

Chamber News

Monthly Newsletter of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry

October 2009

From the Chairman

The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce plays an integral role in the development of policy in this country, and for the past year or so we have tried our best to keep abreast with the important issues that concern the private sector in this country.

As a convention, the Chamber aims to work with and support the government and its development partners in terms of policy and initiatives, particularly as they affect commerce and industries; but every now and then the Chamber finds itself performing a more oversight function by scrutinising the decisions of government and demanding that it considers the point of view of private sector. In 2009 we made every attempt to keep the Chamber operational but as is expected from time to time, we are limited both by suitable and qualified staff as well as obvious financial constraints.

The Chamber survives primarily on the subscription fees paid by its members. Every year membership fluctuates and this again affects our budget and the nature of the work we can do. We hope that in 2010 we will be able to provide additional professional services to our members that will encourage you to support the Chamber in addition to the level of support you already provide.

On this note, I am pleased to introduce to you the Chamber's new Chief Executive Office, Mr Calvin Ziru. Calvin is from Munda, Western Province and is a qualified lawyer trained in the School of Law in Vanuatu. It is always a pleasure to see young, enthusiastic and educated Solomon Islanders take up executive positions in companies

and organisations and want to make a difference in our communities. We are pleased to see him join us and look forward to see him working with each of you during his tenure with the Chamber.

I must also take this time to thank former CEO, Mr Daniel Tuhanuku for his marvellous contribution in the last 2 years with the Chamber. Daniel joined the Chamber and through his professionalism and hard work, the Chamber has grown significantly from previous years. We expect to see more of this kind of growth in 2010.

In closing, I wish to add that we are fast approaching the end of the year and although the next Annual General Meeting will be sometime in March 2010, wisdom suggest that we begin to plan for the New Year and commit ourselves to this organisation. We will be forwarding to everyone Membership Application Forms and Fees for your consideration and completion. The Chamber of Commerce is very important to its members, and possibly more so, its members are to the Chamber of Commerce. Coordinating and motivating active participation from its members will always be a challenge. The Chamber of Commerce has core functions that the office must continue to undertake, but at the same time, there are also a number of things that will add value to your membership and to achieve that it will require 'overtime' from every one.

Thank you tumas!

Michael Hemmer
Chairman

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Welcome

achieve this, the materials that fill its pages must come from you.

When I was first given the opportunity to join the Chamber of Commerce and take up the position of Chief Executive Officer, I knew that it would be a big decision for me and my young family. I had by then settled down comfortably with the National Parliament Office and developed in the two or so years I was there, mutual respect for my colleagues and supervisors and a strong rapport with a number of Members of Parliament with whom I had closely worked.

I was very aware of the benefits that this position would have on my professional career, ultimately taking me out of public service and into the private sector, not to mention lead an organisation that represents more than 20,000 employees in the Solomon Islands. As overwhelming as these thoughts were, they were no more overwhelming than my uncertainty about exactly what I was to do for the Chamber of Commerce. I asked a respected parliamentarian what he thought about my moving to the Chamber. And he could only express strong support for it. He added however that in his opinion the private sector and the government operate quite independently of each other and there was need for the public and private sector to work together on certain national developments. The traditional role of the Chamber of Commerce was to protect the interest of local employers but there was need for it to be a close partner in national development, the vision and proposal that the private sector have must also not be ignored

by the government.

On Monday 13 October, I opened the doors to my humble second floor office at the NPF Building in Point Cruz. I was the only staff in a room that I was told to 'bring to life' with some furniture, stationary and a painting or two. My first visitor was Mr Humphrey Tura from the South Pacific Oil office next door. He welcomed me into the office and after a few tips on how I could go about my first week he left me to plan my day. I had my first meeting with the World Bank on Tuesday 13 October, a meeting with AusAID and an SPC Consultant on Wednesday 14 October, a meeting with a potential investor on Thursday 15 October and my first Executive Board meeting on Friday 16 October. An exhausting first week, but well spent nonetheless. After my first week I better know what I am expected to do as CEO of this organisation.

