
**The Dismissal of NAP Government in Baluchistan in
1973: A Critical Perspective**

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Abstract

The dismissal of National Awami Party (NAP) government by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Baluchistan in February 1973 marked a significant milestone in Pakistan's political arena. It highlighted the strained relations between the central government and Baluchistan, particularly the conflict between Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the then NAP leadership. Key causes of this dismissal included, the London Plan allegation, the Coast Guard operation, tribal conflicts and the alleged discovery of Iraqi arms cache. The aftermath saw violent reactions from Baluch nationalists leading to the formation of Baluch People's Liberation Front and heightened political tensions across Pakistan. The dismissal also strained Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. Overall, this event had far reaching consequences for Pakistan's political stability and regional diplomacy.

Key Words: *Baluchistan, NAP, Provincial autonomy, Baluch Nationalist Movement, Pak-Afghan relations*

Introduction

Provincial autonomy has long been a contentious issue in Pakistan. Baluchistan in particular has been a focal point of tension between the central government and regional authority. The election of the very first NAP-JUI provincial government in Baluchistan in 1970 signaled a shift in power dynamics, yet it also sowed the seeds of conflict with the central administration led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

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The reasons behind the dismissal of the NAP Government in Baluchistan are intricate and involve multiple dimensions. These encompass a series of political maneuvers, strained relations between the central government and regional parties, and underlying ethnic and tribal tensions. The failure to reconcile conflicting demands regarding provincial autonomy, the delay in implementing agreements and the perception of central government overreached in provincial affairs all contributed to the escalating tensions.

The dismissal itself was precipitated by the confluence of factors, including allegations of conspiracy, administrative disputes and the emergence of armed conflicts. The so-called London Plan, allegations of arms smuggling and clashes between tribal factions further exacerbated the situation. Bhutto's government seized upon these events as justification for dismissal, accusing the NAP of collusion with external forces and endangering national security.

The repercussions of the termination of the NAP provincial government in Baluchistan in 1973 had long lasting implications for governance, autonomy and regional stability. Internally it sparked violent reactions among Baluch nationalists and fueled armed resistance against the central government. Externally it strained relations with neighboring Afghanistan, which viewed the dismissal as affront to regional stability and supported Pashtun and Baluch autonomy. The formation of alliances, the outlawing of political parties and the escalations of armed conflict all reshaped the political landscape in Pakistan and its broader regional context. By delving into the background, causes and repercussions of this event we gain insight into the complex interplay of politics, ethnicity and power dynamics in Pakistan and its broader geopolitical context. However, despite its significance a comprehensive analysis of this event, including its causes and repercussions remain lacking. This article seeks to address this gap by providing a nuanced examination of the dismissal aiming to contribute to a deeper understanding of Pakistan's political dynamics and historical trajectory.

Establishment of NAP-JUI Governments in NWFP and Baluchistan

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto assumed office on December 20, 1971. Shortly after taking power, he, unconditionally lifted the ban imposed on NAP by Yahya Khan.¹ While making the announcement he stated:

... I will start with clean slate. I am assuming that we all are patriots and that we all want to serve Pakistan. So, I am withdrawing the ban on National Awami Party and am going to request the leaders of the NAP to meet me very soon. In this connection I am also going to ask leaders of other political parties to meet me.²

In the NWFP and Baluchistan, the National Awami Party and the *Jamiat-ul-Ulemai-i-Islam* (JUI) collectively captured majority of seats in the 1970 general elections.³ PPP had secured 4 out of 40 provincial assembly seats in the elections in NWFP while it secured no seats out of the 20 in Baluchistan Provincial Assembly. In the National Assembly, the People's Party claimed one out of 18 seats from NWFP and none out of 4 from Baluchistan. The National Awami Party (Wali group) came to surface surface as the dominant political force in the two provincial assemblies by securing 12 seats in NWFP and 7 in Baluchistan. Bhutto extended offers for two cabinet positions at the center to two NAP members i.e. Arbab Sikander Khan and Khair Bakhsh Marri. However, both declined the offer. Bhutto's unwillingness to cooperate with the NAP was clear from the beginning when he backed Abdul Abdul Qayyum Khan, NAP's traditional rival. Khan's Muslim League attained the second highest seats in the NWFP assembly by winning 9 seats.

