

THE ICELANDIC COAST GUARD
“ALWAYS PREPARED”



THE ICELANDIC COAST GUARD

The Icelandic Coast Guard (ICG) has recently undergone considerable changes and renewals. As a result of extensive strategic work, the ICG has now developed both a new organisational structure and a new governing law. Other changes include new headquarters, which are now located in a newly expanded building within the National Rescue Centre at Skógarhlíð. A new ship and a new aircraft are also on the horizon. The number of personnel employed by the ICG has increased because additional rescue assets are no longer present due to the fact that the US Iceland Defence Force has departed, as a result of which the ICG's helicopter assets will also increase accordingly.

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity of leading the organisation through these changes, which have all taken place during the tenure of Björn Bjarnason, Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs.

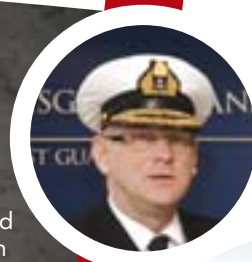
The ICG is an established organisation whose primary responsibilities are more or less the same today as they were in the beginning, although the number of tasks has increased considerably. The ICG's technical assets are considerably more efficient and diverse than when the ICG started out. The main changes involve participation in multinational co-operation efforts regarding the monitoring of fisheries in the ocean, defence against international terrorism, as well as applying a great deal more emphasis on pollution control at sea.

The new motto of the ICG, "Always Prepared", broadly points to the activities of the Icelandic Coast Guard, both for the present and in the future. The slogan applies to all the ICG's duties, whether it be search and rescue at sea or on land, law enforcement, hydrographic survey, or other tasks with which the personnel of the ICG are entrusted. The core meaning behind this motto is to be prepared for everything at all times.

Georg Kr. Lárusson
Director

HISTORY

The Icelandic Coast Guard was formally established on 1 July 1926, because on this day, the Icelandic Government took over the operation of the ship Thor from the Westman Islands' Rescue Association. Thor had, among other tasks, been used for the patrolling of territorial waters in co-operation between the Icelandic Government and the Westman Islands since 1922. A small cannon was placed on board Thor in 1924, because foreign trawler captains were unwilling to take orders from an unarmed patrol vessel. The first purpose-built Icelandic patrol vessel arrived in the country on 23 June 1926. This was the steamship Óðinn, which was armed with two 57mm cannons. Icelanders had made several attempts at patrolling territorial waters from the time the English began their organised fishing with trawls off the shores of Iceland in 1891, and there are many stories of violent encounters between Icelanders and foreign fishermen from this time. Foreign ships first began fishing off the shores of Iceland to some extent during the first half of the 15th century.





The Danish Government undertook the patrolling of the coasts of Iceland up until the Icelandic Government began operating Thor in co-operation with the Westman Islands' Rescue Association.

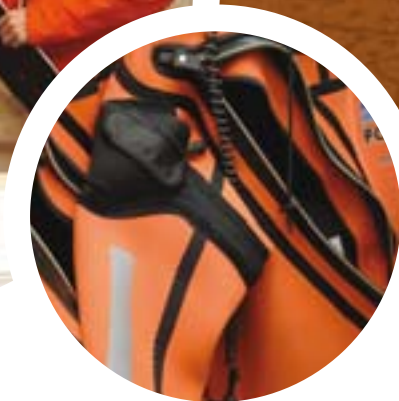
With the extension of the territorial waters, first to 4 nautical miles in the year 1952, then to 12 nautical miles in 1958, to 50 nautical miles in 1972, and finally to 200 nautical miles in 1975, Iceland's fishing jurisdiction grew substantially. The reaction of those nations that had been fishing the seas around Iceland was harsh and created some confrontation, as is well known. All the so-called "Cod Wars" ended successfully for Iceland, the conclusion of which had an influence on fisheries protection at an international level.

The present activities of the ICG are extensive, and the tasks have gradually increased over the years. The ICG's personnel now number over one hundred and fifty, belonging to 15 different labour unions. Today, the primary tasks of the ICG are law enforcement and patrol of the sea around Iceland, the responsibility for and management of maritime search and rescue, assistance in rescue operations on land, airborne ambulance service, hydrographic survey, nautical charting and bomb disposal. Every day, personnel of the ICG deal with very varied tasks, and no two days are the same.

