



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

Weekly News Clippings – 144

16th March- 22nd March

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ILLEGAL MINING IN SANCTURAY

THE police have found illegal mining and tree-felling in the Capital's only protected sanctuary, the Asola Bhatti Sanctuary. The Southeast district police last week raided a plot in Gupta Colony, Sangam Vihar, to recover Badarpur stones, mined illegally from the nearby Aravalli Hills, police sources said. Several labourers working with the illegally stored stones fled at the sight of the police team, according to a source. A truck driver, identified as one Daler Singh, was later arrested. The raid and the subsequent FIR was lodged on March 9, police officials said. The raid came after several complaints to Sangam Vihar police from forest department officials (see box) in the last couple of years about illegal mining and tree-felling in the protected sanctuary. The complaints allegedly did not yield any response. Quarrying has been banned on the Supreme Court's orders in the Aravalli range in neighbouring Gurgaon and Faridabad districts to protect the ecologically fragile hills. On March 9, a social worker, Rishipal Badhana, sent a written complaint to Assistant Commissioner of Police (Ambedkar Nagar) Mahipal Singh, alleging that Station House Officer of Sangam Vihar, Satpal, allowed illegal operations inside the sanctuary. On ACP Singh's instructions, Inspector Rajkumar Shah from Ambedkar Nagar police station conducted the raid. Post-raid, a case under Mines and Minerals Act was registered the same day (Newsline has a copy of the FIR). According to a highly placed source, subsequent investigations have found a well-networked operation in place.

CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITY A senior investigating officer said the initial probe found illegal mining of Badarpur stone in Haryana's Anangpur area, just next to the sanctuary, and transported through Asola Sanctuary to Gupta Colony in Sangam Vihar. The investigating officer said: "The mining is done about 10 feet from the sanctuary walls, in Anangpur. The Badarpur stone is then loaded on camels, as vehicles like tractors and tempos are not allowed inside the sanctuary, and transported to Delhi. "The miners have broken the sanctuary's boundary wall on the Sangam Vihar side -here, the illegally mined stones are loaded on trucks and tractors and taken to Gupta Colony for storage." They are transported and sold to builders from there, the investigating officer added. Questioning of the arrested truck driver and further probe into the mining racket have revealed that trees were cut and Badarpur stones were mined and transported in a similar fashion from within Asola Sanctuary.

FOREST GUARDS 'HELPLESS' Forest officials said operators now use unmanned camels to transport the quarried stones through the sanctuary after a few persons manning the animals were caught in the recent past. The arrested persons were let off by court with penalty, officials said.

SOURCE

16th March 2010, Indian Express

MINING MAFIA BUILDS A SANDY GRAVE

Just 22km upstream from the Okhla barrage, the Yamuna is a different river. Upstream of Wazirabad in the north, it is a big, healthy river in which fish swim and to which birds come for water. Over the next 22km, it gets reduced to a giant sewer because of a number of reasons, the biggest being the city puking out tonnes of its refuse into the river. We, however, look at a different aspect here — an aspect often overlooked in endless (and often insincere) debates on saving the Yamuna. It is pillage of the river sands, often so rapacious that the deep channels caused by mechanized illegal mining are leading to the Yamuna changing its course at certain places. If the process goes unchecked, the river might shift eastwards, triggering a disaster. Just before the river reaches Wazirabad, at Palla village, where mining is rampant, the river has shifted, inundating land that was earlier being used for farming. This is well known and acknowledged by authorities on both side of the river, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. But neither take action under the garb of jurisdiction issues. Activists say it's not just petty matters of jurisdiction, but the fact that illegal sand mining is today a multi-crore business that has led to official inaction. The sand mafia carts away truckloads of sand daily that are sold to the construction companies. And it all happens in front of everyone's eyes. Huge machines are stationed at the edge of the river to dig out sand not only from the banks but also from within the river. In the Palla area, a temporary bank was recently created in the middle of the Yamuna to trap sand, effectively shifting its flow more towards the Delhi border and creating a small sand island in the middle of the river. Why the officials still don't act, and why no one at the top does not step up to settle disputes of jurisdiction, if any, is a mystery. Just how ridiculous the situation is can be gauged from the fact that on a day when a bunch of miners were finally caught, it took more than seven hours to figure out whether they were to be booked by Delhi or UP. Says Manoj Misra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, "Usage of machinery is causing a change in the natural topography. Deep digging and drilling leads to formation of ponds and when the river floods at any point of time, there is a danger of it changing its course. This can prove to be catastrophic for the city infrastructure as well."