On December 25, 1971, Bhutto designated Ghaus Bakhsh Raisani as Governor of Baluchistan who was not a Baluchi. This appointment of Governor sparked disturbances in Quetta, further exacerbating the stress and mistrust amid NAP and Bhutto.⁴ The NAP and JUI demanded the designation of their candidates as governors in NWFP and Baluchistan, like Bhutto's appointments of his own party workers in Punjab and Sind. Subsequently, the NAP initiated a drive to lift martial law and end the state of emergency. This demonstrated that Bhutto could not simply disregard NWFP and Baluchistan in any constitutional framework.⁵

In January 1972, Bhutto visited Afghanistan for bilateral discussions. Upon his return from Kabul, Bhutto informed journalists in Lahore that his visit aimed to express gratitude to King Zahir Shah and the Afghan people for their support during the 1971 conflict in Pakistan.⁶ Given NAP strong ties with Afghanistan, its plausible that Bhutto's actual goal was to diminish Afghanistan's empathies for the NAP and secure peace along the border. The success of Bhutto's visit was evident from Kabul Radio's comment, anticipating that Pakistan would now tackle the Pashtunistan issue.⁷ On March 6, 1972, Bhutto's discussions with the leaders from NAP and JUI, culminated in the signing of a tripartite agreement. The key terms of the accord were as follows:

- i) Military rule would be terminated starting from August 14, the day the National Assembly would be convened to review the Draft Constitution.
- ii) The center would nominate governors after discussions with the majority party in each of the two Provinces of NWFP and Baluchistan.⁸
- iii) The government at the center and in provinces would be set up in accordance

with the legislative plurality. The three parties agreed to establish PPP's rule in the center and in Punjab and Sind, and NAP-JUI coalition rule in NWFP and Baluchistan.

Simultaneously, Bhutto extended an offer to NAP to distribute power at the federal level, but it was declined. Subsequently Bhutto invited Abdul Qayyum Khan of the Frontier Muslim League to become a member of the cabinet as Home Minister, an offer which Khan accepted. Khan was known for his staunch view against Pashtun nationalists. Bhutto's decision was seen as an emotional attempt to sever the previously established mutual agreement. The dispute over the tripartite agreement arose when Bhutto postponed the nomination of NAP's candidates as governors of NWFP and Baluchistan. Bhutto's delaying tactics raised concerns about the future of their relationship. The inflexible stance of NAP, coupled with Bhutto's stubborn attitude, ultimately resulted in the collapse of the tripartite agreement.⁹

However, in April 1973, Bhutto approved the establishment of coalition government led by NAP-JUI in NWFP and Baluchistan.¹⁰ A provincial government led by NAP was established in Baluchistan and a NAP-JUI coalition government in the NWFP.¹¹ Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil (NAP) was appointed as Governor and Mufti Mahmood (JUI) as Chief Minister of the NWFP respectively; while Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Attaullah Mengal as Governor and Chief Minister of Baluchistan respectively.¹² Nevertheless the tension persisted between Bhutto and NAP-JUI. About Bhutto's approach towards NAP, an international expert Robert La Porte Jr. declared:

.... Bhutto's strategy has been one of circumscribing the NAP's ability to govern with the ultimate goal of replacing NAP governments in both provinces. In the accord reached in March 1972, between the NAP and Bhutto, the right of the NAP to form the provincial ministries had been conceded. Both these parties had been in the forefront in the campaign for lifting of Martial Law and for ending the Emergency. Attempt at creating disunity between NAP and JUI, however proved unsuccessful. The regime appeared unable to checkmate NAP and JUI on the political plane, despite accusation of un-patriotism against Khan Abdul Wali Kahn, leader of the NAP.¹³

Dismissal of NAP-JUI Governments in NWFP and Baluchistan

The conflict between Bhutto and NAP encompassed three significant dimensions. Firstly, it evolved into a constitutional dispute, stemming from the profound disagreement over the division of power between the central government and the provinces in the new constitution, which significantly strained relations with

