



E-ISSN: 2664-603X  
P-ISSN: 2664-6021  
IJPSG 2023; 5(2): 138-143  
[www.journalofpoliticalscience.com](http://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com)  
Received: 22-07-2023  
Accepted: 26-08-2023

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## India and ASEAN: Acting east to pursue new prospects in the age of globalisation

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2023.v5.i2b.269>

### Abstract

The changing geopolitical landscape of the world today presents both new problems and possibilities for all nations. Global actors are reviving up their foreign policy to meet these challenges and take full advantage of the possibilities that present themselves. In this age of globalisation, India is also strengthening its relations with other countries and multilateral regional organisations like the EU, BRICs, African Union, and ASEAN, among others. The MGC, BIMSTEC, and the Association for the Rim of the Indian Ocean are other regional organisations where India has assumed a leadership position. A fundamental concern associated with these platforms is how our country manages and regulates its link with other significant power centres in this globalised era. Therefore, we are offering a very systematic strategy in this era of global multilateral cooperation.

**Keywords:** Strategic partnership, look east policy, Southeast Asia, globalisation, act east connectivity, ASEAN

### Introduction

There can be no friendship without self-interests of the nations, which is a harsh fact. Even in times of peace, allies may change into enemies and foes can convert into allies because nations always act in their political, economic, and military self-interest. The renowned global diplomats Sun-Tzu, Machiavelli, and Kautilya are all mentioned. They said that neither our allies nor adversaries are permanent, but what our national interest is. What then is in the national interest? To protect our borders, we must boost our armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force). China and Italy discuss the more practical method of carrying out foreign policy. As we go forward, we draw lessons from our past. We too applied Kautilya's theory of state in his Manuscript Arthashastra, which he dubbed the Mandala Theory. He uses a circle to illustrate how states relate to one another. After a friendly state, a hostile state (China, an ally of the adversary Pakistan) followed by a friendly state-today's Southeast Asian states-arrived. Last but not least, our distant neighbours-the United States, Russia, South Africa, and so on-might serve as our impartial friends. The Saptang hypothesis, which concludes the first theory. In the second theory, he emphasises that Mitra, which is Sanskrit for "friend," is the most crucial element among the seven state organs. It is now apparent how applicable his circle theory is to the current state of the world. According to these two fundamental notions, every country may retain its relations. When these theories are put into practise, the effectiveness of our planning and policies will unquestionably decide how well the nation accomplishes its fundamental strategic goals and ambitions, which are in both our national and international interests. In addition, the improvement in US-Indian relations following years of neglect, and lastly India's links with Southeast Asian nations as Mitra Countries. President Bill Clinton of the United States visited India in March 2000, and as a consequence, New Delhi's geostrategic and international economic connections were realigned<sup>[1]</sup>. The rise of the Bush administration, the decision to withdraw the nuclear restrictions against Pokhran II, the 1998 nuclear bombing, and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, gave New Delhi and Washington the chance to fulfil the promise of their supposed "natural alliance." This new relationship with the United States also made it possible to forge stronger, more extended security and political ties with American allies in the region.

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Indo-US relations. Second, the strengthening of ties between China and India continues to be a key factor. The primary driver behind New Delhi's engagement with the ASEAN nations is China's admission into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, its ability to influence foreign direct investment (FDI), and its strategic and political influence in the region. When Vajpayee, the then-prime minister of India, visited China on June 23-24, 2003, it signalled the beginning of a new era in China-India relations and a major step in the expansion of their mutually beneficial collaboration. The Indian Prime Minister has revived interest in India's Look East strategy due to the aforementioned reasons. The Indian Prime Minister has revived interest in India's Look East strategy due to the aforementioned reasons. He travelled to various Southeast Asian nations in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, which provided evidence of this. During the same time period, other dignitaries from Southeast Asia returned these trips. It is evident that India wishes to re-look, revive, and re-accelerate its Look East strategy from the significant number of international dignitaries that have visited the country. Links with the region on many different levels were starting to play a big role in this approach. The "Look East policy" introduced during the India ASEAN summit in October 2003 represented a crucial turning point in India ASEAN ties.

