



## Obesity Policy Engagement Network Southeast Asia (OPEN SEA) 2nd Annual Meeting

Post meeting report

## Overview of annual meeting

On 22nd November 2022, the 2nd annual meeting of the Obesity Policy Engagement Network Southeast Asia (OPEN SEA) was held, in collaboration between The Royal Danish Embassy and Novo Nordisk.

### Co-chairs of OPEN SEA 2022:

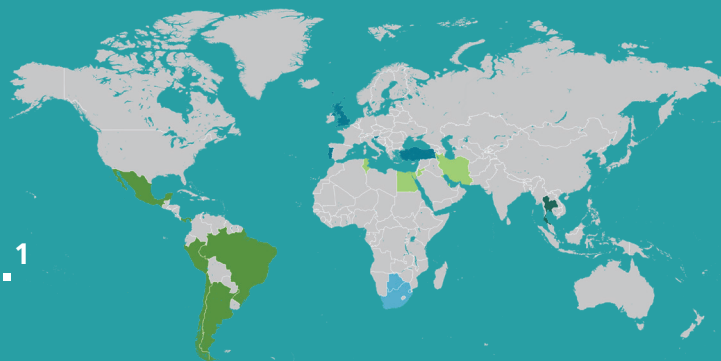


**Prof. Brian Oldfield,**  
Immediate Past President,  
Asia-Oceania Association for the Study  
of Obesity (AOASO)



**Dr Tham Kwang Wei,**  
President, Singapore Association for  
the Study of Obesity (SASO); Honorary  
Treasurer, AOASO; Chair, OPEN  
Singapore (SG)

The event was  
attended by over  
50 stakeholders,  
across 14 countries.<sup>1</sup>



Presentations delivered during the meeting include:

- Keynote speech on the obesity landscape and initiatives in Malaysia
- Progress of OPEN SEA since 2021
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations on obesity prevention and management



**Datuk Dr Norhayati Rusli,**  
Deputy Director General of Public  
Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia  
KEYNOTE SPEAKER