THE JOINT RESCUE CENTRE AT SKÓGARHLÍÐ

The Icelandic Coast Guard has recently moved its headquarters to the National Rescue Centre at Skógarhlíð 14, in Reykjavík. The ICG's administrative offices, Hydrographic Department, Bomb Disposal Unit, logistics and Operations Centre are all located here. The National Rescue Centre is comprised of the ICG, the Capital District Fire and Rescue Service, the Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue, Emergency-Alert 112, the Police National Communication Centre, the Police Vehicle Control and Maintenance Centre and the Civil Protection Department of the National Commissioner of the Police. There is an advantage in having all these emergency response organisations together in the same location, as it makes co-operation so much easier. The ICG operates the Maritime Traffic Service in the Rescue Centre alongside the ICG Operations Centre, in accordance with a service contract made with the Icelandic Maritime Administration. The ICG Aviation Department is located at Reykjavík Airport, where pilots, aviation mechanics and other personnel of the department are based. At Faxagarður quay in Reykjavík Harbour, ICG personnel also man a security post at which ICG employees are responsible for the security of the ICG patrol and hydrographic vessels, moored at the quayside. They also carry out other tasks in support of the patrol vessels.







24 HOURS ON DUTY WITH THE ICELANDIC COAST GUARD

00:05

The Maritime Traffic Service / ICG Operations Centre receives a message from Bodø in Norway stating that a signal is being transmitted from a ship's emergency transmitter through a satellite. This does not necessarily mean that a ship is in any danger, as distress signals are transmitted about 600 times a year, but in only a few of those instances is there any real danger. Distress signals from ships, however, are always taken seriously.

00:07

A survey made by the staff of the Maritime Traffic Service reveals that a ship is missing in the automated, national Vessel Monitoring System (VMS). The latest news of this ship is that it was situated about 50 nautical miles south-west of Reykjanes. The crew of the ICG maritime patrol aircraft, which is on a routine patrol flight in the area, immediately goes in search of the ship. The patrol ship *Ægir*, which is sailing in the vicinity, changes its course and heads for the search area. The patrol ship is operated by a well-trained crew of 18 people and excellent equipment. The Danish Navy is then contacted and the location of their ships and helicopters are confirmed. The Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue is also contacted, which subsequently activates their air rescue team. The airplane can then, if required, take members of the air rescue team along as search observers when the aircraft has to land for refuelling.

00:09

The owner of the ship is contacted, in this case a fishing company. Information is received on the crew and their closest relatives.

00:27

The ICG helicopter takes off from the ICG hangar at Reykjavík Airport. The official call-out time is 60 minutes. The average call-out time is, however, 22 minutes, by any standard considered to be very good. There are between 120–150 helicopter search, rescue and ambulance missions per year.

00:40

The crew of the ICG patrol aircraft locates the ship, whose engine has stopped, and as a result, the ship has drifted ashore and is stranded. There is darkness over the shipwreck area, but the helicopter crew is equipped with night-vision equipment, which is essential on occasions such as this. The ICG helicopter is expected to arrive shortly and will then begin to winch the ship's crew to safety.







THE ROLES OF RESCUE OF THE ICELANDIC COAST GUARD

Some of the main roles of the Icelandic Coast Guard are to rescue people from danger at sea or on land, to provide immediate medical transport and to assist boats and ships within the country's jurisdiction. The ICG assists remotely inhabited places and districts when traditional communication systems are disrupted, for example in the case of a natural disaster. The ICG also assists in civil protection matters, general law enforcement, medical service and customs and lighthouse services.

At the Maritime Traffic Service / ICG Operations Centre, there is a 24-hour watch in order to react to emergency calls as quickly as possible. It is necessary for the ICG to maintain thorough information on the location of ships and boats. Many ships are equipped with automatic location equipment, which transmits information about their location at regular intervals, so that their whereabouts can be monitored on the screen at the Maritime Traffic Service / ICG Operations Centre.

Maritime rescue and assistance to ships in difficulty or that are stranded are executed in various ways. When it is a question of saving lives, then a helicopter is immediately sent to perform a rescue operation. It is often the case that many people and assets are involved in rescue operations like this, including helicopters, an airplane and ICG patrol vessels, foreign navies, coast guards, nearby ships, rescue teams, fire departments and police. Every year the patrol vessels assist many ships by towing them into harbour or by using ICG divers in disentangling fishing gear or other items that are fouling ships' propellers.

01:30

The ICG helicopter recovers the entire crew from on board the ship and flies them to Reykjavik. The patrol ship will be occupied for the next hours in preparing the salvage of the ship together with the representatives of the fishing company, the ship's insurance company and The Environment and Food Agency. Damage to the ship has to be avoided in order to prevent any pollution escaping from the ship. An attempt to pull the ship from the shipwreck area will be made at the evening high tide.