SOURCE

17th March 2010, Times of India

METRO IGNORES DUAC ADVICE

More than three weeks after the Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC) asked the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to stop work on a multi-level under-ground parking on Sher Shah Suri Marg, work continued in full steam on Tuesday. DMRC had given an under-taking in a meeting with DUAC on February 17 to stop work and first go ahead with plans for safety of an unidentified Mughal-era tomb. "Preparatory and mobilizing work" was what the DMRC described as the deep digging and iron grid work at the site. Prompted by the possible threat to the unidentified tomb due to heavy-duty drilling and digging, the DUAC had visited the site on February 10. Pointing out that work goes on at the site unabated, Ratish Nanda, a conservation architect and a DUAC member, said, "The parking and the access as designed will cause irreparable damage to both, a 15th century monument and the Lutyen's Bungalow Zone." "It is shocking that the contractors -- DMRC -- continue to construct illegally and despite strong reservations from NDMC and DUAC," Nanda fumed. DMRC officials said, "We are ready to do whatever the archaeological experts suggest for preserving and conserving the monument." As far as "stopping" work is considered, the DMRC officials maintained, "DUAC observations related to requirements of clearances from other bodies such as Central Vista Committee, Chief Fire Officer, the Archaeological Survey of India and the Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC). We already have these." Sources in the Heritage Conservation Committee said the project proposal that was given a go-ahead restricted to only the multi-level parking. "The proposal for underpass never came to us," the sources added. High Court's Registrar General Rakesh Kapoor said, "The High Court is concerned only about NDMC's approval and not with anybody else." "Once the NDMC gives permission, our contractor can go ahead. There is no need for DUAC or UTTIPEC permissions," he added. The Officer on Special Duty in the Lt Governor's office

Ranjan Mukherjee, said the proposal was considered twice and given a clearance in Delhi Development Authority's Technical Committee in May 2005 and July 2008 respectively. An NDMC spokesperson confirmed, "The plan for the underpass is being forwarded to the UTTIPEC soon." But even when the proposal remains to be approved, there has been some digging going on bang in the middle of the road on Sher Shah Suri Marg. "This work is not for under-pass but for shifting utility services," defended DMRC officials.

SOURCE

17th March 2010, Hindustan Times

ON SALE: NIZAM'S 100-YR-OLD PALACE

Is the Nazri Bagh Palace, home of Hyderabad's last Nizam Osman Ali Khan, up for grabs? Highly placed sources indicate that the grandson of the last Nizam of Hyderabad, Mukarram Jah, was in the city last week to strike a deal to sell off the 100-year-old palace, a notified heritage monument. Jah was in talks with at least three parties, city-based R R Masala and MBS Jewellers and a construction firm from Mumbai, during his week-long visit, sources told TOI. Jah — who now lives in Turkey — has been planning to sell the 5-acre property for some time now. Going by the market rate, the land value alone of the entire palace premises is estimated at Rs 100-150 crore, but industry observers say heritage buildings fail to fetch a good price given that the price of restoration is high and the structure cannot be demolished. For those not familiar with Hyderabad, Nazri Palace is not in the old city — it's located in the congested Abids area. While the present deal has not been finalised, sources say that Jah, during his visit, held negotiations with Md Hameed of R R Masala but no papers were signed. The same sources reveal that a deal had almost been struck with a Mumbai-based construction firm. The companies bidding for the Nazri Bagh palace refused to confirm their interest in the property. An official of RR Masala said that while the owner was in the business of converting palaces into function halls, he hadn't bought the Nazri Bagh palace as yet. The owner of MBS Jewellers, Sukesh Gupta, couldn't be reached for comment. **Nazri Bagh palace was built in 1909** Hyderabad: The famous Nazri Bagh Palace may be up for sale. Hyderabad's last Nizam Osman Ali Khan lived in the palace, built in 1909, until he died in 1967. The last Nizam held court in this palace and it was then converted into the office of the Nizam's private estate. The Nazri Bagh palace was known by the curtain that draped its entrance. This curtain, though tattered with time, had remained an important part of this palace. Historians say this curtain was lifted each time the Nizam went out and drawn when he was inside the palace. This was the western part of the much larger King Kothi palace complex that currently stands unchanged, with the eastern block (of King Kothi palace) converted to a maternity hospital and a part of it demolished about 30 years ago. Historians and aides of the Nizam say that Mukarram Jah's worth would still be in millions of dollars or more if one were to consider his assets alone.