NAP-JUI leaders. Secondly, the contention between Bhutto and Pashtuns and Baluch leaders was deeply rooted in power dynamics. Despite Bhutto's PPP majority in the National Assembly with 81 out of 138 seats, its provincial governance extended solely to Sindh and Punjab. NAP perceived Bhutto's stance on provincial rights as an audacious attempt to seize even greater power for himself. NAP leaders vehemently accused Bhutto of harboring intentions to establish one-man rule, effectively imposing one man governance. The third dimension of the conflict was Bhutto's mounting apprehension regarding NAP's demand for autonomy, fearing it could ultimately culminate in the secession. Bhutto's government remained deeply concerned that if NAP government in Baluchistan persisted, it could catalyze the secession of NWFP.¹⁴

London Plan

In this context, the initial instance surfaced prominently, in September 1972 when Pakistan's Information Minister Maulana Kausar Niazi publicly accused Abdul Wali Khan of NAP and his associates of being involved in an intrigue aimed at disintegrating Pakistan during their visit to London. The coinciding presence of Abdul Wali Khan, seeking treatment for his eyes, Attaullah Mengal, undergoing clinical care and Ahmed Nawaz Bugti, the Finance Minister of Baluchistan being on leave at the start of September in London, contributed significantly to the genesis of this misunderstanding. The authorities labelled the purportedly conspiracy as the London Plan, attributing two main objectives to it.¹⁵ Firstly, it was claimed that a leader of the NAP and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh, allegedly meeting in London or Geneva, orchestrated a secessionist uprising. Allegations also suggested the involvement of a significant figure from Baluchistan in the intrigue.¹⁶ Secondly there was a plan to establish a confederation in Pakistan, consisting of four semi-independent states. The PPP, Muslim League (Qayyum group) and several likeminded individuals condemned this proposal. They condemned the NAP leaders for their past and present actions against Pakistan.¹⁷

Pakistan Coast Guard Operation

In 1974, the Pakistani government released the *white Paper on Baluchistan*, outlining the reasons behind the dismissal of the provincial government. Among the primary factors cited was the Baluchistan chief minister's decision to halt the legal activities of the Pakistan Coast Guard, aimed at monitoring clandestine international trade in the Lasbela area involving the smuggling of prohibited good and trafficking of arms.¹⁸

Pat Feeder Canal Area Disturbances

The second factor stemmed from the provincial government's establishment of camps and provisions of support to mobilize tribal supporters from the Marri and other tribes for attacking settlers in the Pat Feeder Canal vicinity. This led to the destruction of settlers's crops and the forcible seizure of their land and property. The total value of the damaged land and property amounted to Rs 80,000.¹⁹ The outbreak of lawlessness commenced on November 27, 1972, when approximately one thousand tribesmen of Marri accompanied by Kalohies and Lehris equipped with self-operating arms, attacked on Punjabi settlers in Goth Mohammad Hussain, Bedar and some other villages in the Pat Feeder Canal area of Kachchi district. This attack resulted in the death of a settler and four children, with several women and children being abducted. Prior to the assault, the settlers had filed grievances with the provincial government regarding previous incidents of plundering by the tribesmen, but these grievances were disregarded.²⁰

On December 2, 1972, in response to the Baluchistan government's request, the federal government ordered the placement of Frontier Constabulary to curb the lawlessness perpetrated by the tribesmen. On December 4, a deadline was issued to the Marri tribesmen, demanding the abdication of those accountable for the lawless deeds, the return of abducted individuals and stolen property, vacating the land and compensating the losses incurred. The outlaws consented to comply with these conditions and complete the obligations in phases.²¹

Dismissal of Baluchistan Reserve Police

The third reason mentioned in the White Paper highlighted the dismissal of approximately 2,600 personnel, representing 60% of the Baluchistan Reserve Police Force which hailed from other provinces. To address the resulting vacancies, the provincial government established a new agency named the Baluchistan *Dehi Muhafiz* (Village Protectors) for policing duties. Consequently, the Baluchistan Reserve Police was rendered ineffective and essentially disbanded. Subsequently, around 1100 individuals, predominantly supporters of the NAP were recruited. Additional forces including special levies and the Baluchsitan *Dehi Muhafiz* were dispatched to Lasbela.

