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法兰德斯中国商会 FCCC VCKK
FLANDERS-CHINA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
VLAAMS-CHINESE KAMER VAN KOOPHANDEL

PAST EVENTS

Webinar: China's Economy Under Covid-19 Now and After – 29 April 2020

The Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce organized a webinar focused on **'China's Economy Under Covid-19 Now and After'** on **29 April 2020**.

Covid-19 has affected almost every economy in the world. China, being a trade partner of many economies, are the first being affected and the first getting out of the crisis.

Following a word of welcome and introduction by Ms. Gwenn Sonck, Executive Director, Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce, Iris Pang, Greater China economist, ING Wholesale Banking, introduced the topic 'China's Economy Under Covid-19 Now and After'. A Q&A session and final discussion concluded the webinar.

Webinar: WeChat the Super App – How to Engage Digitally in China? – 28 April 2020

The Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce organized a webinar focused on '**WeChat the Super App – How to Engage Digitally in China?'** on 28 April 2020.

If you are doing business with China, you might already know that Western social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and so on are banned in China. No matter if you are in B2B or B2C business, WeChat is one of the best tools for you to reach your target audiences in China. It has grown into a very popular social media network in China, the so-called 'Super App'. This is not just because of its 1.1 billion users worldwide, but also because WeChat has many more functions integrated, like WeChat Pay, WeChat Store, Moments, and Mini-programme, etc.

Following a word of welcome and introduction by Ms. Gwenn Sonck, Executive Director, Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Jiao Li, Co-founder of Crayfish.io, introduced 'WeChat the Super App – How to Engage Digitally in China?'. Q&A and a final discussion followed her presentation.

COVID-19 RESOURCES GUIDE v.3.1

The latest version of the Covid-19 Resources Guide v.3.1 is available here and can also be downloaded as a PDF on the website of the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce (FCCC). The **latest statistics of cases and deaths** can be consulted on Johns Hopkins University's CSSE page: https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html

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HEALTH

Last Covid-19 patients leave Wuhan hospitals

China has announced that the last 12 Covid-19 patients have left hospitals in Wuhan and that the city is now largely free of Covid-19, although there are still about 535l asymptomatic cases. The number of hospital patients had peaked in the city on February 18 at 38,020, with nearly 10,000 in severe or critical condition. Surnamed Ding, the last patient discharged was a 77-year-old man treated at Wuhan Pulmonary Hospital.

Heilongjiang has seen a rise in infected travelers arriving from Russia in recent weeks, and is now battling to contain a flare-up in local cases. A Chinese man who returned from the U.S. to Harbin had infected at least 50 people, either directly or indirectly, including secondary infections at two hospitals. 18 officials in Harbin, including a Vice Mayor, were punished for the flare-up of new outbreaks. To help contain the outbreak, the Heilongjiang government is cautioning against family gatherings, cross infections at hospitals, and slow reporting in epidemic investigations. “The biggest political task at present is to stop the rebound and spread of the epidemic,” Wang Yongkang, Vice Governor of Heilongjiang, said.

Hubei province said its first-quarter GDP fell by 39.2% on a yearly basis, according to the Provincial Bureau of Statistics. The added value of major industrial enterprises in Hubei fell by 46.9% on a yearly basis in March, but the decline narrowed by 32.9 percentage points from the level in February. Among the 41 industries surveyed by the Bureau, 27 reported lower industrial production but at a much narrower pace in March than in the first two months of the year. By April 14, major companies in Hubei reported a work resumption rate of 98%, 88.3 percentage points higher than that on March 11. Nearly 87.9% of the employees had returned to work in the province.

In Beijing, the number of institutions able to conduct nucleic acid testing has risen to 50 from 17 in early February. Beijing municipal authorities said that they would no longer require companies to keep on-site personnel to fewer than half the workforce, as the city is easing its anti-crowding rules implemented since the resumption of work. But eight categories of people would be tested, including travelers checking in at hotels. The National Health Commission said all large general hospitals need to set up laboratories that meet certain requirements and can conduct coronavirus testing independently. Training for medical staff should be stepped up and testing operations standardized to reduce problems with the accuracy of testing.