As part of our "Nearby First" policy, we found ASEAN to be a strong ally and force for Asia. As a result, we have already accelerated the process of connecting with the Southeast Asian region through a number of governmental initiatives. China started to remerge as a worldwide force in Asia with the fall of the USSR. In comparison to India, the economies of South-East Asia and China were expanding far more quickly. On our side, the much-hyped regional economic integration in South Asia under the auspices of SAARC was failing, whilst ASEAN at India's doorstep was rising as a more powerful and effective regional trade bloc and economic community. The Indian economy was struggling at home. In order to become a significant participant in the changing balance of power in Asia, Looking East must expand its sphere of influence in Southeast Asia and cooperate on security issues. Joint efforts to safeguard sea passages and the pooling of resources in the fight against terrorism are part of this security cooperation. The programme has expanded to include political, military, and regional elements after beginning primarily as an economic endeavour. We need a cadre in the MEA that is primarily focused on the East. The Buddhist culture, which is related to Indian civilisation, must also be fostered. The maximisation of national interests should be the main goal of Indian Act East policy. There are still many options available that should be investigated. 2014 saw the transition of India's Look East strategy into an Act East policy, which calls for greater global engagement between the two growth poles of a dynamic Asia. The emphasis on fostering commercial ties with the ASEAN nations through this area of India has been done successfully. India's ability to examine its historical and cultural legacies in the Southeast Asian nations was swift liberalisation changes. The ASEAN nations are also aware that of all the great powers, India is the one that is closest to Southeast Asia's core. Through its north eastern region, India has shown its intent to take on a more strategic role in East and Southeast Asia.

### **India's foreign policy as "looking east to acting east".**

Our official adoption of the Look East strategy in 1991 increased our level of economic integration. Its goal was to rekindle the long-established cultural and economic ties between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and to take advantage of any synergies for both parties. Since its official start, "looking east" has come to symbolise India's foreign policy. From a sectoral partnership in 1992 to membership in the prominent strategic forum ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996 to India-ASEAN summits since 2002 to the 2009 India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, the conversation with ASEAN has advanced steadily <sup>[2]</sup>. We need to support the development of an Eastern Islam that is more liberal and secular. While some early observers believed that India's Look East Policy was not benefiting as much as it could. This was due to two factors: First, the late admission of four nations to ASEAN, namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Brunei (CLMB), and second, India's preference to focus on the developed economies of ASEAN members rather than to coordinate a policy of promoting better partnerships with the region's less developed nations (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Brunei) <sup>[3]</sup>. This disparity in priority was mostly caused by a few significant factors. The parallel approach of joining the ASEAN system through bilateral and sub-regional channels should be used by Indian diplomacy. Early in the 1990s, Brunei, Darussalam's lax participation in the ASEAN forum was a major factor in India's poor ties with that country. New Delhi primarily learned from the economic success stories of the Southeast Asian area in the early years of the Look East Policy. The 1997 financial crisis gave the tiger economies a shock, but most have recovered significantly from that terrible period and are once again on the high growth path. Internal ethnic unrest, unemployment, unequal income distribution, environmental damage, human rights abuses, civil war and genocide, food security, transnational crime, high-intensity conflicts, and an underdeveloped economic structure as a result of Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos' economic backwardness prevented India from forging stronger strategic and economic ties with these nations. Despite the fact that India and ASEAN nations exchanged several significant official visits. These bilateral meetings failed to result in any constructive outcomes that would demonstrate India's priority for the CLMB nations of Southeast Asia. India has improved relations with CLMB nations since late 2000 as a result of the Vientiane Declaration, which was signed in November 2000, against this background. India improved its ties to Southeast Asia's economically developed nations as a result of this participation. With the help of free trade agreements with ASEAN, India is hoping to further its economic integration under the "Look East" policy. In India's eyes, it signalled a "strategic Shift" that is now paying off in the shape of more political engagement, increased commerce, and progressively developing People-to-People relations amongst all the nations in the area. India has agreed to finalise a free trade deal and boost economic connections as part of its "Look East" Policy, which aims to deepen its involvement with ASEAN. India and ASEAN both agreed to create a list of goods that would be exempt from tariff reductions till 2022. It is anticipated that India will add 490 commodities to this list, including rubber and coconut, with a trade value that does not surpass 5% of the total. Additionally, ASEAN has its own sensitive list.

