

Report Launch Event

NEPALI DIASPORA IN AUSTRALIA



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About the Event

On 18 May 2026, the Institute for Integrated Development Studies, in collaboration with the Australian Embassy in Nepal, organised a dissemination programme to present key findings from its study on the Nepali diaspora in Australia. The event brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shishir Khanal, and the Australian Ambassador to Nepal, His Excellency Simon Ernst, along with policymakers, academics, and private sector representatives reflecting a shared interest in strengthening diaspora engagement within Nepal's development framework. The discussions extended beyond a narrow focus on remittances and emphasised the broader significance of diaspora capital, skills, and transnational networks.

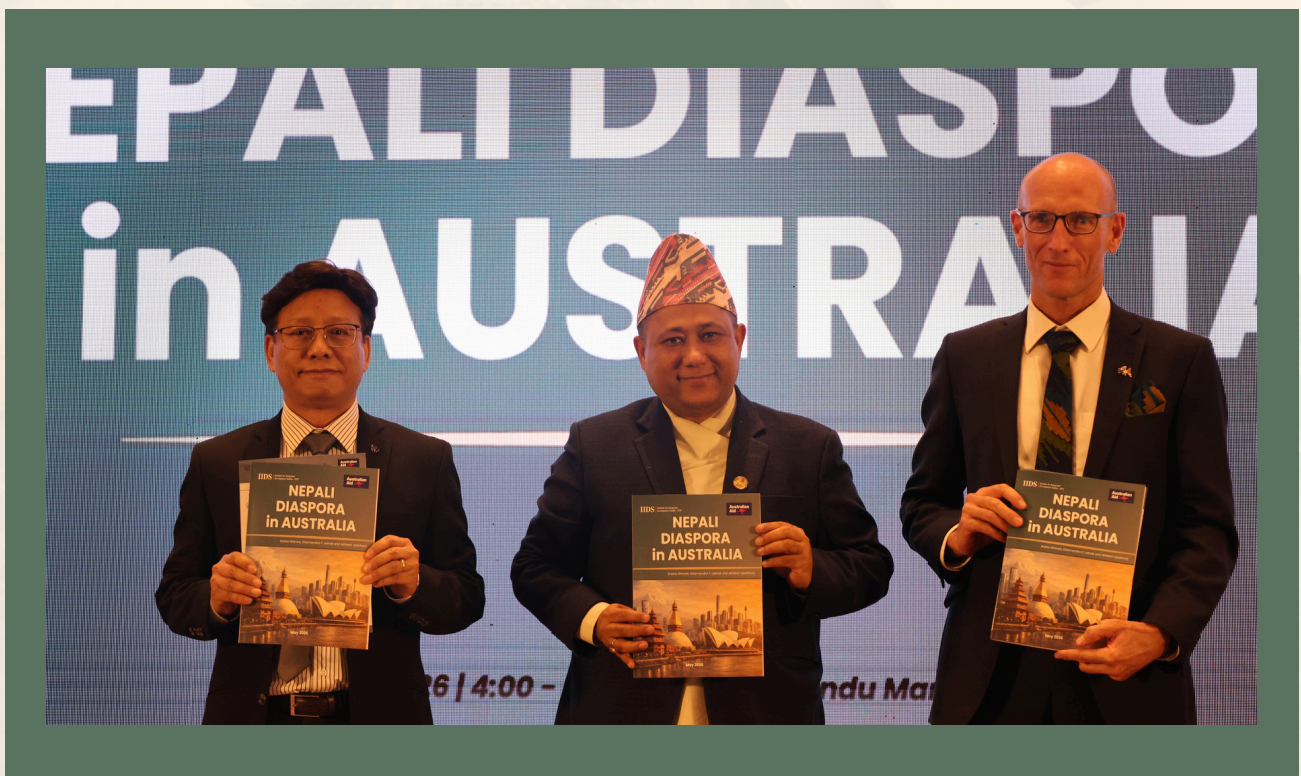
The presentations highlighted the rapid expansion and evolving profile of the Nepali community in Australia. The diaspora was positioned as an important link between the two countries, with the potential to contribute to economic and institutional development. While there is a strong willingness among Nepalis in Australia to engage with Nepal, the discussions identified a clear gap between intent and actual participation, particularly in terms of investment. The need to reconceptualise migration as a sustained and structured partnership was emphasised, with a focus on knowledge exchange, skills transfer, and institutional collaboration. Overall, the event reinforced the view that, with the appropriate policy environment, the Nepali diaspora in Australia can serve as a strategic partner in advancing investment, innovation, and deeper bilateral cooperation.

