

Oriental Pratincole – Look for water and agriculture - that’s where you’ll find them

By Clive Minton:

What an unbelievably exciting time we are having with our Oriental Pratincole satellite transmitter results. No sooner has it gone all quiet and we speculate that all four birds have become relatively static near possible breeding areas than two of the birds ‘explode’ and move long distances in diametrically opposed directions!! One bird (SUN) flew eastwards and settled on the western shores of Taiwan, near where our only previous report of a flagged Oriental Pratincole had occurred (in 2008). After a couple of days, it then proceeded to the east coast of Taiwan, to an area where only last year Chung-yu Chiang had photographed an Oriental Pratincole nest in the shingle of a large riverbed (see photos). But then, as if not to be outdone, another Oriental Pratincole (SEP) flew westwards to north-east India and then, after a short pause, onwards to south-west India. Not surprisingly, it is the first Australian-marked wader to be recorded in that region. There is not much land to the west of it so presumably it has now reached the area in which it is going to breed!

The latest assessment of the third Oriental Pratincole (SHE) (the first one carrying a satellite transmitter to migrate to the Asian continent) confirms that it is still (after nearly eight weeks) at the same large lake in Cambodia. The pattern of recent movements seems to be more or less centered around one particular location, suggesting it is now breeding there. What will the fourth satellite transmitter-carrying bird (SEC) do? Stay put and breed or make a further movement? How long will this saga continue?

Photo 1: Oriental Pratincole on dry riverbed, Taiwan (by Chung-yu Chiang)



By Grace Maglio:

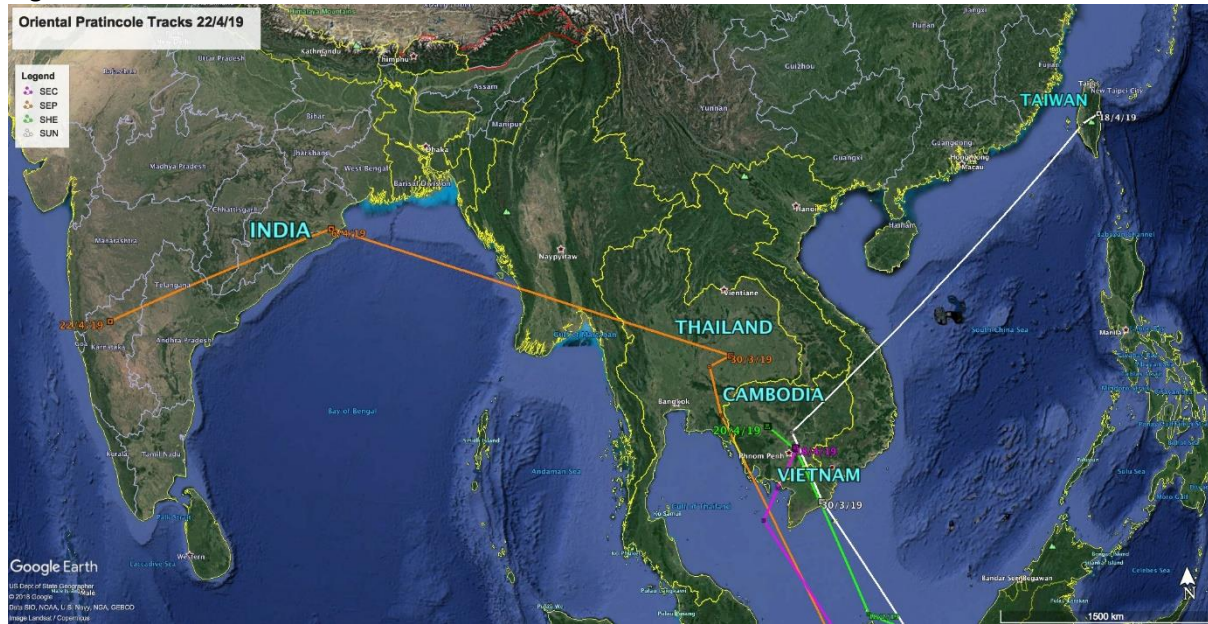
The Oriental Pratincole, Australia’s most numerous migratory shorebird and is proving to have a very wide breeding range. Breeding populations are reported as occurring from Vietnam in the south to Russia in the north and from Pakistan in the west to Japan in the east.

