministers meeting in Brussels was simple: Meek dependence on fossil fuel imports will leave Europe forever lurching from crisis to crisis, with households and industries literally paying the price.

The UNFCC chief noted the bloc is more reliant on fossil fuel imports than almost any other major economy, which cost the continent over €420 billion in 2024 alone.

Pointing out that in 2025, renewables overtook coal as the world's top electricity source, and over USD2 trillion was invested in clean energy – double that of fossil fuels – he said "the opportunities are immense."

As a leader in climate action and ambition, Europe's efforts, including its Emissions Trading Scheme, is driving investment and innovation, with the continent's companies at the forefront of clean industries and growth.

That includes SSAB, Maersk and Holcim, which are leaders on green steel, shipping and cement, and Siemens, Schneider and IPS, which are pioneers in wind power, energy storage and electro-tech services.

"Europe can permanently seize the multi-trillion-euro goldmine of investment that's just getting started by embracing green growth, drawing on your many strengths, [including] education, strong institutions, smart regulation, social justice and innovation and intellectual property, and by backing it up with plans and policies."

Last century, when a continent reeling from war came together to build the foundations of integration, energy was top of the list because countries understood that secure and affordable supplies, achieved through cooperation, were the basis of peace and prosperity, he said.

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AI and the future of employment: Is the Philippines ready?

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It's been awhile since the last time I wrote. But I believe now is the best time to get back to it, with the future looking both exciting and uncertain. Geopolitics, technology, climate change, national security and economics are all rapidly changing. I'd be remiss in my duties if I didn't start writing again.

The simple answer to the question of my column is no, we aren't ready. But it's a bit more complicated than that. I'm not here to point fingers. I'd rather try and share the problem and offer solutions. There are many moving parts, but it's not too late.

Let's face the facts: there's no national artificial intelligence (AI) policy framework, no workforce transition program and no full-on national AI adoption plan in our educational system.

I'm here to offer a stern warning: if we don't lay the digital foundation today, our young people will suffer the consequences – impending job loss, lack of competitiveness and the disruption of our economy as we know it.

Recently, I came across the policy brief that was published by the International Labor Organization (ILO) on generative AI (GenAI) and jobs in the Philippines sometime last month. It focused mostly on Philippine labor market exposure and policy implications and how the adoption of AI can impact the information technology-business process management (IT-BPM) sector.

The policy brief notes that around 12.7 million jobs, which is more than a quarter of employment here, is exposed to GenAI. This is the highest rate among ASEAN countries. The ILO remains confident that GenAI exposure does not necessarily imply full job replacement, but rather the automation of certain tasks within occupations. Research shows that only 3.6 percent of jobs fall into the highest GenAI exposure category. The ILO believes that the primary impact of GenAI on the Philippine labor market will be the transformation of existing jobs, productivity gains and improvements in employment quality.

The policy brief aligns with issues discussed during the recent hearing of the committee on economic affairs. During the hearing, I raised concerns regarding how the continuous rise of AI could affect our IT-BPM industry. The Philippines has been considered as one of the largest global business process outsourcing (BPO) and IT-BPM service providers for the past two decades. In 2024 alone, the IT-BPM industry consisted of 1.8 million workers, which represented 3.8 percent of the total employment of the country and generated revenues equivalent to 8.2 percent of GDP.

A major concern is the potential impact on women and the youth. These groups often depend on the BPO sector as a key source of entry-level employment. Research findings suggest that GenAI exposure, either by job transformation or job displacement, is likely to affect women more. Occupations usually held by women have higher exposure rates that those held by men. Three out of five clerical support workers and/or service and sales workers are women; more than half of technicians and associate professionals are also women. As for the youth in general, the exposure rate is slightly lower than those of adults. However, approximately 217,200 jobs, or 4.2 percent of all jobs filled by young workers, were identified as higher-risk of GenAI-induced automation.

However, we can still prepare for this transition by urgently investing in upskilling, technical education and digital training programs; these will help them adapt and move into higher-value roles. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has acknowledged that some Filipino workers are already experiencing job displacement linked to automation. Some KPO and BPO firms, including Botkeeper and Atlassian, have reportedly shut down operations, though the companies have not indicated that these closures were entirely attributable to AI.

The potential economic consequences of a significant decline in the IT-BPM industry cannot be overlooked. In 2024 alone, the sector generated revenues equivalent to 8.2 percent of GDP. While the data for 2025 is still being finalized, the IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP) has reported that the industry generated over $40 billion in revenue. Beyond direct employment, the IT-BPM industry remains a major source of export earnings and supports millions of additional jobs across related sectors such as transportation, food services, retail and real estate.

To address these challenges, several measures should be considered:

1. Proactive Infrastructure & Policy Adjustments. The government should remodel and/or modernize existing infrastructure and invest further in digital infrastructure. A big part of this would be the National Broadband Plan, common towers for greater connectivity, free WiFi program of the government and leadership of the DICT.

2. Revisit existing laws and policies governing education, workforce development and the digital economy. We must assess whether current initiatives – such as the National AI Strategy Roadmap, the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act and the Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness Act – are sufficient to address the changes shaping the labor market if they are actually implemented.

3. Promote stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors. Let’s develop relevant training programs, expand reskilling opportunities and identify areas for upskilling with the help of industry leaders, educational institutions and technology companies. This industry created millions of jobs and billions in revenue through the years. The least government can do is help the industry transition or become more competitive. TESDA and DOLE will be key players here.

I know that TESDA Secretary Kiko Benitez shares these concerns and is already trying his best to plan for the future. We should support him in his efforts to upskill/reskill our workforce.

For now, just by understanding how artificial intelligence will reshape the labor market, we can adapt and adjust our strategies. We must not abandon our workforce. We must ensure they thrive so we can claim our place in this new digital era.

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Fossil fuel dependency

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Destined to repeat
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‘Immense’ opportunities

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As a leader in climate action and ambition, Europe’s efforts, including its Emissions Trading Scheme, is driving investment and innovation, with the continent’s companies at the forefront of clean industries and growth.

That includes SSAB, Maersk and Holcim, which are leaders on green steel, shipping and cement, and Siemens, Schneider and IPS, which are pioneers in wind power, energy storage and electro-tech services.

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“Europe can permanently seize the multi-trillion-euro goldmine of investment that’s just getting started by embracing green growth, drawing on your many strengths, [including] education, strong institutions, smart regulation, social justice and innovation and intellectual property, and by backing it up with plans and policies.”

Last century, when a continent reeling from war came together to build the foundations of integration, energy was top of the list because countries understood that secure and affordable supplies, achieved through cooperation, were the basis of peace and prosperity, he said.

“Today, these truths are more important than ever,” he said.

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