The mandate of the Chamber of Commerce is essentially to engage leadership regarding the specific issues faced by our private sector, with the view to having a positive influence on government policy. But in order for us to achieve this we must first promote and facilitate greater cooperation among our own members and like organisations in the country; after all as it is said, the quality of an organisation is rightly or wrongly judged by the quality of its members.

Calvin Zirui
Chief Executive Officer

Dear Members,

Welcome to the trial edition of what should be the e-magazine of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This product is called the Chamber News and is intended to be a significant enhancement of the face of the Chamber that will hopefully

“This publication is meant to be interactive with you and as much as possible, it must speak to you as well as for you.”

go a long way in the upcoming year, intended to better portray the Solomon Islands as a single economy with its own opportunities and unique business activities. As it is developed in the next year or so, we hope that we will be able to market your enterprises to the region but more importantly market our nation around the world. This publication is meant to be interactive with you and as much as possible, it must speak to you as well as for you. And in order to



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SICCI INITIATES REVIEW OF SIWA UTILITIES IN THE CAPITAL:

The SICCI Board has expressed its concern for the continuous water cuts and rationing in and around Honiara that is fast becoming a disturbing reality of life in the capital. SICCI has called on SIWA to provide a formal explanation of the reasons for an increasing number of water rationing. With increased complaints from business enterprises in Honiara, the Board has agreed to undertake its own fact-finding project into the problem. SICCI is aware that with increased pressure placed on water supply by a growing population, increased commercial activity as well as large squatter settlements and illegal water meters, SIWA will require significant financial support to upgrade any water service plan that it may currently have.

SICCI MISSES OUT ON PIPSO TRADE FAIR IN TONGA:

The Solomon Islands was not represented in this year's Pacific Island Private Sector Organisation Trade Fair held in Tonga from 26 – 28 October 2009. The regional trade fair is organised by PIPSO and SPC in support of private sector industry in the region and was to be an event comprising a conference and a trade fair with each country setting up its own trade stall. SICCI

has offered a formal apology to PIPSO quoting a lack of planning and preparation due to the vacancies within SICCI. Preparation of a proposal to host similar events in the next year have been approved by the Board of Executive. SICCI believes that such an event, if it were to take place, would be an opportunity for the various private sector associations to collaborate on a project that could allow its members to showcase Solomon Islands businesses and industry to the region. The PIPSO Trade Fair involves regional countries and includes conference as well as trade stalls. SICCI CEO expressed however that this is an ambition for SICCI and whilst SICCI is prepared to take undertake such an event, success would depend on all private sector organisations working together with the government and other development partners and stakeholders.

SPC CONSULTANT UNDERTAKES SURVEY ON LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINT TO EXPORT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY COMMODITIES:

The SPC is conducting a survey of the region on the legislative constraints to the export or agricultural and forestry commodities. The survey will assist the SPC understand the laws in the

Solomon Islands and the region for the purposes of improving laws to better attract investors. SICCI assisted in facilitating interviews and meeting with various exporters in the country including CEMA, SICCI and SMEC as well as meetings with local exporting firms including Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited. John Low has already carried out surveys in a number of Pacific island countries. His visit in to Honiara visited Solomon Islands on 14 October to undertake the following. While his dissemination will

NEWS: PRIVATE SECTOR ASSOCIATIONS MEET WITH WBO MANAGING DIRECTOR

SICCI will join other private sector representative in a meeting with World Bank Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, Juan Jose Daboub. The meeting which is scheduled to take place on Friday 31 October will enable SICCI to contribute to discussion on the impact of the financial crisis is having on businesses in Solomon Islands, to share the WBG's view on the global financial crisis and its impact on the region and to discuss the on going program of support the World Bank Group is providing to the Solomon Islands economy in the aftermath.

Dr. Daboub is one of the World Bank Group's three Managing



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Directors and will be visiting Solomon Islands.