SOURCE

18th March 2010, Times of India

CHANGE FLUSH-&-FORGET MINDSET, CRY FOR YAMUNA

Yamuna is Delhi's river. It flows through our city. But it is our shame. This is why we must build the movement to clean the river. But cleaning the river will take each one of us to connect our waste — our flush toilet — with the river. It will begin only if we can change our flush-and-forget mindset. The fact is that Delhi has already spent a huge amount on cleaning the little stretch of the Yamuna which flows through the city. Some Rs 1,500 crore spent on cleaning this 22-km stretch of the river is possibly the highest in the country, if not the world. But all this has meant little. The city spends and will spend much more. But it is money down the river as pollution only increases. The river, by all pollution parameters, is dead. It has just not been officially cremated. Solutions exist. But these will first require us to relearn pollution in the rich cities of poor India. We will then understand that the answer is not in building more sewage treatment capacity or more drains and

Just think. Delhi has already got 17 sewage treatment plants, which together add up to 40 per cent of the total installed sewage treatment capacity in India. But the fact is that these plants remain grossly underutilized. Why? Because the city does not have drainage to convey all our excreta to the sewage treatment plants. It is expensive to build sewage drainage but even more expensive to maintain it. Today, the bulk of our city is not connected to underground drainage. It also finds that it can never repair enough. The end result is that where there is a sewage treatment plant, there is no waste to treat. But that is only part of the story. Worse, we forget that the majority of Delhi lives unconnected to underground drainage in what we call unauthorized and illegal colonies. We forget that these areas will have sewage and that this will flow into open drains criss-crossing the city. But these are the same drains, flowing past colonies, in which the sewage treatment plant disposes of its treated effluent. So think. In this pollution scheme, the illegal unconnected waste of the majority is being mixed with the treated waste of the minority. The result is obvious: growing pollution in the river. We can never clean Yamuna until we can treat the sewage of all in the city. The economics of this waste matter is important to grasp. We have to pay first for the water we use and then for the waste we generate. This is because the more water we use in our houses, the more the waste we discharge. The water inequity in Delhi is legendary — parts of the city are water-flushed with over 200 litres per capita and then the rest gets a few drops. But what we don't realize is that we who use water and discharge the waste which ends up in the river do not pay the cost of water or its cleaning. Here's how: It roughly costs Delhi government Rs 8-9 per kilolitre (1000 litres) to supply our water. It costs them five times more to take it back, pump it, pipe it and then treat it. We in Delhi pay nothing more than Rs 2.50 per kilolitre for our water and practically nothing for waste. How then can we get a clean river? But it is not just the cost that we need to pay. The fact is that all governments (including Delhi) are designing systems that we cannot pay for. These are unaffordable systems to pipe water over long distances, which add to the cost of distribution and, worse, increase the losses of water. Then we design to take back the waste and pump it and pipe it over even longer distances. The cost of electricity for pumping, and even more the exorbitant cost of first building and then maintaining the infrastructure, means that nothing really changes. This is why we have to relearn the science and art of river cleaning. This is why business as usual will not add up to a clean river.