The programme highlighted the growing importance of the Nepali diaspora in Australia as a strategic partner in Nepal's development process. The discussions reflected a clear shift in perspective, from viewing migration primarily through the lens of remittances to recognising the broader contributions of diaspora communities in terms of knowledge, skills, and global networks. This evolving understanding underscores the need to integrate diaspora engagement more firmly within national development priorities.



Key Highlights

- **High-level commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.** The event drew senior representation from both governments, with Foreign Affairs Minister Shishir Khanal and H.E Australian Ambassador Simon Ernst among the key speakers. Their remarks signalled a shared interest in moving the Nepal-Australia relationship forward, with the 2024 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) cited as a concrete step in that direction.
- **Diaspora recognised as more than just a remittance source.** Across presentations and the panel discussion, speakers pointed to the breadth of what the Nepali community in Australia brings: professional expertise, global networks, and investment potential. The event made a case for treating diaspora engagement as a development strategy in its own right, not just a financial pipeline.



- **Investment in Nepal was a theme that ran through the day.** Speakers noted the strong interest among Nepalis in Australia to direct capital into sectors like energy, agriculture, and tourism, and the discussion explored what mechanisms(), from diaspora bonds to sector-specific funds, could help translate that interest into concrete action. The conversation reflected a community that is economically active and looking for the right entry points.
- **A policy conversation that moved beyond the usual.** The panel, drawing from government, private sector, and research, went beyond broad statements to discuss specific mechanisms: from dual citizenship frameworks and investment single-window systems to digital identification for the next generation. The discussion reflected a room that was not just aligned on the problem, but beginning to get serious about solutions.



Opening Remarks

DR. BISWASH GAUCHAN, FCA

Executive Chair, IIDS

Dr. Biswash Gauchan, Executive Chair of IIDS, opened the dissemination programme by situating the study within the broader transformation of Nepal's migration landscape over the past three decades. He noted that with an estimated 15-20% of the population living abroad, the diaspora has become a defining feature of contemporary Nepali society.



He drew particular attention to the rapid growth of the Nepali community in Australia, which has expanded fivefold within a decade, making it one of the fastest-growing migrant groups in that country. In this context, he called for a shift in national thinking, emphasising that “now is the time to think beyond remittance” and to mainstream the role of the diaspora in Nepal's development.

While acknowledging the critical role of remittances in supporting poverty reduction and macroeconomic stability, Dr. Gauchan highlighted their limitations in driving long-term structural change. He pointed out that remittance inflows are projected to reach approximately 15 billion dollars, a substantial figure relative to Nepal's overall economic size. However, he stressed that Nepal continues to receive very low levels of foreign direct investment, at less than 0.3 % of GDP. In this regard, he identified the diaspora as a key bridge for addressing this gap, noting that “the only way to get FDI for Nepal is the diaspora.”

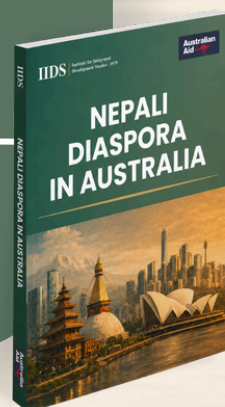


Dr. Gauchan further emphasised that diaspora engagement extends beyond financial contributions and is central to Nepal's integration into the global economy. He argued that access to technology, skills, and international markets through diaspora networks is essential for accelerating growth and achieving higher income status. He also underscored the importance of creating a supportive policy environment that responds to both the economic and emotional aspirations of the diaspora, particularly their desire to maintain a continued connection with Nepal.