Their adaptability and ability to utilise modified agricultural land and various water sources most likely contributes to their healthy populations. Yet we have very little knowledge about the movements and breeding habits of Oriental Pratincoles over-wintering in Australia.

With this project so far, we have gained a small but significant insight to their northward movements and now we wait with anticipation for these birds to reveal their choice of breeding sites.

According to reliable location data, SEP and SUN have made significant moves. SUN is now in East Taiwan and data has just been received to confirm SEPs location in South West India. Chung-Yu Chiang (Taiwan Wader Study Group) has once again provided information on the habitat of SUN's current position. While SEC continues to inhabit Cambodia's "Great Green Belt", we now believe that SHE may be breeding in the Tonle Sap Biosphere.

Figure 1: Tracks of Oriental Pratincole from Mainland Southeast Asia

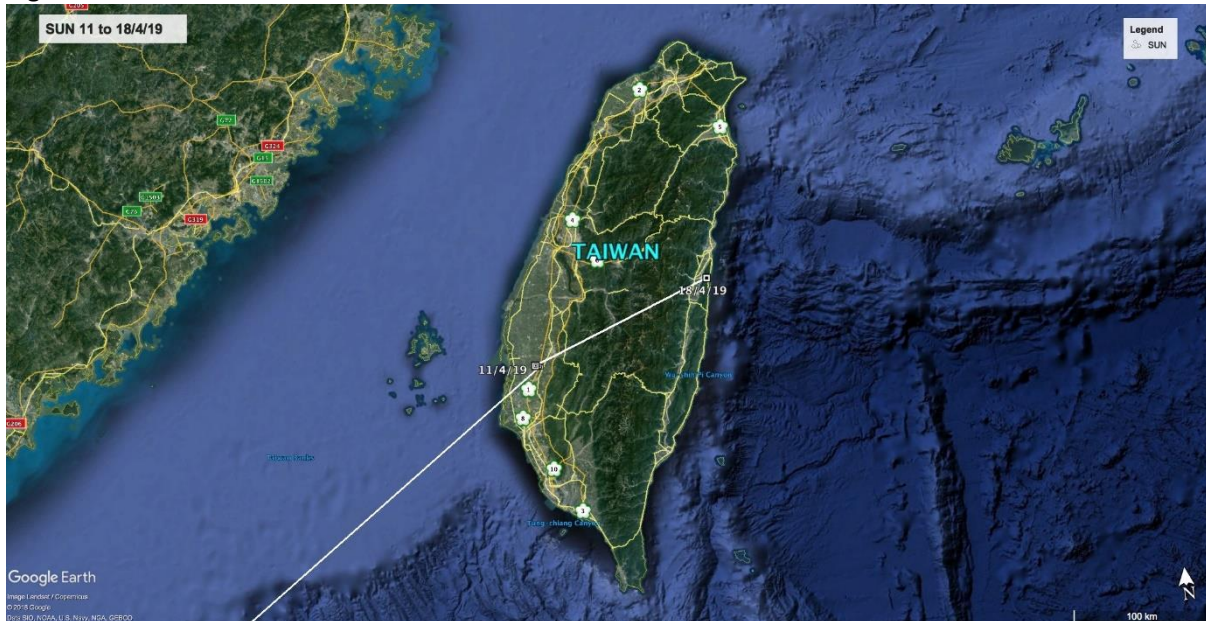


Distance from release location 20 April

Engraved Leg-flag	Distance from 80 Mile Beach release location (approx.)
SUN	4,800km
SEP	6,350km
SHE	4,000km
SEC	3,840km

SUN - Somewhere over east (with input from Chung-Yu Chiang) - Chiayi County, Taiwan, is where SUN was located approximately 9-12 April, probably hawking for insects over the sugar cane, rice and corn fields that surround the Ba-chang River. Bad weather in Taiwan over the last week may have affected the performance of the satellite tag, as the next location reading was on 18 April, 132km east of the Chiayi County location in Shoufeng township, Hualien County.

Figure 2: SUN - from West Taiwan to East Taiwan



Although the current data positions of SUN are in the Coastal Mountain Range, it is most likely situated in the vicinity of the Shoufeng and Hualien Rivers, where breeding attempts have occurred in previous years. Historic breeding records seem to show a preference for dry riverbanks in Eastern Taiwan (and harvested agricultural fields in Western Taiwan).