The majority of some 10 million last-year senior high school students in China returned to school on April 27 after two months of stay-at-home learning amid the coronavirus epidemic. Schools rolled out stringent precautions, including the use of facial recognition, multiple temperature checks, temporary quarantine areas, automatic hand sanitizer dispensers, footprint signs to mark queueing distances, and distributing protective gear to students and faculty members. In Beijing, some 50,000 senior high school students went back to school. Beijing requires teachers to wear masks in the classrooms, and students to wear masks all the time at school.

The Chinese and South Korean governments are working on the details of a fast entry policy, known as the “green channel” between the two countries, in the light of the improved Covid-19 epidemic situation. The policy has been lauded by Korean companies and Chinese observers, as they believed that it could rapidly stimulate the recovery of the region. The “Green Lane” establishes a fast passage for urgently needed personnel who are involved in key sectors such as business and technology. China and South Korea agreed to establish such a fast passage between the two countries during a recent video conference between Chinese and South Korean Vice Foreign Ministers Le Yucheng and Cho Se-young. Analysts said the policy could also be further extended to Japan and other countries and regions in the world, to resume necessary business interactions and travel as soon as possible. But the National Immigration Administration (NIA) said that **the temporary suspension of entry in the country by foreign nationals holding visas or residence permits** issued before March 26 **has not been lifted**. Special visas issued after this date can be used to enter China but are difficult to obtain.

Vital raw material shortages are causing problems in China’s medical equipment market, sending up the prices of masks and gowns. Supplies of melt-blown non-woven fabric, polypropylene, nitrile and parts for ventilators and thermometers are dwindling and prices are soaring. Chinese authorities are cracking down on fly-by-night operators offering products of substandard quality, requiring inspection by Customs before they are being allowed to export.

As **two U.S. states** – Missouri and Mississippi – **have filed lawsuits in the U.S., accusing the Chinese government of not doing enough to stop the coronavirus epidemic**, Chinese companies are contemplating countermeasures, even as legal experts said the lawsuits had no chance of success. International legal and trade experts have argued that if Chinese companies' legitimate interests and rights are damaged by these lawsuits or other politically motivated moves by foreign governments, there are also abundant legal means both the Chinese government and businesses can take to protect themselves. “If they insist on carrying forward the lawsuits and cause damage to China, then sorry, we will also have to strike back and respond in kind by suing them,” He Weiwen, Executive Council Member of the China Society for World Trade Organization Studies, told the Global Times.

There are concerns that Chinese companies that are operating overseas could be impacted – not necessarily by the lawsuits but by the overall anti-China politics. To protect their legitimate interests, some experts said that Chinese business groups can also sue foreign governments, including the U.S., for their inability to contain the virus that caused losses at Chinese companies. To help Chinese businesses handle potential disputes over business contracts, the China Chamber of International Commerce, which represents 246,000 Chinese companies, and Beijing-based Deheng Law Group have recently published a series of legal guidelines for companies to follow in an international business dispute, including legal procedures in the U.S. and other major markets.

The Chinese government has extended the labor holiday, which starts on May 1, from two days to five days this year in an effort to encourage more consumer spending.

This summary was compiled based on reports by the China Daily, Shanghai Daily, Global Times, the Guardian and the South China Morning Post.