SOURCE

19th March 2010, Times of India

TO PROTECT OUR WINGED FRIENDS

Remember the ani- Ek Chidiya Anek mation Ek Chidiya Anek Chidiya ... Ek Titali Anek Titaliyan ... from the golden days of Doordarshan? While one may or may not remember the documentary but almost everyone has fond memory of the sparrows in it. "The first thing a child learns about birds is through house sparrows. I remember we had lot of sparrows ... even till 10 years ago or so. But now, I don't see them anywhere," said Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. Worried about the declining numbers of this bird, the CM said she had put box homes for them in her garden. "But none of them survived," Dikshit said. Pramod Jain, manager of the Jain Bird Hospital at Chandni Chowk added, "Earlier, we used to get injured sparrows once in a while. But for almost two years or more, we have not received any injured sparrow. "The Chief Minister has joined hands with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), India's premier body in the field of documenting and conserving country's natural heritage, to observe the first ever 'World House Sparrow Day' on March 20 at her official residence on Motilal Nehru Marg. DECLINING NUMBERS Said Mohammed Dilawar from BNHS, "There is no statistics available about the number of sparrows. But environmentalists have noticed a sharp decline in their number in the last decade or so. "Among the main reasons are loss of habitat and nesting sites, food, effect of pesticides, microwave pollution, he said. The BNHS, at the behest of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, has embarked on a project for finding out causes of declining of house spar- row in urban sub-habitat. He said the NGO's pilot project began six months ago at Nashik in Maharashtra.

HOW CAN YOU HELP: Environmentalist Kartick Satyanarayan from NGO Wildlife SOS said, “Earlier people had small courtyards in front of their houses. Sparrows depend on such bushes, insects from mud and also from the kitchen waste. “But with declining open spaces and concrete houses, all these are lost. What you can do to help is plant shrubs around your house and save parks from being converted into parking lots, “ he suggested. Sparrows and other such small birds and also butterflies remain the most poignant bio- indicators of the environs we live in. An initiative of Nature Forever Society, the World House Sparrow Day is there- fore being observed by BNHS in India in coordination with other worldwide NGOs.

SOURCE

19th March 2010, Hindustan Times

NO MORE SLEEPOVERS

The news that there will be no resident protestors at Jantar Mantar should bring a smile to the city's heritage lovers. The change of venue for protest from Boat Club to Jantar Mantar, on Parliament Street near Connaught Place, was a source of heartburn for many as it exposed the 18th century heritage complex to van- dalism. Thanks to its location, the Jantar Mantar complex has bore the brunt of hundreds of demonstrations, protests, ral- lies and even dharnas (sit-ins) year after year. Mostly from rural areas, participants did not think twice before abusing the monument, known for being a unique astronomical observatory. Demonstrators at times broke the valuable parts of the observatory's built instruments. The most shameful of such violations came in November 2009, as hundreds of farmers assembled just outside the centrally protected monument to express dissent at the government's sugarcane price policy. The protest ran wild with drunken demonstrators even urinating and defecating inside the structure. Anisha Shekhar Mukherji, a conservation architect involved with the restoration project for monument, had earlier said, “Jantar Mantar is a unique monument as it offers scientific and astronomical heritage. “ Officials from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had been pushing the issue of changing the protest venue with the authorities for last two years. “The restriction will put a stop to encroachment and vandalism,“ said a senior ASI official. Police have removed all the people who had been camping around Jantar Mantar.

SOURCE

19th March 2010, Hindustan Times

CLEAN- UP CAMPAIGN BEGINS

The mammoth Yamuna clean-up campaign ‘Meri Dilli Meri Yamuna’ began today with the spiritual leader and founder of Art of Living, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar cleaning up the ITO ghat along with hundreds of volunteers. Speaking at the occasion, Shri Ravi Shankar said, “A staggering 3.6 billion tones of untreated sewerage flows daily into the Yamunna which supplies 60 percent of the water needed for Delhi. The situation is grave and now we need now.” The campaign of ‘Meri Dilli Meri Yamuna was launched on Tuesday at Purana Qila. The campaign will see a week-long cleanliness drive of the eight Yamuna ghats and citizens mobilization that will culminate with a clean-up drive of Delhi before the Commonwealth Games.

SOURCE

18th March 2010, Statesman

WALLED CITY OFF SEALING, FOR NOW

The sealing drive of the MCD has been postponed for a while for the walled city. The drive, however, is expected to continue in rest of the city. The walled city has been declared protected in the Master Plan 2021 and sealing cannot be undertaken in the area unless its redevelopment plan is finalized. “The area was given three years’ exemption for its redevelopment which has already ended. The appeal for the extension of the exemption will be made again,“ said Deep Mathur, MCD spokesperson.