Photo 2 – Hualien River, dry riverbed, 2018 breeding site (by Chung-yu Chiang)



Figure 3 - SUN - Approximate location Hualien County, Taiwan



Photo 3: SUN - Hualien River, Taiwan, 2018 breeding record (by Chung-yu Chiang)



SEP - So that's where you are! - Possibly due to bad weather or SEP's constant movement affecting satellite tag performance, we were forced to wait for 15 long days for reliable data to more accurately determine its location. On the morning of 22 April, we finally discover that SEP is in South West India in the state of Karnataka, approximately 1,220km from its previous site in Odisha. Less accurate data suggests that SEP flew approximately 500km along the coast before heading inland to its current site. SEP is now located on the banks of the Krishna River, within the boundary of Heggur Village, Bagalkot District, Karnataka, where the economy is driven by agriculture and sugarcane fields dominate the landscape.

Figure 4: SEP - from Odisha to Karnataka, India

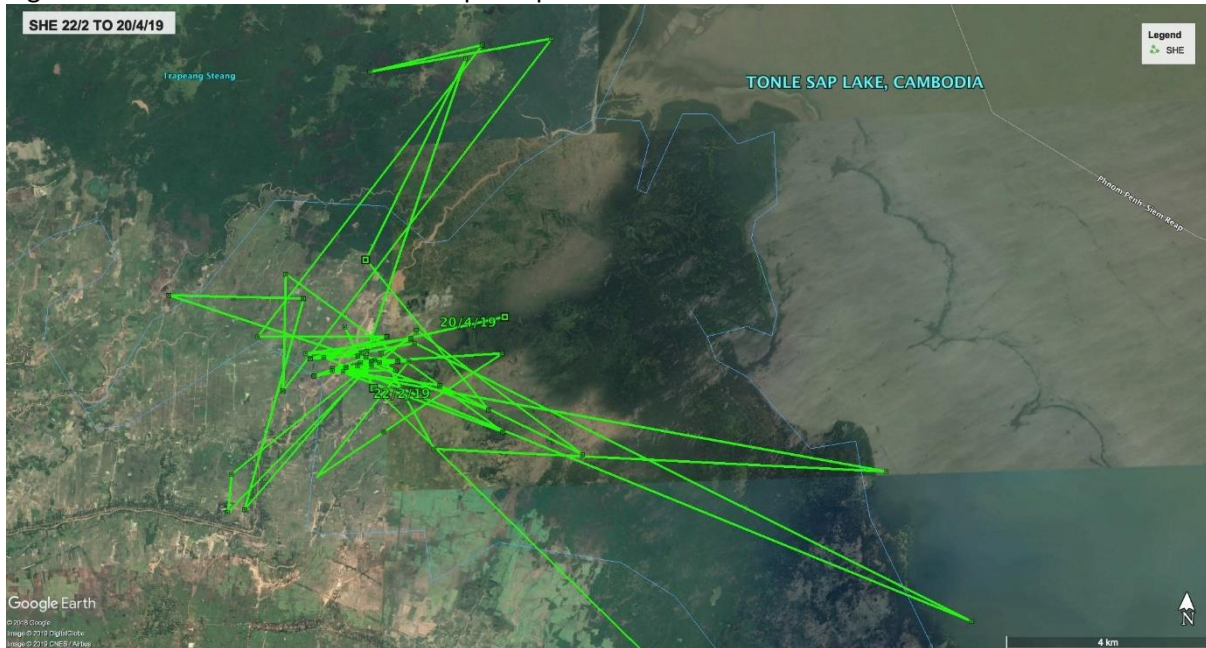