Concluding on a forward-looking note, he expressed confidence in the potential of future generations of Nepalis abroad to contribute significantly to global leadership and innovation, while reaffirming the importance of sustained collaboration between institutions, partners, and the diaspora community.

The diaspora's role in fast-tracking Nepal's development is immense and it is now on us to reciprocate, by finding meaningful ways to engage them socially and economically.

DR. BISWASH GAUCHAN, FCA
Executive Chair, IIDS



Presentation

Research Findings on Nepali Diaspora in Australia



MS. SNEHA GHIMIRE

Senior Program & RA, IIDS

Ms. Sneha Ghimire presented the core findings of the report, walking the audience through a relationship between Nepal and Australia that is growing fast but remains structurally uneven. She opened with the trade picture. Bilateral trade between the two countries has reached AUD 4.9 billion, but the composition tells a more complicated story.

The relationship is overwhelmingly service-driven, largely on the back of Australian education exports, leaving Nepal with a merchandise trade deficit of approximately AUD 4.15 billion. On the diaspora side, appetite for Nepali goods is real and measurable, with 80 % of survey respondents spending up to AUD 1,000 per month on Nepali products such as snacks, spices, and cultural items. But appetite alone is not enough. Only 9 % of those who expressed interest in investing had actually done so, pointing to a significant gap between intention and action that she attributed to an unpredictable regulatory environment and a lack of clear investment pathways.

Ms. Ghimire was equally focused on what it would take to close that gap. Her recommendations ranged from establishing a dual citizenship framework to building confidence among long-term diaspora investors, to streamlining single window systems for tax and business registration.

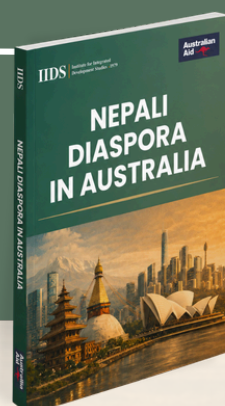


She also pointed to the need to reduce remittance transfer costs and develop direct air connectivity as practical enablers of deeper trade and travel ties. Her broader framing was clear: the Nepali diaspora in Australia should be understood not as a migrant community at the margins of policy, but as a strategic bridge for economic diplomacy, research collaboration, and innovation. Realising that potential, she argued, will require double taxation avoidance agreements, stronger institutional coordination, and a policy environment that matches the ambition of the community it is trying to engage.

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The Nepali community in Australia is not merely a remittance source – they are an economically and socially active community ready to engage. With the right policy platforms, they can become one of Nepal's most important development partners.

Ms. SNEHA GHIMIRE
Senior Program & RA, IIDS



Remarks

Nepali Diaspora in Australia

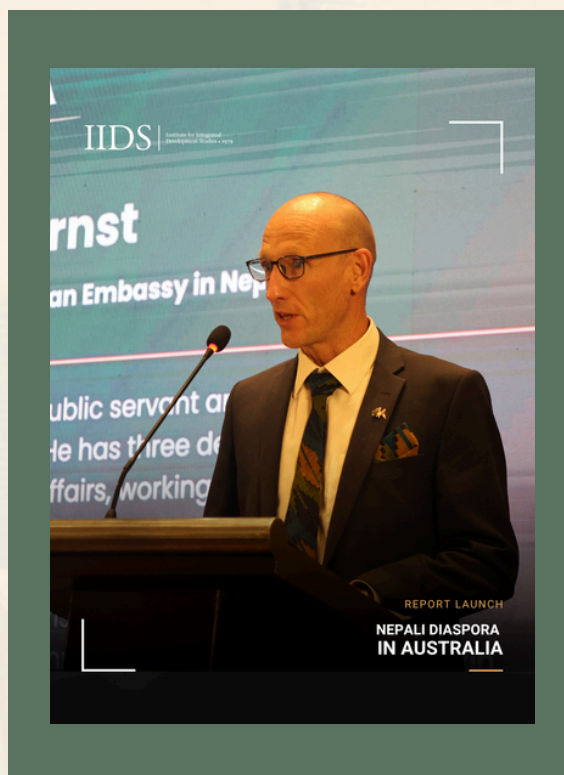
H.E. MR. SIMON ERNST

Australian Ambassador to Nepal

H.E. Simon Ernst, the Australian Ambassador to Nepal, addressed the gathering by congratulating the Institute for Integrated Development Studies on the completion of the report and commending its relevance to ongoing policy discussions. He noted that the research was deliberately entrusted to a Nepali institution that understands the domestic context and is able to engage with both the challenges and opportunities of diaspora engagement from a national perspective.