SOURCE

18th March 2010, Tribune

AWARD FOR INTACH

INTACH has been selected by the jury for the EMPI- Indian Express Indian Innovation Awards for 2010. The jury unanimously decided to award the gold trophy to INTACH. A citation for doing “exemplary innovative work” will also be given.

SOURCE

20th March 2010, Hindu

REDUCE WATER DEMAND & WASTAGE TO REVIVE RIVER

What should and can be done to clean the Yamuna? What is the strategy for business-unusual so that we can spend more money but this time get returns of a living and breathing river. One, we need to change the art of pollution control. First, we must understand that rivers need water to assimilate our waste. Today, Delhi takes water from the river, upstream of Wazirabad, and returns only sewage to it. Between the two barrages — Wazirabad, when the river enters Delhi till Okhla, where it exits Delhi — there is no water. There are only some 17 drains that bring sewage into the river. Even if we were to treat every drop of waste before it reaches the river, it will do nothing. The river must have water to dilute waste. And to live. There are two ways for Delhi to get water in the river. One, it can demand that Haryana should give it more water. But this will be difficult. All cities, up or downstream, do what Delhi does. They take every drop of water the river has and give it only their waste. All cities are desperate for water. The second option is that Delhi can begin to reduce its own water demand, so that it can allow water to flow in the river. This can be done. Delhi today has the highest water availability in the country — already over 250 litres per person per day. The richest cities of the world, like those in Denmark, have roughly 110 litres per person per day. Delhi needs so much water because it wastes half the water in distribution. This must be stopped or at least minimized. But importantly, money for river cleaning must incorporate this target — how much will Delhi do to reduce water use. Water is part of the sums of waste. This also means we have to use less water in our homes, so that we discharge less waste. We have to be part of the solution to the river. Remember our flush is enjoined to the Yamuna. Then we must change the science of river cleaning. We know the river will not be clean till we treat all the sewage of the city. And the only way we can treat the sewage is by making solutions more affordable. In the current situation, Delhi government does not even recover the cost of water supply, forget sewage disposal. We must demand technologies that we all can pay for. This will drive the change in approach. The second agenda is to fully utilize the capacity of our sewage treatment plants. Delhi has capacity to clean 2330 million litres of sewage each day —enough to treat 70-90% of current waste, depending on the estimate you take. This will mean bringing waste to the plants, by lifting it from open drains, not just waiting to build new ones or building and repairing more drains. The hardware approach needs to go. The third agenda is connected and critical. The treated effluent must not be put back into the same open drain, which carries the untreated waste of the majority. It must be reused and recycled, as far as possible locally so that costs of pumping are reduced. Today, we spend huge money in first pumping sewage long distances for treatment and then waste this effort by dumping the cleaned water in unclean drains. In other words, sewage must be reused in gardens, in lakes or in industry. Sewage treatment plants must be built only when they have planned for reuse. Just consider. Today, sewage is treated at the Yamuna Vihar plant in east Delhi and disposed of in the drain carrying untreated waste outside the plant. Then the same waste is treated further down in the Kondli treatment plant. Cleaned effluent is then dumped in a drain, which flows past the new growth colonies of Noida with huge discharge. By the time it reaches the river, there is sewage, no water. Get serious, for heaven’s sake. Fourth, we must treat sewage directly in the open drains that criss-cross the city. Instead of waiting for every open storm water drain to go underground and disappear, the system will ensure all waste is treated and cleaned as it flows through the city. This would mean using innovative technologies for bio-remediation green plants and oxidation to decompose and degrade sewage. Get real. Fifth, we should build sewage treatment plants as close to the bank of the river to treat what remains in the drains. This will need technologies, which need less land to treat sewage. The design is not to discharge anything but treated effluent in Yamuna.