Figure 5 – SEP Heggur Village, Bagalkot District, India



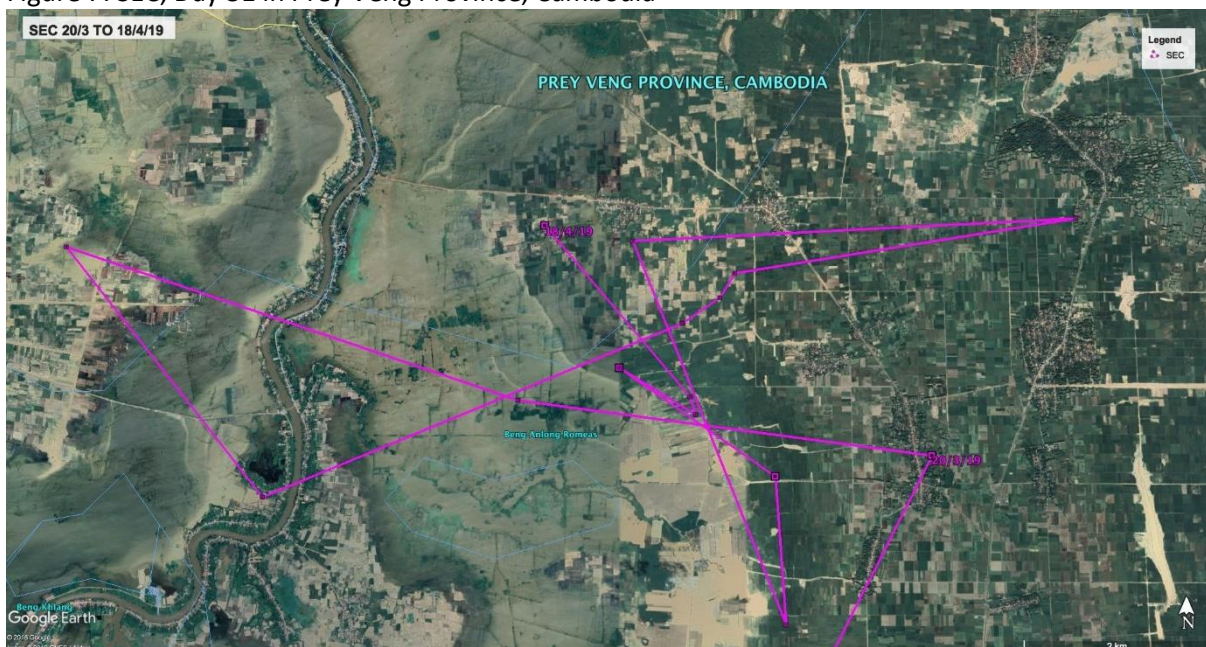
SHE - Lakeside living – a great place to raise a family? - After eight weeks in the Tonle Sap Biosphere, we are now cautiously optimistic that SHE's movements in this area do suggest signs of breeding behaviour. The tracks are developing a 'centre point', which may indicate a nest site. There are some historical breeding records of Oriental Pratincole for Cambodia and in particular other parts of the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve and as we have mentioned in previous reports, the area around Tonle Sap Lake consists of floodplains and agriculture, habitat features preferred by the Oriental Pratincole.

Figure 6: SHE - 8 weeks in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve



SEC – Another potential breeding site? - Day 31 and SEC is still in Prey Veng Province: the “great green belt” of Cambodia, approximately 40km east of Phnom Penh. Is this area suitable for breeding? Time will tell.