He described the report as a meaningful contribution to the broader global discourse on migration, with insights that extend beyond the Nepal–Australia context.

The Ambassador highlighted the growing importance of the Nepali community in Australia, describing it as an “asset to both our nations.” He observed that the diaspora has contributed across multiple sectors while also strengthening its presence within Australian society. He further emphasised that diversity remains a defining feature of Australia, with a significant share of the population born overseas. Drawing on personal experience, he reflected on the everyday connections between the two countries, noting how such interactions reinforce a sense of shared community.



Ambassador Ernst further characterised the diaspora as a “living bridge” that facilitates the exchange of culture, ideas, and capital between Nepal and Australia. He noted that this influence is increasingly visible in Nepal through businesses and practices shaped by experiences in Australia.

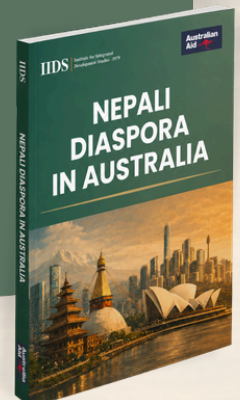
He also underscored the broader value of multiculturalism, referring to the idea that societies see themselves reflected in their global connections. In conclusion, he reaffirmed Australia’s commitment to building on the findings of the report to support stronger engagement and deepen bilateral relations between the two countries.

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The Nepali diaspora is an asset, not just for the community abroad, but for Nepal itself. It gives the country connections across the world that can be leveraged for greater benefit. This report, we hope, provides strong evidence-based guidance on how that potential can be harnessed.

H.E. MR. SIMON ERNST

Australian Ambassador to Nepal



Nepali Diaspora in Australia



RT. HON. MR. SHISHIR KHANAL
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal

Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shishir Khanal began his remarks by expressing his appreciation to the Institute for Integrated Development Studies and the Australian Embassy for the timely dissemination of the report. He noted that his participation in the event reflected a deliberate effort to better understand the evolving dynamics of the Nepali diaspora, particularly given the Ministry's direct responsibility in this area.

He also acknowledged the increasing political relevance of diaspora communities, observing that they have played a meaningful role in recent political developments. Reflecting on the study, he highlighted the relatively young profile of the Nepali community in Australia and underscored the importance of understanding its aspirations.

The Minister drew attention to the broader scale of migration, noting that with an estimated five million Nepalis working abroad, "almost one in six Nepali is currently outside of Nepal." While recognising that remittances remain a "single most contributing factor" to the national economy, he emphasised that they are insufficient to support long-term economic transformation. He stated that the government is now exploring ways to "unlock some of the legal bottlenecks" that limit the ability of the diaspora to engage more meaningfully with Nepal's economy, particularly in areas such as investment and enterprise.



Addressing policy concerns, Minister Khanal clarified that while dual citizenship remains constrained by the current constitutional framework, the government is prioritising the effective implementation of Non-Resident Nepali citizenship provisions. He noted that this mechanism has not been fully operationalised and stressed the importance of enabling its practical use for activities such as property ownership, financial transactions, and investment.

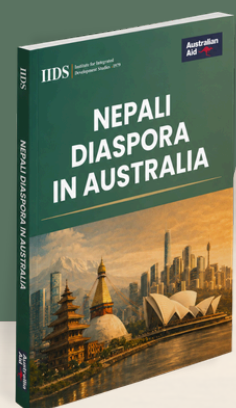
He further emphasised that diaspora engagement must be guided by evidence-based policymaking, balancing openness with necessary safeguards. In conclusion, he described the diaspora as one of Nepal's "greatest assets" and a vital linkage for strengthening economic cooperation and long-term relations between Nepal and Australia.