IPR PROTECTION

New draft copyright law raises compensation

Experts on intellectual property rights protection applauded increased compensation for copyright infringements in a newly released draft law, viewing it as a bigger threat to copycats and a stronger tool to fight piracy. In the draft revision to the Chinese Copyright Law, if a copyright owner clarifies the cost of using his or her works, people using the works without paying or those deliberately infringing on the copyright will be ordered to pay five times the cost in compensation, the China Daily reports. Meanwhile, the ceiling for compensation that pirates will face has been increased to CNY5 million in the draft – up from CNY500,000 – when the cost of infringing on a copyright is not clear or when the loss to copyright holders and benefits gained by violators cannot be determined. The draft was submitted on April 26 to the bimonthly session of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) for a first of three readings before being adopted. “Raising the compensation as a heavier punishment will be effective in deterring copycats, especially those in cyberspace, as it’s easier to plagiarize works online and the infringement cost is also much lower than it is in traditional ways,” Liu Bin, an IP lawyer from Beijing Zhongwen Law Firm, said. He gave a thumbs-up to the CNY5 million for undetermined damages in the draft, adding that the current CNY500,000 compensation is not a large amount of money for copyright violators compared with their illicit gains. Liu Junhai, Law Professor at Renmin University of China said “the key to copyright protection is to make sure the penalty is higher than the gains from violations”. Besides the harsher punishment, the draft has added protection for new types of works in the internet era, including short videos, live-streaming and online dramas, “which I think is urgent and essential,” said Kang Lixia, a lawyer specializing in IP-related disputes at the Beijing Conzen Law Firm. Copyright cases have made up about 60% of IP-related disputes in recent years. The Copyright Law was put into effect in 1991 and amended in 2001 and 2010.

The Chinese Patent Law, which is still being reviewed, will also raise compensation to a range of CNY100,000 to CNY5 million when the loss to patent holders and the benefits gained by infringers cannot be determined. The current range is CNY10,000 to CNY1 million, the China Daily reports.

In related copyright news, **Shanghai’s market watchdog imposed administrative penalties on** seven trademark applicants and four trademark application agencies for **preemptive trademark registrations related to the coronavirus epidemic**. The applicants applied for trademark registrations of Huoshenshan Hospital, Leishenshan Hospital and Dr Li Wenliang, which infringes others’ rights and violates China’s trademark law and related regulations, the Shanghai Administration for Market Regulation said. The seven applicants, including Shanghai Tubo Internet Science and Technology Co and Shanghai Diqi New Material Science and Technology Co would be fined CNY10,000 each. The four agencies, including the Shanghai Jiacheng Trademark Agency and Shanghai Jinshan Trademark Agency, would be fined up to CNY85,000 for violating China’s trademark law.

The parties filed trademark applications although they were aware that it was a malicious registration, the Administration said. Huoshenshan and Leishenshan are the names of makeshift hospitals built in Wuhan, the city hit hardest by the epidemic in Hubei province, to treat Covid-19 patients. Both have ceased operation as the epidemic wanes within the country. Dr Li Wenliang is known as one of the first whistle-blowers who warned the public of the coronavirus and later died of the disease. Li is widely known in China, while the two hospitals were registered as public institutions on January 27. These have prior rights to these names, said Pan Lei, an Administration official. The Shanghai Intellectual Property Administration has ordered the four agencies to withdraw their applications. Heads of the companies and agencies involved will face punishments as well, the Shanghai Daily reports.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

China faces fight to retain foreign manufacturers

Three of the world's four largest economies, the United States, Japan and the European Union, are drawing up separate plans to lure their companies out of China after the supply shock caused by China's coronavirus shutdown. European Union Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan said the bloc would seek to "reduce our trade dependencies" after the pandemic, while Japan unveiled a USD2.2 billion fund to lure Japanese manufacturers back to the country or even to Southeast Asia – as long as they leave China – in response to supply chain disruptions. This followed the Director of the United States' National Economic Council, Larry Kudlow, saying that Washington should pay the moving costs of American firms bringing manufacturing back from China. "I would say, 100% immediate expensing across the board for plant, equipment, intellectual property, structures, renovations," Kudlow told Fox News, adding to his comments in January that the coronavirus outbreak would be a boon for American employment. However, the U.S. has no formal corporate repatriation program.

Firms from the U.S., Japan and Europe have been moving manufacturing away from China for some time due to rising costs and the impact of the U.S.-China trade war, but the pressure is now on to accelerate this, with the coronavirus pandemic highlighting how reliant the world is on goods made in China, particularly vital medical products.