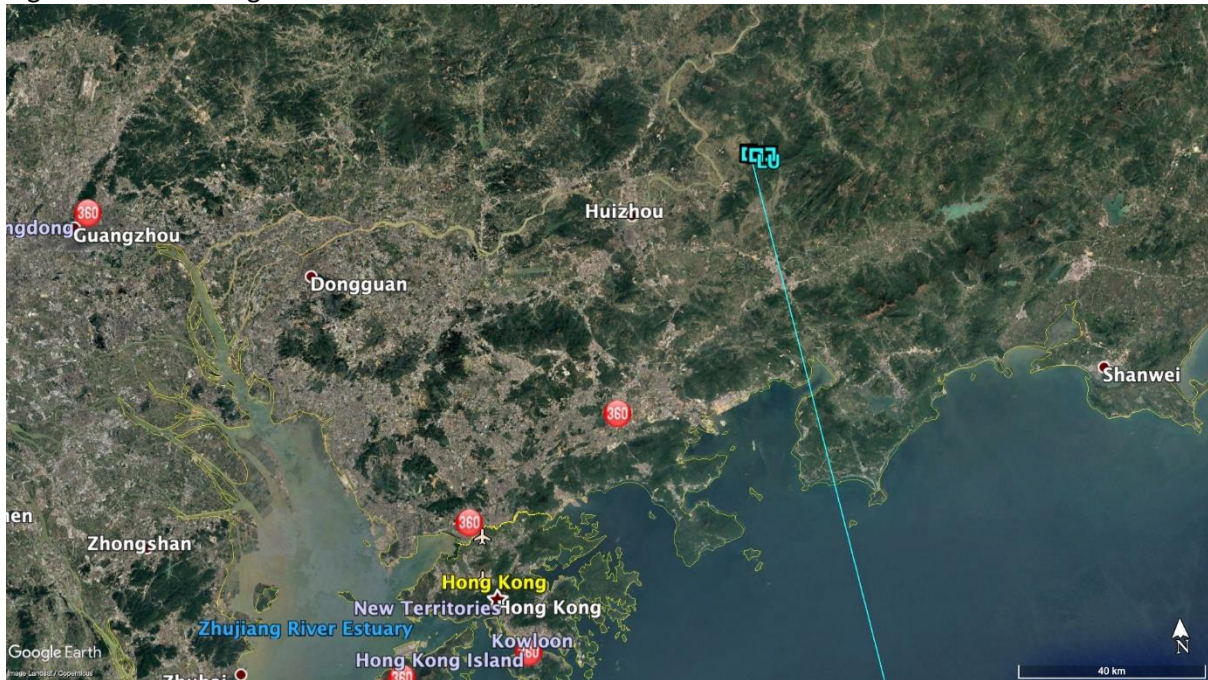
Figure 7: SEC, Day 31 in Prey Veng Province, Cambodia



Little Curlew – Direct to China (by Inka Veltheim)

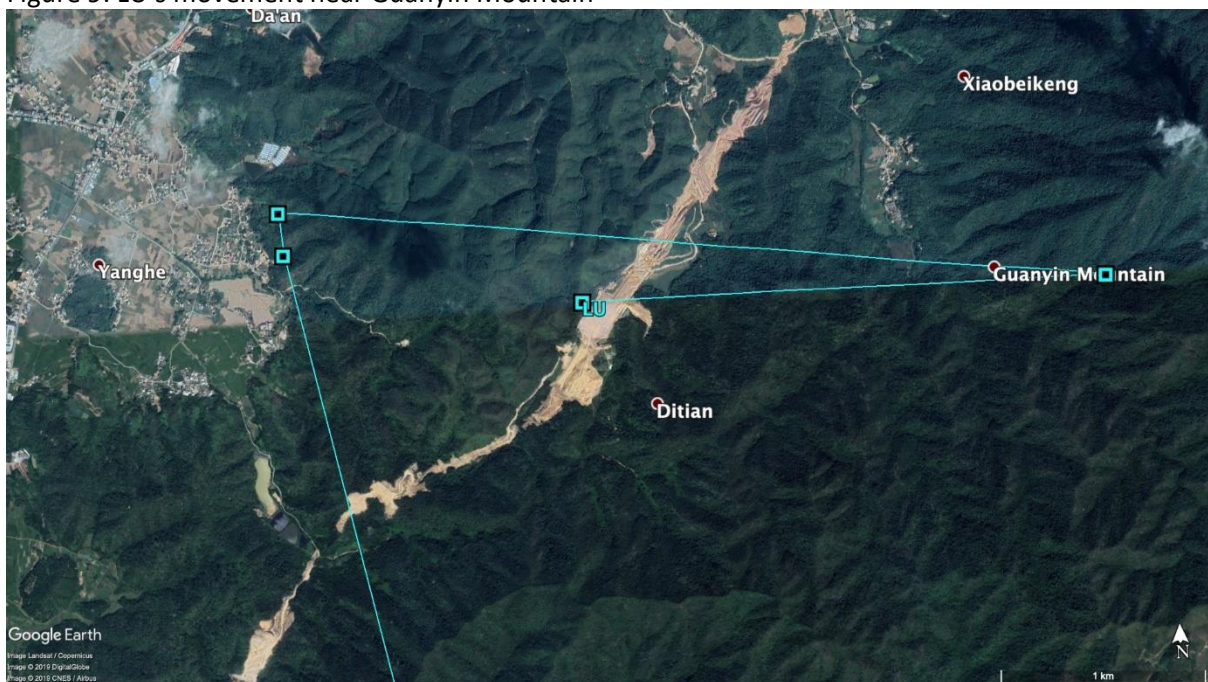
Amazingly, the next Little Curlew (LU) to depart Anna Plains, 80 Mile Beach, has flown to mainland China in one direct, 5,000 km, flight. The last fix of this bird at 80 Mile Beach, Australia, was on 14 April, and the first fix on migration was on 16 April.