### Factors Influencing East Acting

The Look East policy is similar to the Act East policy. There is no political undertone to the name change. With the focus changing from the LEP to the Act East Policy (AEP), it restored attention to the ASEAN area. Renewal of political ties with ASEAN Partners should come first, followed by an expansion of economic cooperation (trade, investment, research, and technology, tourism, etc.). And third, to establish defence ties with ASEAN partners in order to advance political, strategic, and national objectives in light of post-cold war development. Improving maritime and air connections will be a significant priority area in the coming days.

### India Needs to Act East: Fast Facts

- To strengthen Neighbour First Policy of India.
- India would now be involving globally with not only ASEAN but Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and Australia. Opens up doors for chances to strengthen our relations to the most active region of the globe, namely East and Southeast Asia.
- Hopefully, it will develop a thorough and goal-oriented programme for the modern world.
- As a precaution to combat Chinese influence in this area.
- To align with the USA's goal of pivoting to Asia.

As a result, the "Act East" strategy has influenced how the nation interacts with its neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region, resulting in much stronger institutional, institutional, and security links. The primary goal of the plan, which was partly inspired by India's strategy for balancing China's influence, was to involve Southeast Asia diplomatically and economically. A new prosperity is expected to be unleashed in this region as a result of the Indian government's increased focus on promoting the economic development of India's north-eastern states, which serve as the country's gateway to ASEAN. Improving aviation and sea connections will be a top priority in the coming days. However, as India has shown its readiness to play a bigger strategic role in the area, the strategy has developed over time to incorporate wider security and defence relations throughout the whole Indo-Pacific [4].

### Acting East: The ability to investigate international networks

As Myanmar is India's "gateway to Southeast Asia," it has always played a vital role in India's foreign policy. Looking east is enough for now. 'Act East Policy' is now in place and is a crucial part of my government's foreign policy, Prime Minister Modi said the Indian diaspora at a gathering at Kyung Hee University in the South Korean capital. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi renamed the strategy as the "Act East" policy and stressed the need of additionally pursuing closer connections with allies like Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, and Australia. This was done because of the rapidly shifting security dynamics in the area. The narrative of "spiritual affinity" and "strong cultural and civilizational ties" between the two countries is frequently emphasised in the intellectual discourse on India-Japan relations since Japan is a key player in that country's "Act East" strategy and a potential participant in its "Make in India" project. In November 2007, Vietnam, India, and Vietnam raised their relationship to the status of a strategic alliance. The current Indian government has purposefully and quickly increased

its high-level interaction with Vietnam. When it comes to India's top bilateral trading partners, Vietnam comes in at number 29 in terms of economic ties. However, commerce between India and Vietnam has increased by more than thrice during the last five years. With a total registered capital of \$US252 million spread over 73 projects in 2013, Indian businesses are also starting to engage in Vietnam's oil and gas exploration, mineral exploration and processing, sugar production, agrochemicals, information technology, and agricultural processing sectors [5]. Given that Vietnam and India both use Russian defence equipment, there is a lot of room for cooperation in terms of training and knowledge transfer. In exchange for berthing privileges in Nha Trang, the Indian Navy allegedly gave the Vietnamese military facilities for training and capacity building in 2011. China is wary about India's expanding alliance with Vietnam, not the least of which is the possibility that it would push India into the South China Sea. The South China Sea oil exploration deal was signed by Vietnam and India's state-owned oil corporation ONGC Videsh Limited in October 2011. More recently, ONGC Videsh and Petro Vietnam inked a joint cooperation agreement on the exploration of multiple South China Sea oil blocks during the visit of Vietnamese Prime Minister Dung to India in October 2014 [6]. Australia, although there has historically been a lack of focus on the Australia-India relationship, both Delhi and Canberra now see the economic benefits of deeper relationships and the increasing convergence of their respective strategic objectives. Act East strategy has increased contact between Australia and India to a previously unheard-of degree and will keep a beneficial influence on bilateral relations. The two democracies in the Indian Ocean have a lot of room to grow their security cooperation, especially in the marine sector. In order to solidify and provide direction to their developing military and security relations, the two nations recently finalised a Framework for Security Cooperation in acknowledgement of this. Not surprise, the Modi administration has done all possible to support that claim. India favours a tranquil environment in Southeast Asia that will support solid political and security ties for the benefit of both countries in the twenty-first century. The three C's—Commerce, Culture, and Connectivity—are the three cornerstones of India's crucial relationship with ASEAN, and they will be the focus of new interactions in 2017.