SICCI CONTINUES INVOLVEMENT IN ANTI-CORRUPTION TASKFORCE

The Chamber of Commerce is once again engaged in the Anti-Corruption Taskforce that was set up by the Solomon Islands Government, with the assistance of the Australian Government and RAMSI to develop recommendations and strategies which can be considered for adoption by the government. The taskforce is co-chaired by the Special Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr John Keniapisia and Auditor General, Mr Edward Ronia. Membership include the Attorney General's Chambers, Office of the Auditor General, Accountant General, Leadership Code Commission, Ombudsman, Transparency Solomon Islands, Director of Public Prosecution and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry as represented by CEO Calvin Ziriu.

In its last meeting on Friday 23 October, the Taskforce finalised its planning for a second of a series of workshops on corruption and anti-

corruption issues in the Solomon Islands. That workshop will be held in Honiara with at least one hundred invited participants and presenters focusing specifically on 'political corruption' in the public sector. SICCI is expected to identify a representative to make a presentation on the issue from the point of view of the business sector.

The Taskforce is also expected to review and comment on a feasibility studies on corruption and anti-corruption mechanism which may be suitable for the Solomon Islands.

Any member interested to make some form of presentation or submission may do so through the SICCI office. The views of the business community is greatly required.

SICCI CONGRATULATES PRIME MINISTER ON GOVERNMENT STANCE ON PER 2009

In a joint letter to the Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Derek Sikua on 23 October 2009, SICCI and SINCTU congratulated the Prime Minister and his government for the position it took over the Parliament Entitlements Regulation 2009. In a High Court decision on

22 October 2009, the Chief Justice Sir Albert Palmer quashed the controversial regulation saying that the Commission acted beyond its powers and mandate and powers under the Constitution.

SICCI praised the CNURA government for its decision to oppose the regulation and seek a declaration of the Court on its legality. In the letter to the Prime Minister was informed of the support rendered by SICCI and SINCTU in this respect noting that it was a strong indication of the value that the government had to principles of transparency and good governance.

It remains to be seen however whether there will be sufficient political will to make the necessary changes to the Constitution to change the formation and membership of the Parliamentary Entitlements Constitution from one which is potentially subject to political influence. In a number of jurisdictions, the bodies that establish parliamentarians entitlements and salaries are independent comprising. SICCI is considering pursuing the inclusion of private sector representation in the Commission.

BEN BARNETT JOINS SICCI AS AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADORS VOLUNTEER

The Chamber of Commerce will see the inclusion of Australian Youth Volunteer Ben Barnett in early November. The AYAD program which is supported in the Solomon Islands by PASIFIKI has facilitated the attachment of youth volunteers to the various Ministries and organisations in the Solomon Islands for the past 7 years with three intakes per year.



PROFILE

Ben Barnett is from Melbourne, Australia, where he has been working for the last two and a half years for the management consulting firm, The Nous Group. The Nous Group has offices throughout Australia and Asia. Ben is a consultant in The Nous Group's strategy and public policy practice, and he has worked on projects across the energy, media and education sectors, typically in strategy development and organisational development. He has also worked on a number of government-based projects, mainly in economic development and regulation.

Before beginning at The Nous Group, Ben worked for the current federal Minister for Finance and Deregulation, The Hon. Lindsay Tanner, for four and a half years.

Ben graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from The University of Melbourne. He also spent one year studying business and teaching politics at University College, Dublin.

JOHN KAKADI

DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRY, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

What are the major issues and challenges facing the industries in Solomon Islands? How is the government dealing with these issues?

Industries policies are not a priority. Industries are scattered with no proper networking. We need to establish a working committee and seek endorsement for SME definition or policy frame work/ studies. There is also limited access to finance and this is a hindrance to potential SME's in the country. Through SME definition various studies will be conducted to see weakness in the area of finance, thus help to make policies to support SME.

There is also a very weak or no economic or industrial infrastructure is a blow to the industry sector of this nation. The government is working towards the creation of economic growth centre, i.e. Suapa Bay and development of industrial estate and international seaport like Bina Harbor.

What resources have you identified as the major investment areas for business opportunities in the Solomon Islands?

Coconut, Timber, Fishery, Tourism and Oil Palm.