08:00

The employees of the ICG Hydrographic Department arrive at work. Their task will be to evaluate exactly when the high tide will occur in the shipwreck area and to study the surveys already available for this location.







HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYING AND NAUTICAL CHARTING

The ICG Hydrographic Department is responsible for both hydrographic surveying and nautical charting. Hydrographic surveys are carried out over the summer months by the survey vessel Baldur, and during the winter months, the crew works on the processing of data together with the nautical cartographers. Updated nautical charts are essential for safe navigation, and it is mandatory for all ships to have such charts. The ICG/Hydrographic Department issues a monthly publication of Notices to Mariners with information on amendments that need to be put into the nautical charts. Ocean areas, where surveys are old, are under constant review by the ICG Hydrographic Department.



BOMB DISPOSAL UNIT

The ICG runs a bomb disposal unit. Its role is to locate and destroy hazardous explosive items both on land and at sea. The ICG Bomb Disposal Unit personnel have a great deal of specialised knowledge regarding bomb disposal. The unit's equipment is also highly specialised and includes remotely operated vehicles (robots), which can be used in a variety of roles in bomb disposal operations, and two specially equipped trucks, which are used to transport the robots and other necessary equipment between locations.

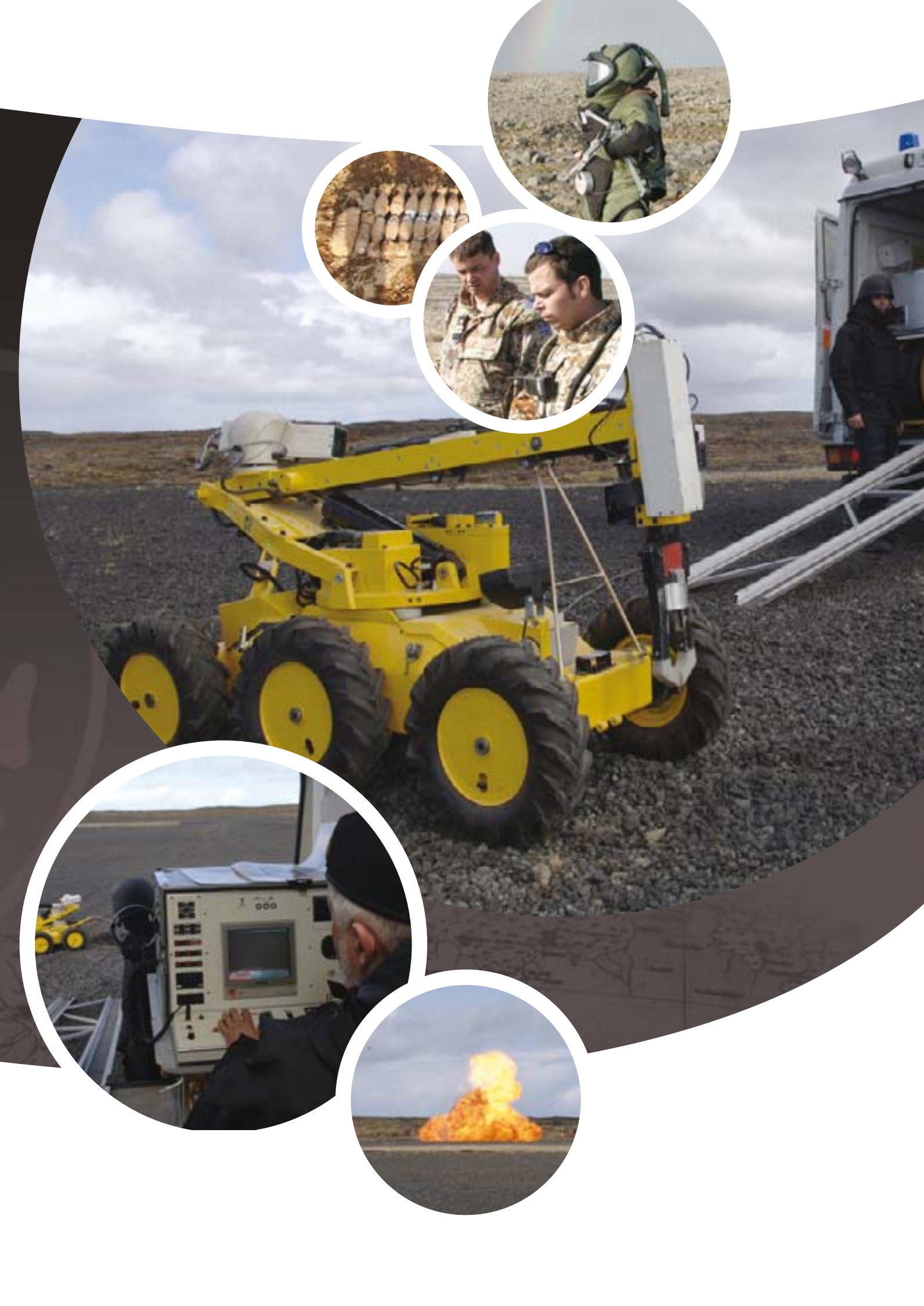
10:00

The ICG Bomb Disposal Unit carries out unexploded ordnance search and disposal operation at Vogaheiði on the Reykjanes peninsula. This area used to be an artillery firing range operated by the US Military, but has since become a popular outdoor recreation area for the general public.

11:00

The crew of the patrol vessel Týr executes a spot check on ships in the north of the country. Ships' documents, equipment, registration, professional licences of the officers, fishing gear and the catch are all thoroughly inspected, and on this occasion, everything turns out to be in good order.







LAW ENFORCEMENT AT SEA

The Icelandic Coast Guard carries out general law enforcement duties on the ocean, including fisheries control, national security operations, border control in connection with the Schengen agreement, and marine pollution monitoring and control within the jurisdiction.

General law enforcement on the ocean includes, above anything else, the patrolling and inspection of vessels at sea. This is carried out through co-ordinated communications from the ICG Operations Centre, its aircraft and patrol vessels. It includes monitoring ships' seaworthiness, whether they have the necessary safety equipment, whether the licences of the officers on board are satisfactory and whether the laws on fishing, fishing control and marine stocks are being followed. The ICG also monitors pollution, hazards to navigation and whether lighthouses and other aids to navigation are in order. There is a certain amount of secrecy regarding the sailing routes of the ICG patrol vessels, and seafarers who become aware of the patrol vessels are forbidden to tell of their whereabouts.