**Prof. Brian Oldfield,**  
Immediate Past President,  
AOASO



**Dr Tham Kwang Wei,**  
President, SASO; Honorary Treasurer,  
AOASO; Chair, OPEN SG

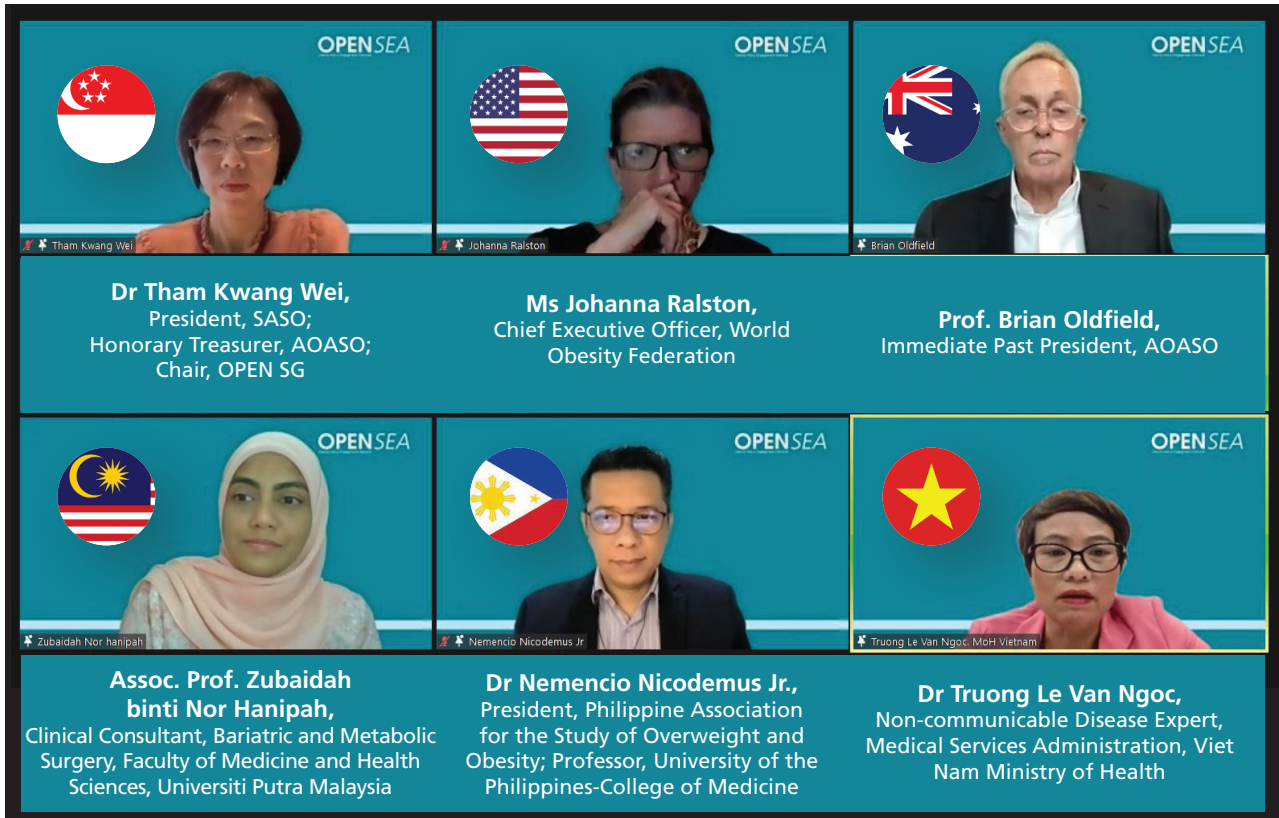


**Prof. Dr Rohana Abdul Ghani,**  
Chair, OPEN Malaysia  
(MY OPEN)



**Ms Johanna Ralston,**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
World Obesity Federation

A panel discussion featuring key experts who discussed the significance of the WHO recommendations and opportunities to implement them in Southeast Asia during the 2022 OPEN SEA annual meeting:



Despite the efforts to tackle obesity in the region, key challenges identified in our inaugural meeting remain:



Low awareness that obesity is a chronic disease



Lack of data and research for evidence-based policies and programmes



Lack of prioritisation on the national development agenda



Current publicly available interventions do not address the complexity of obesity

We set out to tackle these challenges in 2022, with the establishment of national chapters in Malaysia and Singapore to advocate for the implementation of policies that successfully prevent and manage obesity.

## Progress from 2021

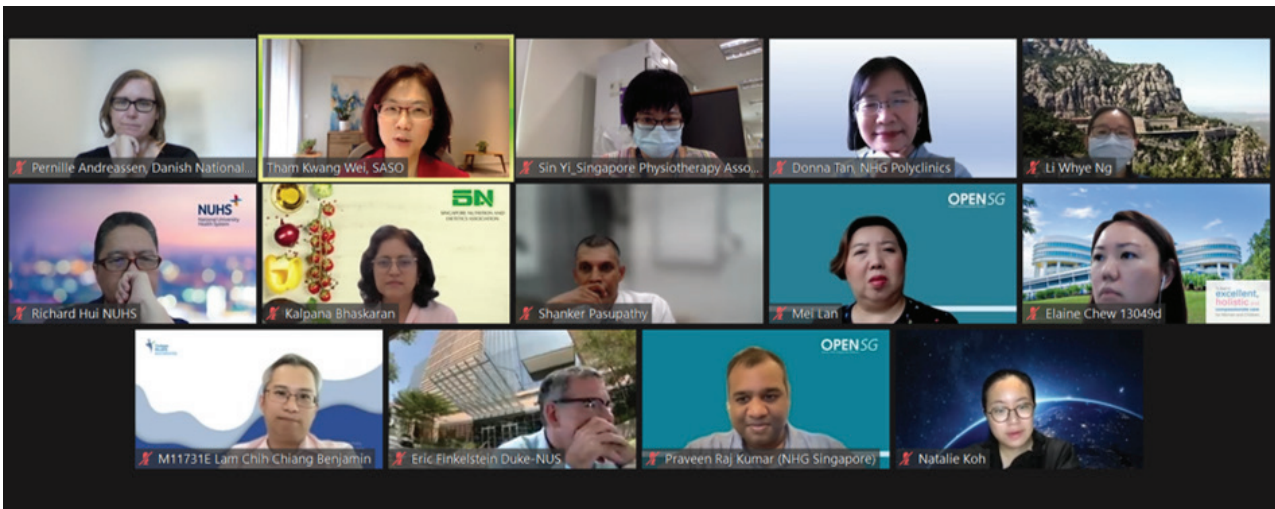
### Establishment of national networks in Malaysia and Singapore