Conflict with Jamote Tribe

The most significant catalyst for the dismissal of the Baluchistan provincial governor and Chief Minister was cited as an attack on Jamote tribe.²² Reports indicated that certain tribal leaders harbored opposition towards the NAP and held apprehension about the party's intolerance towards them. One of these tribes included Jamote tribe who had previously cast their vote against the NAP

in the 1970 elections due to a dispute with Mengal tribe. In December 1972, the NAP provincial government in Baluchistan reportedly arrested numerous people in Lasbela, which sparked concern among the Jamote tribe. In protest against the arrest of some of their leaders, the Jamote tribe resorted to cutting telephone wires as a demonstration.²³

On December 26, 1972, Sardar Attaullah Mengal opted for punitive measures against them, dispatching a *Lashkar* consisting of Mengal, Bizenjo and nine other tribes. The *Lashkar* commenced looting and attacking the Jamote tribe resulting in the deaths of 42 individuals. Approximately 8,000 members of the Jamote tribe were compelled to seek refuge in nearby hills, only to find themselves besieged by the tribal *Lashkar* and Baluchistan *Dehi Muhafiz*. The tribe's access to food supplies was cut off to coerce surrender. The Chief Minister's handling of the situation epitomized the Sardari system, as he personally perceived the differences with the Jamote tribe as a direct affront and transformed it into a personal vendetta.²⁴

According to the Pakistani Authorities the NAP-JUI ministry was accused of aiding its supporters by furnishing them with guns and ammunitions. Allegations were made against the Chief Minister Attaullah Mengal, suggesting that he amassed weapons to bolster his tribesmen and suppress the Jamote tribe to settle a tribal feud. Official record indicates that in a bid to resolve a tribal conflict, 260 rifles and 34,000 rounds of ammunition were provided to the Mengal tribal *Lashkar*. Additionally, the Mengal's Ministry allegedly meddled in the organizational structure and operational capacity of law enforcement agencies in Baluchistan.²⁵

However, Sherbaz Mazari offers a distinct interpretation of the third cause outlined in the White Paper. According to him, an armed uprising erupted in the Lasbela region in early February 1973, purportedly incited by Bhutto with Jam Ghulam Qadir, acting as federal government agent and plunged Kalat into a state of near disorder. When the provincial government sought assistance from local militia, the Commander, Brigadier Nasirullah Babar declined the request, asserting that he and his militia operated under the jurisdiction of the central government and could only act upon the directives from Islamabad. Following this refusal, the NAP government in Baluchistan mobilized an irregular force of levies from local tribes to quell the rebellion. However, upon the arrival of these levies in Lasbela, the federal government accused the provincial administration of involvement in an inter-tribal conflict.²⁶

The Chief Minister of Baluchistan, Attaullah Mengal was accused of organizing

his personal *Lashkar*. In response, Prime Minister Bhutto dispatched an army to Lasbela to confront the provincial levies. The Chief Minister's deployment of provincial levies inadvertently gave Bhutto a reason to send federal forces into Baluchistan. Consequently, military operations expanded from Lasbela to neighboring areas in Kalat.²⁷

The Federal government took provocative measures to prevent the situation in Lasbela from escalating into a full-scale tribal conflict. On January 30, 1973, the Chief Minister of Baluchistan received instructions to immediately cease his operations and transfer control of the public safety to the civil armed forces. Additionally, he was strongly urged to withdraw both the tribal *Lashkar* and the Baluchistan *Dehi Muhafiz* from Lasbela, to lift the siege against the Jamote tribe and to ensure the return of all government weapons to police armories. Furthermore, the federal government issued a directive for the Pakistan army to assume full authority over Lasbela.²⁸

Bhutto's Alliance with the Tribal Chiefs

Bhutto strategically allied with certain tribal and feudal chiefs, including Nawab Akbar Bugti, the head of the Bugti tribe to forge political alliances aimed at ousting the Mengal government. Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti played a pivotal role in toppling of the Mengal government in 1973.²⁹

Baluch Liberation Front and Ghaffar Khan's Arrival

Additional justifications cited for the dismissal of NAP led government in Baluchistan included the emergence of the Baluch Liberation Front and Bizenjo's secessionist plot. Bhutto's apprehensions were further fueled by the coming back of Abdul Ghaffar Khan from Kabul to Peshawar after a decade of self-imposed exile. Ghaffar Khan openly criticized Bhutto for his treatment of the Pashtuns and Baluch, intensifying Bhutto's concerns.³⁰