Michael Alkire, President of health care resource provider Premier, has already identified 22 items of protective clothing and 30 drugs that are likely "so critical that they need to be produced" in the U.S. Many are currently made in China, which dominates the world's personal protective equipment (PPE) and pharmaceutical markets. "For an N95 face mask, the cost to manufacture it overseas before the pandemic was about USD0.30 vs USD0.34-0.36 cents domestically," Alkire said. "We've dodged a bullet, what we've seen in New York could have been widespread, there will be some serious shifting of supply chains after this." Scott Paul, President of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, said that the idea of reshoring and decoupling is "gaining currency beyond the Navarros", referring to hawkish White House Trade Adviser Peter Navarro. "How much of that lands back in the United States is an open question. But I think it's much more certain that it will continue to flow out of China into other places," Paul said.

For China, this presents a problem. As relations with Japan had been improving, Tokyo's repatriation package "touched o! a heated debate in the Chinese political world", according to the Nikkei Asia Review. Li Xunlei, Chief Economist at Zhongtai Securities and Adviser to the Chinese government, said while the rhetoric did not provide an immediate threat to China, it could be a serious long term challenge. About 70% of protective masks used in the U.S. are made in China, as well as a significant portion of its medicines. Reducing that dependence feeds into wider concerns over China's growing economic, diplomatic and military might. Several law proposals have already been introduced at the U.S. Congress. One filed by Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio would require the U.S. to reduce its supply chain dependence on China, and has attracted support from three Democratic Senators as the issue gathered bipartisan support. "It is unfortunate that it took a global pandemic to make clear the ramifications of offshoring our industrial base to countries like China," Rubio said.

According to American analytics and advisory company Gallup, **U.S. public opinion of China fell to a 20-year low with just 33% of Americans holding a favorable view**. These results were echoed in a survey by the Pew Research Center. According to the 2019 Reshoring Index released earlier this month by American consultancy firm Kearney, the pandemic is forcing companies to rethink their supply chains, accentuating trends already under way, the South China Morning Post reports.

CHINA NEWS ROUND-UP

China disbursing coupons to reignite consumption

The strategy to disburse coupons could be the most direct and effective way of reigniting consumption, the most powerful engine for economic growth in not just Wuhan but the entire country, according to analysts. However, the size and scale of stimulation still need to be significantly increased to better cope with the massive economic losses the epidemic has inflicted, they added. In Wuhan, the vouchers, which can be used to make purchases closely linked with people's lives, such as at malls, supermarkets, and convenience stores; and to participate in sports and tourism-related activities, were snapped up within a few seconds after they were launched via mobile apps such as Alipay, Meituan-Dianping and WeChat. One consumer said she secured a coupon displaying “every CNY60 purchase has a CNY20 deduction” at nearby supermarkets. “The consumption subsidy is practical as it is closely linked to our daily necessities. Although the amount is not that huge, it is a very good incentive for the public to spend,” she said.The coupons are valid for one week.

“Following scores of Wuhan factories getting back up to speed, the recovery of the consumer-focused business is vital for Wuhan, where people remain cautious to go out,” Dong Dengxin, Director of the Finance and Securities Institute at Wuhan University of Science and Technology, told the Global Times. Consumption makes up around 46% of Wuhan's roughly CNY1.6 trillion economy. In 2019, consumption contributed to 57.8% of China's GDP growth, but total retail sales dropped by 19% in the first quarter, making such stimulus a most crucial part of China's economic recovery. Many other cities and provinces – including Hangzhou, Nanjing, Jiangxi, and Anhui – have issued or announced plans to disburse consumption coupons in a bid to boost their economies. In total, **more than 18 provinces and 40 cities and localities have issued coupons since March 13**. Companies and small businesses followed suit in releasing their own promotions. Another consumption stimulus package, worth CNY1.8 billion, matched by three e-commerce platforms, Alibaba, Meituan Dianping and Tencent; was targeted at consumers in Wuhan. But some Wuhan locals have no appetite for such large-scale stimulus packages, saying the amount is too small per person. Given Wuhan's total population of around 11 million, the CNY500 million voucher fund is equivalent to each resident receiving on average just over USD6.

Many Wuhan locals also questioned why the government chose vouchers over cash, a common practice adopted by some Western countries to encourage spending. Experts explained consumption vouchers are more effective than distributing cash. “People may not spend cash right away when they get it, so it will not be directly converted into demand and might be saved instead of spent”, the Global Times reports.