Launch of MY OPEN (Malaysia) in January 2022, consisting of a multidisciplinary team of experts who aim to complement public health prevention strategies by focusing on the clinical aspects and management of obesity and its related complications.



Engagement meeting between the Health Minister of Malaysia, Ambassador of Denmark to Indonesia and Malaysia and MY OPEN in September 2022 to discuss shared national priorities and a presentation of key recommendations to improve obesity care in Malaysia.



Launch of OPEN SG (Singapore) in August 2022, which saw attendance of over 40 stakeholders, comprising of people living with obesity, health economists, policymakers, public health officials, medical practitioners and academics. During the meeting, stakeholders analysed key learnings and outcomes of current efforts and policies. These discussions then inspired appraisal of other initiatives needed to effectively prevent and manage obesity in Singapore.

## Regional publication highlight

### 1. South and Southeast Asia consensus on care and management of obesity<sup>2</sup>

- Authored by medical experts from 10 countries, in collaboration with AOASO
- Published in leading obesity journal, Obesity Reviews
- A set of 42 clinical recommendations to prevent and manage obesity taking into account the region's unique biological characteristics in obesity, cultural nuances and healthcare landscape



### 2. A study on the economic impact of obesity in Singapore<sup>3</sup>

- Authored by researchers in Duke-NUS Medical School and SASO
- Provides the required health economic data to strategically design policies that target at-risk populations

People living with obesity (PwO) have  
**37%**  
higher medical expenditure

PwO are  
**3x**  
more likely to have diabetes and other chronic diseases

Estimated national cost of SGD  
**\$261**  
million  
in medical expenditures and absenteeism

## Global recommendations on obesity prevention and management

During the 75th World Health Assembly in May 2022, country representatives of the WHO recognised obesity as a chronic, multifactorial disease, and agreed on the recommendations for the prevention and management of obesity<sup>4</sup>. An Acceleration Plan was also introduced to help drive country-specific actions based on individual country needs and priorities.<sup>5</sup>

### The recommendations emphasise:



A whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach



A life-course approach, that covers preventive actions in early childhood



Integrated health services that provide a continuum of care, including health promotion and prevention, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management

The Acceleration Plan focuses on establishing and implementing a data-driven incremental strategy to support an initial subset of frontrunner countries to tackle and reverse obesity trends, with a view to extending the strategy to other countries later. Since the implementation of recommendations requires government leadership, a strong commitment from the Ministry of Health will be needed to qualify as a frontrunner country.

- **EURO:** United Kingdom, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey
- **AFRO:** Botswana, Eswatini, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa
- **EMRO:** Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, Tunisia
- **SEARO:** Thailand
- **PAHO:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay

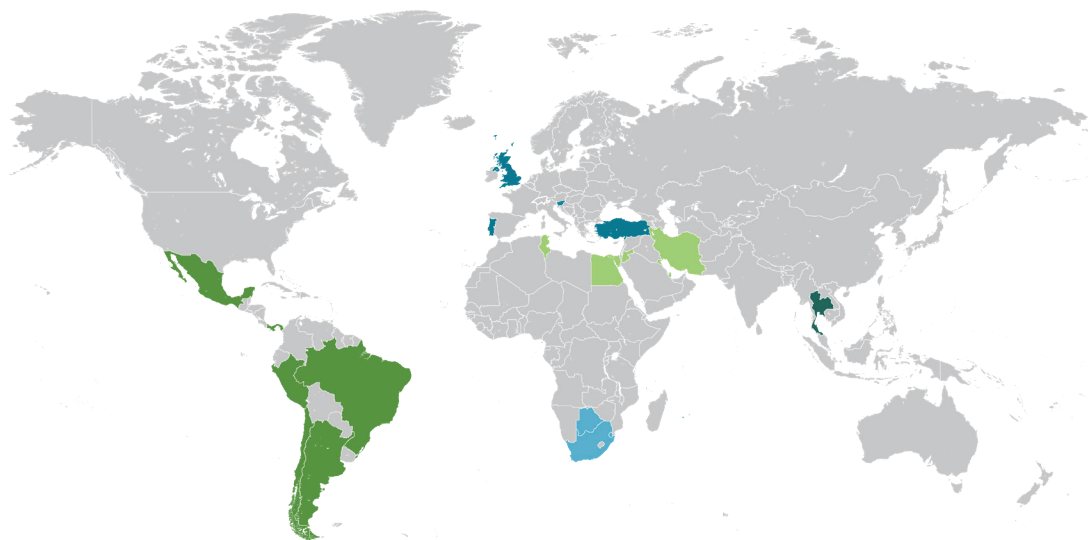


Figure 1: List of frontrunner countries, as of December 2022

World Obesity Federation is the key civil society partner of the Acceleration Plan, who will work closely with the WHO, members and wider stakeholder networks to secure strong commitments and accelerate action globally.

## Strategic actions to improve obesity prevention and management in Southeast Asia



Figure 2: A systemic, sustained and whole-of-society approach, delivered at a large scale across these six focus areas is needed to address the complex nature of obesity

To complement the recommendations set by the WHO and sustain momentum at the regional level, OPEN SEA conducted several workshop sessions during the annual meeting to discuss strategic actions needed to improve the landscape for PwO, as well as opportunities for OPEN SEA to engage with stakeholders successfully to effect positive changes.

### 1. Broader recognition of obesity as a health priority in society

Key stakeholders:    

Proposed initiatives:

- **Recognise obesity as a chronic disease:** Highlight the complexity and multifactorial nature of obesity in national public health campaigns and communication activities, as well as education for healthcare professionals, with the aim to:
  - Raise awareness that obesity is a preventable and treatable disease that is also a risk factor for other chronic diseases
  - Increase understanding of the many drivers of obesity, including the genetic predisposition to obesity and an obesogenic environment
  - Target underlying factors and drivers of obesity in its prevention and management
  - Address discrimination and stigma faced by PwO
  - Emphasise on a shared responsibility between PwO and healthcare professionals
- **Centralise policy supervision:** Create a central governmental committee that spans the Ministries of Health, Education, Transport and Trade and oversees policy drafting and implementation
- **Develop evidence-based strategies:** Conduct research on the obesity landscape, analyse current initiatives and incorporate findings for longer-term planning of policies and initiatives

## 2. Prioritise obesity on the national health agenda

Key stakeholders:   

Proposed initiatives:

- **Promote positive health management across society:** Raise awareness of healthy lifestyle and weight management among communities by:
  - Incentivising physical activity at the workplace
  - Leveraging technology to promote behaviours on healthy living and enhance obesity care, for example smartphone applications that integrate data such as nutritional content of food with self-monitoring of mental health and sleep hygiene and use of teleconsultation services for under-served populations
  - Increasing the number of green spaces, walkways or bicycle lanes across urban and rural settings
- **Increase awareness, accessibility and availability of healthy foods:** Leverage influencers to promote healthy eating; increase accessibility and availability of healthy foods in schools and food banks

## 3. Improve prevention and clinical management of obesity

Key stakeholders:   

Proposed initiatives:

- **Formalise national benchmark for multidisciplinary obesity care:** Develop national multidisciplinary clinical associations that standardise clinical guidelines, as well as providing resource centres for healthcare professionals
- **Build capabilities of healthcare professionals:** Incorporate regular training sessions and benchmark accreditation in obesity care and management in all levels of healthcare system starting from healthcare undergraduate programmes
- **Improve accessibility to obesity prevention:** Improve availability and affordability of preventive measures by
  - Providing health screening in primary care, schools and workplaces
  - Subsidising the uptake of screening procedures
  - Incentivising health promotion behaviours, including when health targets are met after commencing treatment
- **Provide financial protection:** Include screening, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management of obesity as part of universal health coverage packages

## Next steps and contact information

If you would like to get in touch for more information on OPEN SEA or would like your organisation to be an OPEN SEA member, please contact [opensea@gcihealth.com](mailto:opensea@gcihealth.com).