How would you assess business and investment environments in the Solomon Islands, and what is the outlook for the Solomon Islands in terms of investment?

There are great opportunities for domestic investment by Solomon Islanders. This should be done in light of customary land ownership because if there is no land available, then there will be no investment. Access to finance is a very important component to industry development, but in the absence of a credit bureau it is very difficult for any Solomon Islander to get investment capital. The current credit facilities available in the country is operating on a 'who you know' basis. The government needs to improve its finance and attention to SME's in the country as the base for any economic growth & employment opportunities. Investment needs a stable government and healthy society. Even with limited population we still can not manage the population/ society. Solomon Islands is a tourist destiny, we need a lot of work to be done by communities, churches, provincial Government and private sector and public.

SOLOMON ISLANDS ECONOMY

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate raw materials Cheap labor Raw Talents or Skills Adequate basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major reforms required in labour law and tax law Land difficulties (current land administration is tough for new industries) Weak infrastructure (economic or industrials) Difficult in accessing finance Poor business industries environment Weak net working/ coordination of support service by private & public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish national private sector organization Define small & medium enterprises Legislate small & medium enterprise act Utilize WTO agreements (WTO/TBT/SPS/Codex etc) Privatize some of government service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstable government Corruption in high places Geographical (Isolated Islands)

James Kim on PACER

PACER Plus in its extreme form will open up Solomon Islands market for free trade. PACER Plus and other related agreements will have investment chapter that will open up land and natural resources for development. Most businesses in Solomon Islands rely heavily on imports. Many agree that they are vulnerable to huge fluctuations in foreign exchange rates or sudden tariff changes.

However, PACER Plus if carefully designed, planned and implemented, promises the potential to become an excellent opportunity for Solomon Islands. If PACER Plus is inevitable, Solomon Islands should be in position to take full advantage of it rather than fear it, fight it or simply ignore it.

“PACER Plus if carefully designed, planned and implemented, promises the potential to become an excellent opportunity for Solomon Islands.”

POTENTIAL RISKS OF POORLY NEGOTIATED PACER PLUS

1. Reduction of SIG revenue by removal of tariffs: Tax collection by Customs Division could be the most effective and efficient source of revenue for the SIG compared to other sources of revenue. Imports from Australia and New Zealand would make significant portions to the Customs revenue. Removal of tariffs by PACER Plus will cause cash-flow problems and loss of revenue to SIG and if the Government does not have sufficient funds, development and infrastructure will be affected causing public services, infrastructure and utilities maintenance, hospitals and school to be affected. Non-effective government services will make doing business in Solomon Islands very difficult or even impossible.
2. Closure of local businesses and loss of jobs: There is also the possibility that cheaper imports will affect local manufacturers as consumers buy cheaper imported goods. It will be unlikely for local manufacturers to survive without legislated

protection of their products or the local brands. Closure of local manufacturers will result in the loss of production, jobs and revenue. Furthermore, Solomon Islands will become more dependent on imports.

3. Squeeze on private sector by SIG: If the Government experiences a situation where there is a shortage of revenue, it will inevitably have to turn to an aggressive tax collection and tax increase in order to replenish the shortfall. This will lead to squeezing the private sector, and the consequences on small and medium enterprises can be very detrimental. If this occurs, SIG would have essentially killed the 'golden goose' by destroy all foundation for economic development and become more dependent on foreign aid.
4. SIG losing ability to set up and execute its policy: SIG's ability to set policy will become limited. For an example, SIG offers duty and GST exemption to foreign capital investment and this incentive will no longer be effective as it once was.
5. Sudden and major land reform: Customary land will be affected and its land owners may become disgruntled. This may lead to another social unrest.
6. Over development of natural resources: Poor management of natural resources could lead to negative environmental and social impact. Furthermore, countries other than Australia or New Zealand may find Solomon Islands unattractive. An example is the United States refusal not wanting petroleum exploration or Japan not wanting mines.
7. Solomon Islands becoming dependent on





Australian and New Zealand imports: Imports from Australia and New Zealand are likely to increase as it will have price advantage over other countries. In business, it is unwise to become dependent on few major suppliers because they will control the price and supply. If Solomon Islands becomes heavily dependent on Australia and New Zealand for essential goods such as food, medical supplies, hygienic items etc its position will weaken.