Shanghai announced a two-month shopping festival and a wide range of promotional activities. Around 130 promotional activities will be held across the city through the end of June. “The Double Five shopping festival aims to compensate for consumption losses in the previous months and unleash further shopping demand. It could also boost the city’s influence as a top shopping destination,” Hua Yuan, Director of the Shanghai Commission of Commerce, said. It will include a month of product launches to introduce 80 products from 60 brands including Louis Vuitton, Coach, Adidas and Dyson. The city will also encourage the nighttime economy by calling on museums, restaurants and bookstores to extend their opening hours.

China's aviation sector on a path to recovery

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) said that daily air passenger numbers rose 7.9% as of April 21, from March, about one-third of the level of the same period last year. China’s air traffic has been steadily recovering since late February. Daily air passenger numbers hit 458,300 in March, surging 69.8% over February, said Jin Junhao, an official with the CAAC. As of April 21, the number of flights had jumped to 6,586 per day, exceeding 40% of the volume of the same period a year ago. The CAAC said it had almost doubled the number of weekly cargo flights to 1,989 between April 20-26, from 1,014 flights before the epidemic struck. Of the 1,989 flights, 939 had been converted from civil flights, the Shanghai Daily reports.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has released an updated analysis of the situation, showing the Covid-19 crisis will see airline passenger revenues drop by USD314 billion in 2020, a 55% decline compared to 2019. It also warns more airlines will face bankruptcy if things do not get better.

A tourism peak is expected during the upcoming

Labor Day holiday from May 1-5 this year, as Ctrip said some 90 million trips will take place, double the number during the Qingming Festival in early April. Ctrip expects traffic volume to increase 353%, and the total number of trips will rise by 282%, compared with the beginning of April. According to the China Tourism Academy, more than 43 million trips were made during the three-day Qingming Festival holiday in early April, generating a revenue of CNY8.26 billion, an 80% drop year-on-year. Ctrip analysis predicts that the travel volume during the Labor Day holiday will be double that during the April holiday, or even more. However, most tourists are expected to stay within the province where they reside, as traveling to other provinces could result in a quarantine. Shanghai residents are most active in their plans to travel while the city is also expected to receive the most visitors. Beijing ranks seventh in terms of departures and third in terms of planned destinations. Beijing currently adopts the most stringent Covid-19 prevention measures with strict quarantine rules. **Travel platforms temporarily do not accept bookings of travel packages to foreign countries.** China's Foreign Ministry urged citizens to refrain from going abroad, and to fully assess the serious risks of cross-infection and being stranded overseas.

Luo Yameng, a Beijing-based urban management expert, told the Global Times that the tourism industry's recovery is crucial to the country's economy in the post-epidemic period, but disease prevention and control remains a priority at the moment.

U.S. FCC moving closer to revoking licenses of three Chinese telecom operators

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has taken another step to ultimately remove the business licenses of three Chinese telecom operators – China Unicom Americas, China Telecom Americas and ComNet (USA) – that allow them to do business in the U.S. The FCC asked them to “show cause”, meaning to explain why they should be allowed to do business in the U.S. as concerns over security were mounting. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said “we simply cannot take a risk and hope for the best when it comes to the security of our networks”. “Foreign entities providing telecommunications services – or seeking to provide services – in the United States must not pose a risk to our national security,” he added. The move is part of a recent push by U.S. regulators to minimize Chinese involvement in U.S. telecommunications infrastructure.

Last year, the Commission rejected the application by another Beijing-controlled telecommunication provider, China Mobile, to obtain a license to operate in the U.S. on national security grounds. The orders give the companies 30 days to demonstrate that they are not subject to the influence and control of the Chinese government. Such ownership might allow Chinese government entities “to engage in malicious cyber activity enabling economic espionage and disruption and misrouting of U.S. communications” and “provide opportunities for increased Chinese government-sponsored economic espionage,” U.S. departments said. China Telecom Americas filed a letter in response to the allegations, requesting an opportunity for a hearing.