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Dual citizenship may be constrained by our constitution today but that is not the end of the conversation. We are actively exploring what we can unlock, and NRN citizenship is one meaningful path forward.

RT. HON. MR. SHISHIR KHANAL

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal



Panel Discussion ¹³

Experiences, Opportunities, and Future Directions



Panelists:

Mr. Pushpa Raj Bhattarai — Joint Secretary, MoFA

Mr. Birendra Raj Pandey — President, CNI

Dr. Meena Poudel — Social Analyst, Researcher & Author

Mr. Pjay Shrestha — Founder & CEO, Digital Consulting Ventures

Moderator:

Mr. Akhilesh Upadhyay — Policy Lead, IIDS

Panel Discussion Summary

MR. AKHILESH UPADHYAY

Policy Lead, IIDS

The panel discussion, moderated by Mr. Akhilesh Upadhyay, shifted the focus from research findings to the practical dimensions of diaspora engagement. He guided the conversation towards moving beyond the traditional remittance-centred narrative and encouraged a more forward-looking approach that recognises the diaspora as a strategic resource for Nepal's development. The discussion emphasised the need to channel diaspora capital into productive sectors while also strengthening institutional mechanisms.



A recurring theme throughout the session was the importance of building a trust-based policy environment that enables meaningful and sustained collaboration.

Dr. Meena Poudel – Social Analyst and Researcher

Dr. Meena Poudel highlighted the urgency of the current moment, describing it as a narrowing “window of opportunity” for Nepal. She noted that while the Nepali diaspora in Australia continues to expand, Nepal's domestic labour force is gradually shrinking. In this context, she called for a shift towards more proactive labour diplomacy. She also underscored the need for more inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches, pointing out that women's contributions often remain unrecognised due to their classification as dependents rather than active economic participants.

Mr. Birendra Raj Pandey – President, Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI)

Mr. Birendra Raj Pandey provided a private sector perspective on diaspora investment patterns. He observed that while real estate remains the preferred investment avenue for many Non-Resident Nepalis, it does not contribute significantly to broader economic transformation. He emphasised the need to redirect investment towards productive sectors such as energy, agriculture, and tourism, where diaspora capital and expertise could play a catalytic role in achieving Nepal's long-term development goals.



Mr. Pjay Shrestha – CEO, Digital Consulting Ventures

Mr. Pjay Shrestha offered insights from a second-generation diaspora perspective, highlighting the challenge of maintaining long-term engagement. He referred to the risk of a gradual “drop-off” in connection between younger diaspora members and Nepal. To address this, he proposed the introduction of mechanisms such as a digital identification system that could maintain a continuous link with Nepalis living abroad. He also emphasised that one of the most valuable contributions of the diaspora lies in the transfer of global work culture and professional practices.

Mr. Pushpa Raj Bhattarai – Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Pushpa Raj Bhattarai presented a policy-oriented perspective, focusing on the need to strengthen existing institutional frameworks. He emphasised that efforts should first be directed towards improving the functionality of Non-Resident Nepali citizenship provisions, particularly in enabling economic participation. He suggested that a phased approach is necessary, where economic rights are effectively implemented before expanding into broader political considerations. He also described the diaspora as an important instrument of soft power, contributing to Nepal’s international presence and strengthening bilateral relations.





THE PANELISTS



Q&A Session

The floor opened to a series of inquiries that challenged the panel to move beyond the data and address the more complex, human, and regulatory aspects of the diaspora story.

Question: What is the government doing to ensure future diaspora strategies are gender-sensitive and address the specific concerns of women?

The Response: Pushpa Raj Bhattarai admitted that current protections, particularly in labor-heavy corridors, remain insufficient. He noted that the upcoming migration policy (2082) is being designed to create a safer and more enabling environment for women in both the corporate and labor sectors. Dr. Meena Poudel added that the biggest barrier is data-driven; women are often statistically invisible because they are mislabeled as "dependents" rather than primary economic actors, which prevents the government from acknowledging their true contribution.



Question: The report highlights a very prosperous diaspora, but isn't there a risk that this data is skewed? What about the Nepalis in Australia who are struggling?