### North East Region (NER) of India: As a Gateway to ASEAN

Geographically, we are connected by 1647 km of maritime and land borders with Thailand and Indonesia as well as ASEAN land borders with Myanmar. Myanmar and Thailand are really two of North East India's most significant neighbours in both ASEAN and India. Their connections are firmly anchored in history, culture, interpersonal relationships, and trade. Thailand intends to refocus its commercial and investment relations with India and the Indian North East as part of its Look West agenda. Additionally, Myanmar offers an alternative route to India via the Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project on the Kaladan River. The ASEAN nations are aware that of all the great powers, India is the one that is closest to Southeast Asia's core. Myanmar via Moreh (Manipur), which serves as India's "gateway to Southeast Asia," has traditionally played a vital role in India's foreign policy [7]. India's past inability to explore its physical proximity to ASEAN and its

historical and cultural ties to the area of Southeast Asia was caused by its glacial progress with economic reforms, project approvals, and project implementation. As a result, NER feels dependent, which raises questions between New Delhi and NER since some individuals have perceived Act East policy as dictating Indonisation. Through its northeaster area, India has recently shown its willingness to play a bigger strategic role in East and Southeast Asia. This gives the residents of NER reason to think that by establishing economic and strategic linkages with the bordering nations through AEP, the socioeconomic situation and political problems of the Northeast would improve. AEP is now firmly focused on developing commercial ties with ASEAN nations via India's northeast. With regard to the North East, the AEP of India also aims to promote the NER through increased commerce in goods, services, investments, tourism, and labour activity. However, it seems that there is a significant lag between the assertion and actualization of the desired result. So the main concern is finding a way to shorten this delay.

Road connectivity with the ASEAN region is similarly crucial for the advancement of the other two included cultures and economies as well as for the convenience of doing business with Southeast Asia. It continues to be the major focus of India-ASEAN relations. A number of international initiatives that aim to connect the area through a complex network of land, sea, and air routes have been spearheaded by India. The 'Act East' policy is anticipated to provide the infrastructure projects being implemented in northeaster and eastern India a boost. Moreh will be a key point of entry for the AH-1 and AH-2 Asian Highways, which will connect Mae Sot, Thailand, to Moreh, Manipur, through Mandalay, Myanmar. The trilateral India-Myanmar-Thailand highway deal is now under negotiation. The Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) will connect India with the Mekong countries-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam or CLMV-via Dawei and Bangkok after the different nodes, including Dawei, are constructed. The World War II-era Stilwell Road, which begins in Ledo, Assam, has several broken parts that need to be repaired. Once finished, it would offer a smooth travel route via cities in Myanmar between Ledo and Kunming (Yunnan Province, China). Similar to the old silk routes, this contemporary network facilitates commercial and cultural exchange between parts of the Asian continent and other parts of the world. Large portions of the eastern section of the Asian highway, which eventually aspires to connect Delhi and Hanoi, would have been completed by this road<sup>[8]</sup>. The Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo sector of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is about to be finished, and it is expected to bring about a new dynamic in India's multifaceted relationships with the area. The second significant Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project would link Sittwe Port in Myanmar with Lawngtlai in Mizoram, developing Sittwe Port and connecting it to the Calcutta Haldia Port. The Rih-Tiddim and Rih-Falam road projects are another initiative to improve border trade and communication with Myanmar. The Kolkata to Kunming Highway (K2K) is a key component of the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, which would connect the four nations. There is currently no rail connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia, but the Trans-Asian Railway will offer a rail connection between Delhi and Hanoi once the missing or connecting