Law enforcement at sea is in many ways different from other forms of law enforcement. One of the main tasks of the Icelandic Coast Guard is fisheries control. The crew of the patrol vessels execute spot checks and record if there is anything noteworthy or illegal. In case of violation of fishing laws, the ship is ordered to harbour, where the police, in co-operation with the ICG, continue the investigation of the matter.

The monitoring of the handling of marine stocks aims at the promotion of sustainable utilisation of marine stocks. It attempts to prevent the discarding of usable fish and ensures that all catches that come ashore are weighed and registered. Special monitoring is carried out to ensure that the undersized fish in a catch are within the reference limits and that fishing is in accordance with efficient utilisation of marine stocks. In cases where the proportion of undersized fish is too high, the ICG notifies the Marine Research Institute and a fish specialist on duty decides whether the fishing area needs to be closed down. ICG fisheries control also involves checking the mesh-dimensions of the fishing nets and gear.







PROTECTION AGAINST POLLUTION

The Icelandic Coast Guard, together with The Environment and Food Agency and The Icelandic Maritime Administration, has a very important role with regard to the protection of the ocean and the coasts against pollution. The ICG patrols the oceans around Iceland, both from the sea and from the air. In the case of an imminent pollution accident, the ICG has the right to intervene in ships' operations, and the organisation bears the responsibility to do everything within its power to prevent pollution accidents.

14:36

The Emergency-Alert 112 receives a phone call from passers-by who have come across a car accident in Gilsfjörður. The driver is trapped in the vehicle, but remains conscious. A nurse, living in the vicinity, is called out and tends to the man until an ambulance, a doctor and the police arrive on the scene. The Maritime Traffic Service / ICG Operations Centre puts a rescue helicopter on stand-by. Personnel from the Capital District Fire and Rescue Service are requested with hydraulic cutters and other rescue equipment to go with the helicopter on scene.

15:15

A doctor has now arrived on the scene, and it turns out that the driver is seriously injured. The doctor asks for the ICG helicopter, which sets off immediately together with the firemen.

16:06

The ICG rescue helicopter arrives on the scene. The firemen cut open the car in order to get the injured man out of the wreck, and he is then transported by the helicopter to Reykjavík.

17:32

The helicopter lands with the injured man at The National University Hospital in Fossvogur.



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