The Response: The panel acknowledged that while the report shows high median incomes, it does not mean every individual is thriving. **Pjay Shrestha** noted that life in Australia is often "tough" and involves significant struggle, but argued that this very struggle often fuels the drive to reinvest back in Nepal. The consensus was that future policies must be inclusive of both the high-achievers and those still finding their footing.



Question: Last year, Nepal saw a USD 1 billion outflow for education while receiving USD 12–13 billion in remittances. Is it time to link foreign currency provisions for students to future investment in Nepal?

The Response: Pjay Shrestha argued against restricting currency flow for education, suggesting it would be counterproductive. Instead, he argued that the focus should be on the "return side", making the domestic environment attractive enough that students naturally want to bring their capital and global expertise back. He suggested that if the market is open and professional, the "brain drain" naturally converts into a "circular gain."



Question: Since real estate is the "safe bet" for most NRNs, how do we actually get them to put their money into productive sectors like energy or agriculture?

The Response: Birendra Raj Pandey explained that the private sector is working to build confidence in alternative sectors like digital infrastructure and tourism. He emphasized the need for a shift in Nepal's financial system, moving away from "property-based collateral" toward inclusive financing that allows diaspora members to invest in projects based on their professional knowledge and technical expertise.



Full List of Questions

- 1. On Gender:** What is the Nepali government planning to do to ensure that future strategies for the diaspora address the concerns of women and are more broadly gender-sensitive?
- 2. On Education Outflow:** Is it a good idea to link foreign currency provisions for students studying abroad to future investment requirements in Nepal to balance the USD 1 billion outflow?
- 3. On Data Accuracy:** The study finds that the diaspora is economically prosperous, but is it possible that this is skewed by the survey respondents? How do we account for those who are struggling economically?
- 4. On Diversifying Investment:** How do we move diaspora money away from the "safe" real estate sector and channel it into productive sectors like energy, agriculture, and digital infrastructure?
- 5. On the Second Generation:** How will the concerns and needs of the diaspora change over the years as we transition from first-generation migrants to the second generation?
- 6. On Policy Recommendations:** What are three concrete recommendations for achieving greater participation and investment from the Nepali diaspora in Australia?



Closing Remarks

MR. DURGA PRASAD BHATTARAI Governing Council Member, IIDS

In his closing remarks, Durga Prasad Bhattarai emphasized that the massive potential of the Nepali diaspora in Australia requires a significant shift in how the Nepali government operates. He stated that the *"range of possibilities and the extent of opportunities demand a commensurate range of sincere flexibility and forthcomingness on the part of Nepali state"* to move beyond talking and actually deliver results.



Reflecting on his years in the foreign service, Bhattarai challenged the government's commitment to its own rhetoric. He specifically pointed to the slogan *"Once Nepali, Always Nepali,"* questioning how sincerely the state has actually honored that promise. He noted that domestic political interference continues to divide the community abroad, often alienating highly skilled professionals who want to avoid being caught up in party politics.

Bhattarai argued that the state must take a more active role in protecting and supporting Nepalis in distress. He stressed that consistent consular and social support is the only way to maintain a real connection with the *"second, third, and fourth generations"* living overseas. While acknowledging that the government is aware of these issues, he noted that this study serves as a tool to bridge the information gap and turn these concepts into action.

He highlighted that the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism from 2017 and the 2024 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) are the essential foundations for future cooperation. Bhattarai expressed satisfaction at the growing scale and intensity of people to people ties between the two nations. He concluded by noting that the data provided by the study serves as a starting point for more informed and strategic diaspora engagement moving forward.

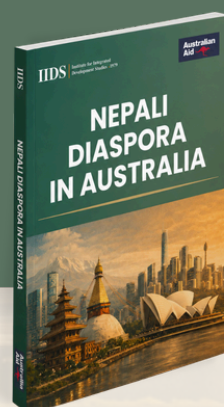


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The slogan 'Once Nepali, always Nepali' was a promise. The vast opportunities our diaspora presents now ask a simple question of the Nepali state: how sincerely have we honored it?

MR. DURGA PRASAD BHATTARAI

Governing Council Member, IIDS



NEPALI DIASPORA
IN AUSTRALIA

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