lines are finished. There are also potential connections to new airports in Southeast Asia. All of this will alter how we view both our neighbourhood and the Northeastern regions of our nation. The scope and goals of Looking East have expanded to encompass all of Asia-Pacific as well as developing linkages with the area on the business, institutional, and defence fronts. In the future, the AH-1 will start from Tokyo (connected by ferry) and run through Seoul, Beijing, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom to Mae Sot, Yangon, Mandalay, Tamu, Moreh, Imphal, Kohima, Dimapur, Nagaon, Jorabat (Guwahati), Shillong, Dawki, Sylhet, Dhaka, Kolkata, Kanpur, New Delhi, Attari, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Kabul, Istanbul till the border of Bulgaria. The highway's northern section will be referred to as AH-2. As a result, the "Act East" strategy has influenced how the nation interacts with its neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region, resulting in much stronger institutional, institutional, and security links. The primary goal of the plan, which was partly inspired by India's strategy for balancing China's influence, was to involve Southeast Asia diplomatically and economically. A new prosperity is expected to be unleashed in this region as a result of the Indian government's increased focus on promoting the economic development of India's northeastern states, which serve as the country's entry point to ASEAN. Improving aviation and sea connections will be a top priority in the coming days. However, the strategy has expanded over time to incorporate deeper defence and security relationships throughout the whole Indo-Pacific, with India signalling its readiness to take on a more important role in the region.

A SWOC (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Challenges) study of the Act East Policy with regard to the northeastern regions of India and ASEAN is necessary in this situation.

### Strengths

- Shares borders with five different countries;
- Hosts the ASEAN-NER Business Summit;
- Hosts the Northeast Development Summit;
- Sponsors an endless number of initiatives on behalf of the Indian government.
- Young Population of English Speakers
- Invest Assam and Assam Advantage
- World-Class Institutions for Learning
- Connectivity, Commerce and Culture promotion is on progress

### Weakness

- Youth unemployment is high
- lack of trained employees for infrastructure projects
- illegal immigration
- Exorbitant Transportation Prices
- Law and order issues,
- political unrest,
- poor infrastructure,
- instability in border regions,
- trafficking in persons

### Opportunities

- Huge trade and investment opportunities. Integration with the world economy.
- Coordination between many functional areas, such as transport and communication, human resources

development, and research and technology

- Better bilateral and multilateral ties with South East Asian nations.
- In order to counter Chinese economic and military dominance in this area, connectivity has made positive progress.
- The ASEAN Region has developed its budget tourist industry and infrastructure.

### Challenges

- Indian activities in the ASEAN area are unstable due to China's highly ambitious plans for economic, financial, and military assistance to countries in South East and South Asia.
- Chinese plans to create OBOR and the String of Pearls.
- Chinese technology innovation that is aggressive in order to compete.
- Chinese maritime claims in the South China Sea.
- There is a lack of knowledge about North East India, its people, and its economy in the ASEAN area.
- Location in the world, regional uprisings
- Government efforts are moving slowly, which is holding up ongoing projects.

The parallels between ASEAN's Look West and India's Look East links show that both sides now recognise the need of implementing policies with the wider neighbourhood in the spirit of pragmatism and diplomacy. Even though India has signed several pacts, agreements, and free trade agreements with ASEAN nations, its track record for carrying out these agreements has been poor, as seen by the CECA with Singapore and the follow-up of the India-Thai FTA. The Indian industry is either afraid of these nations' less expensive exports to India or it has worries about its own ability to compete effectively.