SOURCE

21st March 2010, Times of India

AFTER YEARS OF NEGLECT, PARK GETS HERITAGE TAG

LYING neglected for years, the Mehrauli Archaeological Park might now be developed and integrated with the Qutab Minar, a World Heritage Site, and the adjoining monuments in Mehrauli to form a larger heritage zone. At a meeting of the Delhi Urban Heritage Foundation (DUHF), chaired by the Lieutenant-Governor Tejendra Khanna, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is learnt to have agreed to transfer the 125-acre plot to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for development and maintenance. The DUHF, set up by the DDA in 1999 to frame and implement policies for conservation of the city's built and natural heritage, has been considering ways of developing the park for some time. According to sources, the ASI had written to the L-G expressing interest in taking up the project. The L-G had then requested the DDA, which presently owns the land, to transfer it to ASI. In a meeting of the Foundation held in the first week of March, the DDA agreed to transfer the plot to ASI for its development and maintenance, a DUHF member told Newslite. "We had been planning to develop and integrate the park with the Qutab Minar as it already falls in the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site and is also in proximity with several other significant monuments in Mehrauli. The entire area, from the remains of the Lal Kot wall to the park encompassing other heritage structures in Mehrauli, can be developed together into a heritage zone with a linked history," a senior ASI official said. "We will restrict entry to the park and build fencing around the larger heritage zone. We are waiting for an official notification from the DDA to start drawing up a final plan." EARLIER PROBLEMS According to ASI officials, conservation of the Lal Kot wall -the remains of the fortification wall around the first city of Delhi -had run into trouble. The DDA owned the land adjoining the wall and the ASI was seeking its transfer too. If this proposal comes through, the ASI will be able to develop the entire area. The Mehrauli Archaeological Park, which has already been identified as a heritage zone under the Delhi Masterplan 2021, is riddled with issues like encroachment and a lack of effective supervision due to involvement of multiple agencies. MULTIPLE OWNERSHIP While the park, which houses roughly 70 heritage structures, is owned by the DDA, around 15 of these monuments are protected by the ASI; over 12 have been notified by the state Department of Archaeology. The Wakf Board too owns some of the mosques and tombs in the park. "The heritage structures here range across different periods in history. Several of these monuments have been encroached upon. Only piecemeal development of the park has been possible, with different agencies involved," said A G K Menon, Convenor, Delhi Chapter, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage. Officials of the state Department of Archaeology, which offered to take up the project earlier, maintained the department is still keen on developing the area and there is no dearth of funds.

SOURCE

22nd March 2010, Indian Express

FOOTPATH, ROADS IN LUTYENS' DELHI GET NEW LOOK FOR GAMES

ROADS and lanes in Lutyens' Delhi will soon be a walker's paradise. Apart from the streets aping project for 11 roads leading to Commonwealth Games venues, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has taken up renovation of footpaths of at least 41 roads in areas under its jurisdiction before the October event. The footpaths will be given nearly identical look, with sandstone or pre-cast concrete slabs being used for the work. Work on all 41 roads is in progress and most are expected to be ready by September. Renovation of the footpaths of the C-hexagon, the road bordering India Gate, is expected to be among the first to be completed. While civil work is almost complete, horticultural work is expected to start soon. According to an NDMC official, the civic body is trying to avoid wastage of resources by re-using stones that are "in a good condition" from existing footpaths.

Most lanes in the area have undamaged stones, but the surface has become uneven. For these lanes, the stones are being dug out, the footpath is being levelled and the same stones are being used to cover it," he said. In February, the municipal body had approved the tenders for work on a set of footpaths inside lanes and for a set on the roads. The lanes include Hailey Lane, Connaught Lane, Pt Ravi Shankar Shukla Lane, Copernicus Lane, Balwant Rao Lane and the lane branching off from Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule Marg. The roads include Sikandara Road and Hailey Road, including the Mandi House roundabout. Other places where footpaths are being relaid include Dr Zakir Hussain Marg, Pandara Road, Shershah Suri Road, Ferozeshah Road, Tolstoy Marg, Jantar Mantar Road, Safdarjung Road and Akbar Road. Work has been taken up under two plans -Pavement Improvement Plan and Lane Improvement Plan. A senior NDMC official said care has been taken to ensure the trees lining the pavements are not harmed. This has been done by introducing "sieve covers". The area around a tree is covered with a slab with perforations in it to ensure the trees are not surrounded by concrete and can be watered. This has been done on Lodhi Road and Max Mueller Marg.

Should you have any comments or suggestions, you could reach us at

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