The FCC granted the operation approvals to the firms more than a decade ago. Since then, “the national security and law enforcement risks linked to the Chinese government’s activities have grown significantly,” the FCC said. Last year, the Trump administration also placed Huawei Technologies – the Chinese telecoms company that is the global leader in next-generation 5G technology – on an “entity list” and barred it from buying critical components from its American suppliers, the South China Morning Post reports.

Industrial profits drop in Q1

Profits of major industrial firms in China fell 34.9% on a yearly basis in March, improving from a 38.3% decline for the first two months of the year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. Total first quarter industrial profits stood at CNY781.45 billion, down more than one-third year-on-year. Profits of major industrial enterprises fell 36.7% year-on-year to CNY781 billion in the first quarter due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the decline narrowing 1.6 percentage points from the first two months, the NBS said.

Huawei Technologies said revenue rose 1.4% to CNY182.2 billion in the first quarter. Beverage companies' profits rose 7.5% on a yearly basis in March, compared with a 21.9% decline in January and February. Vehicle companies' first-quarter profits slumped 80.2% year-on-year, widening from a 79.6% decline in the first two months. Foreign-invested companies in China also reported a business revival. Their total first-quarter profit fell 46.9% to CNY167 billion, compared with a 53.6% decline in the first two months.

The coronavirus pandemic is set to cause a slump in Chinese investment in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and a dip in trade with partner countries that could take a year to overcome, analysts say. China’s total foreign trade in the first quarter of 2020 fell by 6.4% year-on-year. Trade with the United States, Europe and Japan all dropped in the period, by 18.3%, 10.4% and 8.1%, respectively, the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) said. By comparison, China’s trade with Belt and Road countries increased by 3.2% in the first quarter, although the growth figure was lower than the 10.8% reported for the whole of 2019. China’s trade with 56 Belt and Road countries accounts for about 30% of its total annual volume.

China also prepares to launch a registration-based IPO system on ChiNext. The policy was approved during a meeting overseen by President Xi Jinping, who stressed the need to counter economic headwinds with structural reforms. China is stepping up efforts to channel much-needed capital into coronavirus-hit companies and innovative startups.

China's digital currency to be tested in the Xiongan New Area

China's official digital currency, dubbed DC/EP, will be tested in the Xiongan New Area in Hebei province, with a trial run in local catering and retail industries including U.S. coffee chain Starbucks, fast food chain McDonald's and the Qingfeng Baozi (stuffed bun) restaurant chain, the Global Times reports. Participants include the Xiongan Development and Reform Bureau, working teams piloting DC/EP from a subsidiary of the People's Bank of China (PBOC) in Hebei provincial capital Shijiazhuang, employees from the Xiongan branches of four major commercial banks, as well as representatives from Tencent and Alipay. As an innovation-driven city, Xiongan is accelerating its pace of overall digitalization in local governance, business operations and people's daily life, Chen Bo, Director of the Finance Research Center at the Institute of Finance and Economics under the Central University of Finance and Economics, told the Global Times. In addition to Xiongan, three other cities – Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Suzhou in Jiangsu province, and Chengdu in Sichuan province – will also test the central bank-backed digital currency.

The major force behind the sudden advancement is the growing economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has largely impaired economic growth, particularly the offline retail and services sectors. China's central bank has said the research and development work for the official digital currency is proceeding steadily.

In March, experts at China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) suggested the People’s Bank of China (PBOC) may ramp up its DC/EP implementation after the virus subsides, as it may become a stimulus to offset the economic downturn.

Covid-19 pandemic providing impetus to cargo traffic

China’s Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) have voiced **support for airlines to operate all-cargo flights**. Significant cargo capacity was lost as a result of airlines reducing passenger flights in response to government travel restrictions. Since February, the CAAC has approved a total of 3,178 all-cargo flights for Chinese and foreign airlines, and 1,873 cargo-only flights – converted from passenger flights – for Chinese and foreign airlines, which “has greatly eased the capacity shortage.” From April 20 to 26, China is maintaining regular cargo flights with 93 overseas destinations in 45 countries. China plans to implement 1,989 cargo flights every week, an increase of 17.7% week-on-week, and an increase of 96.2% from pre-Covid-19 levels.

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