If risks are identified, they can be avoided.

CURRENT PROGRESS IN PACER PLUS

1. Office of Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) has been established, which is based in Vanuatu. Australia and New Zealand pledged to fund AUD\$1.0 million each year for three years to OCTA. Australia recently made its first payment of AUD250,000.
2. Australia has also pledged AUD\$15.5 million that will be available for pacific island countries if they need to conduct research into PACER Plus.
3. Australia and New Zealand aims to have PACER Plus agreed by 2011. Solomon Islands has already ratified PACER Plus and in August 09 meeting, agreed to follow this schedule.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

Three extreme options are available to the Solomon Islands, but are not recommended for various reasons:

1. Withdraw from PACER Plus - No country is tied to PACER Plus forever. Any government can withdraw by giving 180 days notice to the Secretary General of the Forum Secretariat.
2. Terminate PACER Plus - PACER Plus no longer exists if all Parties withdraw. Australia and New Zealand would not withdraw from PACER Plus. However, if all other island countries withdraw, it will damage PACER Plus.
3. Accept PACER Plus and all the related risks: It may be that SIG consider the balance of convenience to the country and accept PACER Plus and the risks associated. As it stands, the first two options are practically not an option because SIG cannot afford to lose aid assistance (RAMSI, AusAid and NZAid).

The most practical approach would be to negotiate a middle ground; it is therefore important for the Solomon Islands to consider the first two extreme options as trump cards.

MAXIMIZING BENEFIT FROM PACER PLUS

SUGGESTIONS FOR PACER PLUS NEGOTIATION

This is only a starting point. Without professional advice and support of international trade lawyers, it is difficult to

know if this is even legal. Our suggestions is that:

- SIG should not rely on OCTA to do all the researches and planning. SIG should setup a task force and utilize the funds Australia offered (15.5 million) to do its own research and studies suitable for Solomon.
- SIG should consider its position on PACER Plus. If it is inevitable, it is better to start early. PACER Plus in theory should be the same to all pacific island countries.

“SIG should consider its position on PACER Plus. If it is inevitable, it is better to start early.”

However, anything is possible. SIG should carefully reconsider its position and make progress with Australia and New Zealand. Australia

and New Zealand could agree on terms that is attractive to Solomon Islands so they can use it as an example for negotiation with other countries.

- Fiji enjoyed growth in clothing industry when it had free trade agreement with Australia. Many Australian companies established factories in Fiji to take advantage of free trade agreement and cheap labour. Fiji enjoyed this growth until the series of military and civil coups frightened investors away and cheap labour from China and India overtook their competitiveness.
- Solomon Islands could do the same to attract investment but remove tariff on raw materials only.
- Solomon Islands could remove export duty whilst Australia and New Zealand can remove tariff on goods manufactured from Solomon Islands that used main ingredient from Australia and New Zealand.
- This will minimize negative impact to Solomon Islands whilst stimulating economic growth.
- This trade arrangement seem unattractive to Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps it can be improved with other arrangements in investment and natural resources chapter of PACER Plus.
- PACER Plus may be about economic development but we should be mindful that one of the tools utilized to achieve such a development will be free trade.
- He Solomon Islands must prioritize major tax reform before any removal of tariff is made; this is to avoid loss of revenue by government and subsequent squeeze on private sector.

Solomon Islands	Australia & New Zealand
Reduce poverty and improve standard of living	Strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with Solomon Islands
Improve trade result – Shift from trade deficit to trade surplus	Make economic gains for Australia and New Zealand from free trade
Stimulate economic growth	Secure Solomon Islands natural resources

Anti-Corruption Convention to be Signed by Government In 2010

The Solomon Islands Government launched its battle to weed out corruption. Prime Minister Dr Derek Sikua today says there is no "silver bullet solution" to gun down corruption but calls on all Solomon Islanders to join the government as it begins a tough battle to tackle corruption in the country.