The inability to take part in "developmental" activities, despite opposition or logical arguments against them, has given rise to underground organisations, student bodies, and groups of young men who engage in active rent collection from various stages of the projects, particularly from the tertiary sector. This specific incapacity to take part in the initiatives contributes to the outmigration from the area, which has increased significantly over the past ten years.

Second, it is possible to assume that increased connectivity would increase stakes, which may reconfigure the parameters of negotiations between ethno-nationalist parties and the Indian government in order to maintain peace and, more significantly, cross-border movement.

Thirdly, the Look East and Act East policies appear to be a double-edged sword because they would ostensibly create jobs through the expansion of logistics and infrastructure, but the restructured labour market would also make it easier for people to migrate, which could jeopardise the region's already precarious peace.

Fourthly, trafficking in labour, prostitution, human organs, and weapons may increase due to migration. This suggests a distinct type of connectedness that coexists with the legal transits of resources and money. Second, India continues to be excluded from the Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC), which is the Asian trading umbrella. For India, APEC membership is viewed as the solution. The greatest alternative now available to India is to develop strong ties with several powerful APEC forum members, such as Australia, the United States, Singapore, and Japan. APEC

will surpass all other regional blocs in the future thanks to the presence of powerful members.

Fifth, there are certain domestic political pressures that affect the planned changes and the battle for liberalisation that is taking place in "the minds of our people." The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement has been delayed for more than six years, and India has received strong criticism for the list of major negative points. Despite exploring defence cooperation with several ASEAN countries (Myanmar, Indonesia, and Vietnam) and winning a place for joint patrols in the Malacca Straits, some observers believe that India's strategic vision is lacking. India's low military capability may be the reason why it doesn't play an assertive role.

The Indian Prime Minister strengthened the "Act East" strategy in light of the rapidly shifting security dynamics in the area, stressing the significance of also pursuing closer connections with allies like Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, and Australia. Now, ASEAN and India offers several fantastic prospects to each other.

### The Way Forward

Without a doubt, the goal of Act East Wave's strategy towards North-Eastern India is to serve as a link between South East Asian economies. In the age of globalisation, the northeastern states won't continue to be marginalised and undeveloped in a number of areas. Law and order issues, political turmoil, high unemployment, poor infrastructure, insurgency, and racial unrest will be adequately addressed and resolved. Act East Policy is crucial to India's foreign policy internationally and strategically.

This is how our policymakers see it; they think that without cooperation from both sides to properly develop the area, we cannot paint the flawless picture of Indian foreign policy on the painting. There are still many alternatives, all of which require suitable attention. The engagement has several key elements, including increased inter-personal connections, border area stability, and security collaboration. Therefore, in order for us to advance as a team, we need to establish some supportive common ground. Last but not least, India's Act East strategy is strategically supporting our position in the age of global competitiveness. On a larger scale, the current "Pivot to Asia" initiative by India and the USA shapes the balance of Asia. To achieve a balance of power in this area, it is crucial that the USA focus on the Asia-Pacific region and the Indo-Pacific as parts of a wider global order. India and the United States have been approaching the creation of an Asian balance in ways that are significantly converging. This will assist to better control China's ascent and is bringing the nations east of India in the Indo-Pacific region closer together. I'm hoping that soon we'll be able to collaborate with the QUAD, a quartet made up of India, the USA, Japan, and Australia. However, it will be accurate to state that the Act East via Northeast strategy is opening doors for India to become a Global Enabler and foster harmonious interaction with the rest of the globe.

The analysis mentioned above makes it abundantly evident how important the Act East Policy is to India's international and strategic foreign policy.

North East States of India are still isolated and underdeveloped in many aspects, but Northeast India is undoubtedly being targeted by policy to act as a connection between South East Asian economies. Political violence,

massive unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, insurgency, and ethnic conflict are still problems. Thus, a key component of India's Act East policy should be maximising national interests. There are still a lot of possibilities out there that need to be researched. Collaboration in security, border region stability, and an improvement in interpersonal connections are the main subjects of this engagement. It's true to say that Act East is launching a number. It would be true to say that Act East is creating several opportunities to enhance our communication with the East and Southeast Asian regions.

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