Iraqi Arms Cache

The overthrow of the NAP government in Baluchistan stemmed from the discovery of a suspected shipment of Iraqi weapons destined for Baluch Pashtun Nationalists. On February 10, 1973, authorities uncovered cache at the Iraqi diplomatic office in Islamabad, reportedly containing 300 Soviet submachine guns and 48,000 rounds of ammunition. According to Mazari some foreign sources indicated that the inter-services intelligence agency ISI informed Prime Minister Bhutto of this purported conspiracy, furnishing him with photographic evidence. The weapons were suspected to be enroute to Iran, where Iraq sought to foment insurgencies amid their controversy over the Shat al-Arab waterway. The riot on the Iraqi embassy occurring concurrently with the PPP government's

efforts to undermine Baluchistan's administration raised suspicions. Bhutto opted to implicate NAP leadership in an alleged arms smuggling operation. Despite lacking concrete evidence, the PPP government accused Baluchistan's NAP leaders of orchestrating an armed insurgency in the region using these weapons.³¹ However, shortly thereafter, the government of Iraq swiftly clarified that the weapons were meant for Iranian Baluchistan and not Pakistani Baluchistan. Iraq in retribution for the Shah's support for Kurdish rebels, openly backed Baluch guerrilla's activity in Iran. Western intelligence sources corroborated Iraq's explanation, explaining that Pakistani authorities initially seized the arms in Karachi before transporting them to Islamabad. The aim was to amplify the scandal's impact on diplomats and foreign media concentrated in the capital. Baluch leaders accused Bhutto of fabricating the Iraqi arms scandal as a pretext for their dismissal.³² The escalated differences led to the ousting of the Baluch Provincial Government on February 15, 1973. The following day, the government of the NWFP resigned in protest.³³ Following the dismissal in Baluchistan, Nawab Mohammad Akbar Khan Bugti and Jam Ghulam Qadir were appointed Governor and Chief Minister of Baluchistan. In January 1974, Ahmad Yar Khan of Kalat succeeded Bugti as the governor of Baluchistan.³⁴ On April 15, 1973, President's rule was imposed in the NWFP. Two months later a coalition government was established with Inayatullah Khan Gandapur as Chief Minister. Aslam Khattak had been appointed as the Governor of NWFP since February 15, 1973.³⁵

Bhutto justified the overthrow of the provincial government and levied accusations against the NAP, alleging their involvement in a conspiracy with Iraq and the Soviet Union aimed at destabilizing Pakistan and Iran.³⁶ Bhutto also alleged that NAP functioned as a proxy for Afghanistan's territorial ambitions towards Pakistan. He contended that the provincial government's action such as the expulsion of non-Baluch government officials from Baluchistan, unrest in Pat Feeder Area and resisting to abolishing the Sardari system, revealed its true motives.³⁷

Repercussions of the Overthrow of NAP Government

The removal of NAP provincial government had significant repercussions on both national and regional politics. The Baluch people began a violent reaction against this dismissal. Several prominent Baluch nationalists like Bizenjo, Mengal, and Khair Bakhsh Marri were placed under house arrest in the Punjab, which deeply insulted the Baluch people. Adhering to their code of honor, they felt compelled to defend their dignity by revolting against the government. As a

result, at the start of April 1973, short of six weeks after the dismissal, Baluch guerilla began skirmishes with the Pakistan Army stationed in the region since the Lasbela uprising in 1972.³⁸

The Baluch People's Liberation Front was established as a precursor and product of the *Parari* guerilla movement founded by Sher Mohammad Marri in 1963.³⁹ Mir Hazar Ramkhani led the *Pararis* during the 1973-1977.⁴⁰ The *Pararis* played a significant role in the Baluch armed struggle against Bhutto's regime.⁴¹