On 8 October Dr Sikua opened the first of a series of Anti-Corruption Workshops organized by the CNURA Government to help raise community awareness about corruption and provide an avenue for Solomon Islanders to express their views on ways to tackle corruption. The workshops marked the beginning of the Government's intention to establish a national anti-corruption policy.

Workshop participants included the country's 9 provincial premiers, senior government officials, Private Sector, NGO and Church representatives. But a notable absence from the workshop was Despite, there was no representation from the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce.

Dr Sikua said corruption is one of the major challenges that disrupt development and growth in Solomon Islands.

"It undermines political stability, government effectiveness and delivery of essential services, such as health care, education and law and order. Corruption is a global challenge as it affects development generally," Dr Sikua said.

Since taking Office in 2008, the CNURA Government had established a high level Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF) in the first quarter of 2009 to spearhead groundwork for the development of the proposed anti-corruption policy.

The ACTF comprised of both the public and private sector representatives. ACTF composition included the Prime Minister's Office and Auditor General (Co-chairs) and members including the Accountant General, Law Reform Commission, Director of Public Prosecution, Leadership Code Commission, Ombudsman Commission,

Public Service Commission, Attorney General's Office, Transparency (SI) Chapter and Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce.

The fundamental mandate of the Task force is to develop the Policy, oversee the implementation of the Policy, make recommendation on anti-corruption reform and monitor effectiveness of the anti-corruption reform.

The Policy will be an important tool for fighting corruption. The Policy is crucial for better coordination and integration of anti-corruption efforts, better identification of the corruption disease, better identification of solutions and better awareness building across Solomon Islands.

The underlying intention of the Policy is to develop a long term framework for anti-corruption reform, identify gaps in existing anti-corruption regime and identify reform priorities and an effective sequencing for reform.

Solomon Islands to sign UNCAC in 2010

Prime Minister Dr Derek Sikua announced during the anti-corruption workshops in Honiara in early October that the Solomon Islands would become party to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2010. This decision follows a cabinet decision earlier this year. The move is part of the Government's major anti-corruption agenda in efforts to minimize corruption in the country.

Dr Sikua said Solomon Islands need to join international efforts to fight corruption since it cannot fight in isolation because corruption is a global pandemic. Being party to the UNCAC will assist Solomon Islands work towards international standards to prevent corruption.

The government had intended to sign UNCAC in September 2009 during the UN General Assembly meeting in New York, but was prevented from doing

so due to technicalities.

"The technicalities should be sorted out and we should sign and accede to UNCAC in early 2010," Dr Sikua said.

Special Secretary to the Prime Minister and co-Chairman of Solomon Islands Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF), John Keniapisia said being party to UNCAC will help Solomon Islands access international support in terms of financial and technical resources to strengthen the governments fight against corruption.

Among other government anti-corruption agendas include the Political Parties Integrity Bill, establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption and National Audit Office and Anti-Corruption Policy and Task Force.

Tonga Tops World Bank Survey

'Business Advantage Tonga' published as Tonga moves to top of Pacific 'Doing Business' rankings.

This week sees the publication of Business Advantage Tonga 2009/10, our first business and investment guide to the Pacific Kingdom.

The publication follows the release last month of the World Bank's latest Doing Business rankings, which show Tonga has overtaken Fiji as the easiest place to do business in the

Pacific, as measured by the World Bank's 10 criteria.

Now on a steady course of recovery follow the civil disturbances of November 2006, Tonga is entering a new era of reform and growth. The Government is undertaking an ambitious program of pro-business reform aimed at stimulating the private sector. Opportunities exist across key sectors such as tourism, agribusiness, services, fisheries and even deep sea mining.

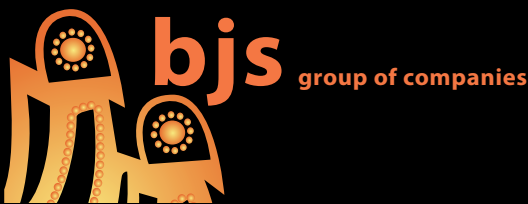
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