## Appendix A: Attendee list Speakers

Name	Organisation
<b>Australia</b>	
Prof. Brian Oldfield	Immediate Past President, Asia-Oceania Association for the Study of Obesity
<b>Denmark</b>	
H.E. Sandra Jensen Landi	Ambassador of Denmark to Singapore, Ambassador-designate of Denmark to Brunei (non-resident) and Board Member, The Danish Trade Council in Southeast Asia
<b>Malaysia</b>	
Datuk Dr Norhayati Rusli	Deputy Director General of Public Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia
Prof. Dr Rohana Abdul Ghani	Professor of Medicine & Consultant Endocrinologist, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM); Chair, MY OPEN
Assoc. Prof. Zubaidah bt Nor Hanipah	Clinical Consultant, General Surgery, Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery, Universiti Putra Malaysia
<b>Philippines</b>	
Prof. Nemencio Nicodemus Jr.	President, Philippine Association for the Study of Overweight and Obesity; Professor, University of the Philippines-College of Medicine
<b>Singapore</b>	
Dr Kwang Wei Tham	President, Singapore Association for the Study of Obesity; Honorary Treasurer, Asia-Oceania Association for the Study of Obesity; Chair, OPEN SG
<b>United States of America</b>	
Ms Johanna Ralston	Chief Executive Officer, World Obesity Federation
<b>Vietnam</b>	
Dr Truong Le Van Ngoc	Non-communicable Disease Expert, Medical Services Administration, Viet Nam Ministry of Health

## Appendix A: Attendee list Participants

Name	Organisation
<b>Bangladesh</b>	
Dr. A. B. M. Kamrul Hasan	Assistant Professor, Mymensingh Medical College Hospital
Dr Md. Faruque Pathan	Professor of Endocrinology, BIRDEM Hospital
Prof. Dr. Muhammad Hafizur Rahman	Senior Consultant, United Hospital
Dr Shahjada Selim	Associate Professor, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital
Dr Tanjina Hossain	Associate Professor, Dept. of Endocrinology, Green Life Medical College & Hospital
<b>Brunei Darussalam</b>	
Dr Alice Yong	Consultant Endocrinologist & Physician, Head of Endocrine Unit, R.I.P.A.S. Hospital
Dr Siti Rosemawati Yussof	Senior Medical Officer, Health Promotion Centre
Ms Siti Munawwarah Tarif	Senior Health Officer, Health Promotion Centre
<b>Cambodia</b>	
Dr Chhun Loun	Country Representative, Ministry of Health
Dr Kol Hero	Country Representative, Ministry of Health
Dr Sum Satha	Chief of Internal Medicine, Calmette Hospital
<b>Malaysia</b>	
Dato Sri Dr Azhari Rosman	Senior Consultant Cardiologist, National Heart Institute
Assoc Prof Dr Barakatun Nisak	Deputy Dean and Associate Professor, Dietitian, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia
Dr Feisul Mustapha	Deputy Director, Non Communicable Disease, Ministry of Health Malaysia
Prof Dr Firdaus Mukhtar	Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, Universiti Putra Malaysia
Dato Dr Gee Tikfu	Consultant Bariatric & Metabolic Surgeon, Prince Court Medical Centre