Moreover, on February 8, 1975, the Home Minister of NWFP, Hayat Mohammad Khan Sherpao known for his affiliation with the PPP and a close associate of Bhutto, tragically lost his life in a bomb explosion during an event at Peshawar University. Bhutto, who was in New York at the time, promptly pointed fingers at the NAP, alleging their involvement in orchestrating the assassination. Reacting swiftly, the government moved to ban the NAP on February 10, 1975, and rounded up all its leaders.⁴² Within the following week, the federal administration took further action by replacing Aslam Khattak and Gandapur, and appointing (retired) Major General Syed Ghwas as the new governor.⁴³

The Attorney General of Pakistan took up the task of presenting the case of the ban on NAP before the Supreme Court. Following an unconventional trial, the Supreme Court upheld the federal government decision to ban NAP on October 30, 1975. Rather than resolving issues, this ban exacerbated existing tensions. Bhutto established a special tribunal in Hyderabad specifically to prosecute NAP's leadership, appointing Syed Ahmad Khan to oversee the case. However, during the disturbances of the March 1977 elections, this tribunal emerged as a focal point of conflict during negotiations between the PPP and the opposition.⁴⁴

The discretionary dismissal spurred opposition forces to unite under the banner of the United Democratic Front in Islamabad under the leadership of Sardar Sherbaz Mazari in the first week of November 1975. Former NAP workers and those, still out of prison, joined it. Mazari and Wali Khan's wife Nasim Wali Khan initiated an organized struggle against the PPP regime demanding an immediate return to democratic governance.⁴⁵ These developments significantly heightened political tensions across Pakistan in late 1973 and early 1975.⁴⁶

The dismissal of the NAP-JUI coalition government in Baluchistan and NWFP elicited strong reactions from the People of Afghanistan too. Daud's rise to power as President of the Afghan Republic in July 1973 further exacerbated tensions.⁴⁷ In an interview, he made it clear that Afghanistan would not passively observe the tense situation in Baluchistan and NWFP. Instead, Kabul would

actively support the Pashtun and Baluch people's right to self-determination. He voiced strong condemnation of the ban imposed on the NAP and raised objections to the arrest of its leaders. Pakistan was accused of resorting to such drastic measures without substantial evidence against the NAP and its leadership. He also highlighted the Pashtunistan issue and Baluchistan insurgency at various international forums including the United Nations⁴⁸ and the 1974 Islamic Summit held in Lahore.⁴⁹ These actions significantly strained Pakistan's diplomatic ties with Afghanistan.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The overthrow of the NAP provincial government in Baluchistan in February 1973 marked a critical juncture in Pakistan's political landscape, reverberating with lasting repercussion both domestically and regionally. The multifaceted causes leading to the dismissal emphasized the deep-rooted tension between the central government led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the NAP. The backdrop of the dismissal revealed a complex interplay of factors, including the struggle for provincial autonomy, conflicting visions of governance, and allegations of conspiracy and intrigue. Bhutto's maneuvers to consolidate power in NWFP and Baluchistan, coupled with NAP's insistence on autonomy, set the stage for a confrontation with far reaching consequences.

The London Plan allegations, Coast Guard operation, Pat Feeder Disturbances, dismissal of Baluchistan Reserve Police, conflict with the Jamote tribe and alliance with Baluch leaders all contributed to the escalating tensions. The purported Iraqi arms cache further fueled Bhutto's justification for dismissing the NAP government, despite subsequent clarification of the weapons.

The aftermath of the dismissal witnessed a surge in Baluch nationalist sentiments, leading to violent reactions against the central government. The formation of the Baluch Liberation Front and subsequent armed resistance epitomized the Baluch struggle against perceived injustices and usurpation of power. The political climate became increasingly volatile, culminating in the ban on NAP, arrests of its leaders challenging Bhutto's regime.

The legacy of the NAP government dismissal serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges inherent in managing diversity, safeguarding democratic institutions and upholding of the principal of justice and equality. Its far-reaching implications continue to resonate, emphasizing the enduring legacy of political upheaval, the perils of authoritarianism, the enduring resilience of grassroots movement striving for autonomy, the perennial quest for democratic governance and regional stability. As Pakistan charts its course forward, it must heed the

lessons of history, embracing dialogue, inclusivity and respect of plurality to forge a path towards enduring peace, stability and prosperity for all its citizens.

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