Figure 8: LU's landing on Mainland China



LU landed approximately 100 km north east of Hong Kong five days later, on 21 April and appears to have stopped over in a mountainous area near Ditian and Shangbeileng.

Figure 9: LU's movement near Guanyin Mountain



Unfortunately, the transmitter of the first Little Curlew to depart Australia (LL) has not transmitted since last report. It is unclear what may have happened to the transmitter or the bird.

Meanwhile, LS has just departed Australia. This individual initially flew to Roebuck Plains and back in March. LS has transmitted early Tuesday morning (23 April) and is currently some 1,500 km north-west of Australia. This Little Curlew looks to be following similar migratory path to LU, and we eagerly wait its landing in China.

Figure 10: Migration tracks of LU, LL and LS

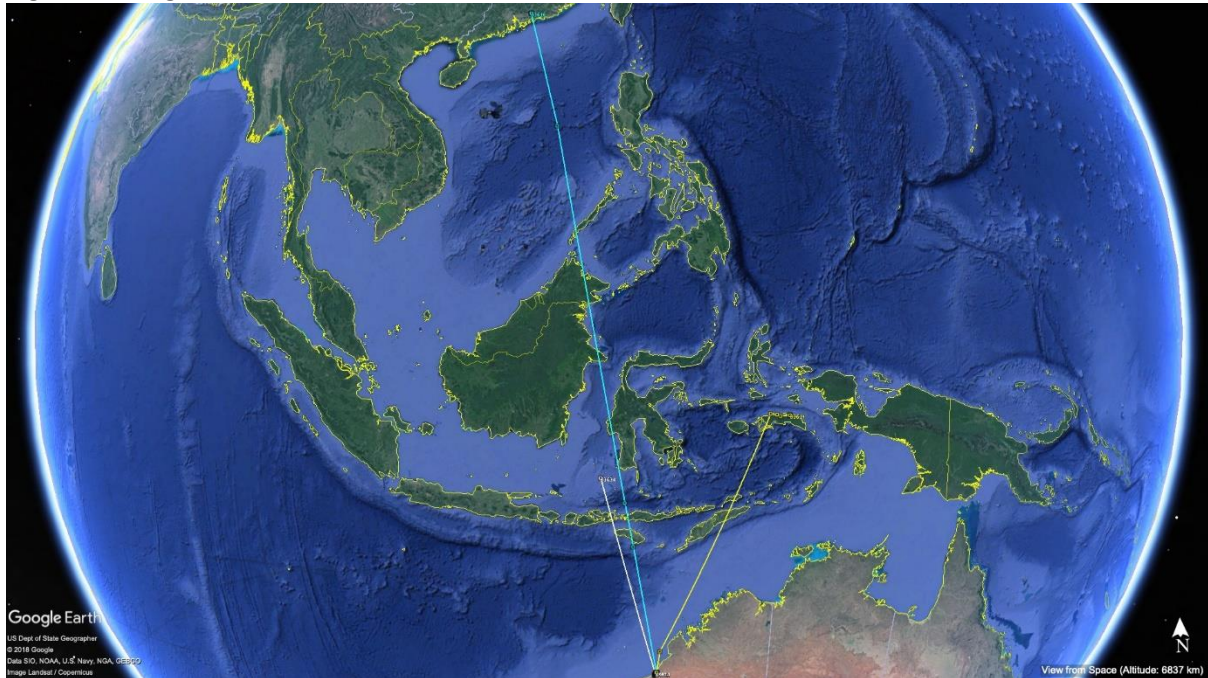


Photo 3: We pray that LS and LU can continue providing tracking information through their migrations (by Pat Macwhirter)



Whimbrel – On your mark (by Katherine Leung)

Broome Bird Observatory witnessed a LOT of Whimbrels departing Broome this week, see and listen to this fascinating video taken by BBO staff:

<https://www.facebook.com/broomebirdobs/videos/vb.203556159723771/2288988138042021/?type=2&theater>

We are expecting KU and LA joining them within the coming few days.