## Appendix A: Attendee list Participants

Name	Organisation
<b>Malaysia</b>	
Dr Masni Mohamad	Consultant Endocrinologist, Hospital Putrajaya
Dr Muhammad Fikri bin Azmi	Senior Principal Assistant Director, Disease Control Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia
Prof Dr Muhammad Yazid Jalaludin	Senior Consultant Paediatrician, Paediatric Endocrinologist, University Malaya Medical Centre
Dr Nalini M Selveindran	Paediatric Endocrinologist, Hospital Putrajaya
Prof Dr Nur Azurah Abdul Ghani	Head of Department, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Hospital Chancelor Tuanku Muhriz, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Dr Nurhaliza binti Zakariah	Senior Principal Assistant Director, Disease Control Section, Ministry of Health Malaysia
Dr Norlaila Mustafa	Head of Department, Senior Consultant Physician and Endocrinologist, Department of Medicine, Hospital Chancelor Tuanku Muhriz, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Dr Wong Ping Foo	Family Medicine Specialist, Klinik Kesihatan Cheras Baru
<b>Maldives</b>	
Dr Moosa Murad	Consultant Endocrinologist, Consultant in Internal Medicine IGMH, Maldives
<b>Myanmar</b>	
Prof. Tint Swe Latt	President, Myanmar Diabetes Association
Prof. Than Than Aye	Gastroenterologist, Grand Hantha International Hospital
<b>Philippines</b>	
Dr Carmela Granada	Medical Officer, Non-Communicable Disease Division, Department of Health
Ms Lenliegh Hope Luces	Senior Health Program Officer, Department of Health
Dr Mia Fojas	Endocrinologist, Medical Centre Manila; Honorary Secretary, AOASO
Dr Razel Nikka Hao	Director IV for Standards and Sectoral Strategy, Disease Prevention and Control Bureau, Department of Health
<b>Singapore</b>	
Dr Cindy Ng Li Whye	Principal Physiotherapist and Clinical Coordinator, Obesity Metabolic Unit, Singapore General Hospital
Dr Kalpana Bhaskaran	President, Singapore Nutrition and Dietetics Association
Ms Tan Cin Yee	Assistant Director, Group Integrated Care - Clinical Integration, National Healthcare Group

## Appendix A: Attendee list Participants

Name	Organisation
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	
Dr Noel Somasundaram	Endocrinologist, Diabetologist, National Hospital of Sri Lanka
<b>Vietnam</b>	
Dr Do Thi Ngoc Diep	Vice President, Vietnam Nutrition Association
Dr Ho Thi Kim Thanh	Director of Family Medicine and Community Healthcare Center, Hanoi Medical University
Mrs Kiều Thị Tuyết Mai	Health Economist, Hanoi University of Pharmacy
Ms Le Thi Thuy	Professor, Hanoi University of Pharmacy
Dr Nghiem Nguyet Thu	Head of Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics Department, National Institute of Nutrition
Assoc. Prof. Nguyen Anh Tuan	Vice Head of Digestive Surgery Institute, 108 Military Hospital
Dr Nguyen Quang Bay	Head, Department of Diabetes and Endocrinology, Bach Mai Hospital
Mrs Pham Nu Hanh Van	Health Economist, Hanoi University of Pharmacy
Dr Phan Huong Duong	Vice Director, National Hospital of Endocrinology
Assoc. Prof. Vu Thi Thanh Huyen	Head of Endocrinology, Musculoskeletal Department, National Geriatric Hospital

## References

1. Refer to Appendix A for a full list of attendees.
2. Tham KW, Ghani RA, Cua SC, et al. (2022). Obesity in South and Southeast Asia—A new consensus on care and management. *Obesity Reviews*. e13520
3. Junxing C, Huynh VA, Lamoureux E, et al. (2022). Economic burden of excess weight among older adults in Singapore: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*. 12:e064357.
4. World Health Organization. (2022). WHO Discussion Paper: Draft recommendations for the prevention and management of obesity over the life course, including potential targets. [Online]. Available from : <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-discussion-paper-draft-recommendations-for-the-prevention-and-management-of-obesity-over-the-life-course-including-potential-targets>
5. World Health Organization. (2022). Seventy-Fifth World Health Assembly: Provisional agenda item 14.1 Follow-up to the political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. [Online]. Available from: [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA75/A75\\_10Add6-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA75/A75_10Add6-en.pdf)

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