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## WHEN INDIA GROWS, THE WORLD GROWS, SAYS MODI



While Modi addressed a packed chamber and received several standing ovations, a handful of lawmakers boycotted the event. ANI

Addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress, PM stressed on the shared value of democracy; he also touched on global concerns such as the war in Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific situation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress on Thursday, where he, in agreement with U.S. President Joe Biden, called the India-U.S. relationship "a defining partnership" of the 21st century.

The Prime Minister also talked about the virtues of democracy, the ties that bind India and the United States, and India's economic and development trajectory. He also touched on issues of global concern, such as the war in Ukraine and the situation in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Modi's hour-long speech was heard by a packed chamber and he received several standing ovations, but over 70 members of Congress had raised concerns about democratic backsliding in India ahead of his address. A handful of them boycotted the event. "Democracy is one of our sacred and shared values," the Prime Minister said as he referred to India as the

"mother of democracy".

"I am here to speak about our calling for this century," he said, characterising as an "exceptional privilege" the opportunity to address Congress twice (his first address was in June 2016).

He talked about the digitisation of the Indian economy and said that India would soon be the third-largest economy in the world. "When India grows, the world grows," the Prime Minister said

He depicted India's development as being led by women and a blend of ancient values and modern capabilities, such as in technology. "Be it creative reels on Insta or real-time payments, coding or quantum computing... the youth of India are a great example of how a society can embrace latest technology," the Prime Minister said.

"We celebrated a remarkable journey of over 75 years of freedom, after a thousand years of foreign rule in one form or another," Mr. Modi said. (This is apparently a reference to both British rule and Mughal rule. The BJP has previously alluded to the Mughals as being essentially foreign).

He also spoke about India's environmental commitments, linking them to India's culture.

On the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Mr. Modi said the world order was based on respect for the United Nations Charter, sovereignty and territorial integrity and the peaceful resolution of disputes.



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## AFFIRMING U.S. AS A 'TRUSTED' LONG-TERM PARTNER FOR TECH, INDIA SENDS MESSAGE TO CHINA



Trusted partners: Prime Minister Narendra Modi signs autographs for U.S. lawmakers at the U.S. Capitol in Washington DC. AFP

**Modi and Biden launched two Joint Task Forces on advanced telecommunications, focused on Open RAN and R&D in 5G/6G tech; An MoU on semiconductor supply chain has also been signed**

Outlining a shared vision of "creating secure and trusted telecommunications" and "resilient supply chains" in the ambitious joint statement released in Washington, India has in the clearest terms yet both affirmed the U.S. as a "trusted" long-term partner in its plans for developing critical technologies and also sent a clear signal closing the door to China and its tech companies.

"President Biden and Prime Minister Modi share a vision of creating secure and trusted telecommunications, resilient supply chains, and enabling global digital inclusion. To fulfil this vision, the leaders launched two Joint Task Forces on advanced telecommunications, focused on Open RAN and research and development in 5G/6G technologies," the joint statement said, adding that public-private cooperation between vendors and operators will be led by India's

Bharat 6G Alliance and the U.S. Next G Alliance. The two leaders also "endorsed an ambitious vision for 6G networks, including standards cooperation, facilitating access to chipsets for system development, and establishing joint research and development projects".

### Significant step

Both described the signing of an MoU on the semiconductor supply chain as "a significant step in the coordination of our countries' semiconductor incentive programs". They also stressed the need to put in place a "Trusted Network/Trusted Sources" bilateral framework".

"Trusted" has been a recurring and key theme during the ongoing visit. As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday, Mr. Modi's address to the U.S. Congress had "underlined that the India-U.S. relationship has moved from the 'hesitations of history'", which Mr. Modi had referred to in his 2016 address to Congress, "to 'trusted geographies'".

This has also coincided with a broader debate in the region in assessing risk while rolling out new technologies and in governing and managing data flows, by opening doors to only "trusted" geographies.

Chinese companies such as Huawei, which is offering its 5G technology to many countries in the region, are at the centre of the debate. India has been a major importer of Chinese telecom equipment which has been used in the rollout of 3G and 4G networks, but took a landmark decision in 2020 to leave Chinese companies out of 5G trials.

The downward spiral in relations since 2020, following China's border transgressions, has subsequently all but closed the door to once thriving tech cooperation between the neighbours. U.S. politicians who have been campaigning against Chinese tech firms on Friday welcomed the deepening technology cooperation between India and the U.S.

"I commend the announcement of important commercial, technological, and defence deals with India around Prime Minister Modi's visit this week," said Rep. Mike Gallagher, Chairman of the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, which focuses on U.S. economic and security competition with China. "A thriving relationship with the world's largest democracy," he said, "is critical to maintaining a stable, open Indo-Pacific."

## 'PRICE STABILITY IS A MUST FOR GROWTH'

**Basic mantra: Path to high but sustainable inclusive growth has to be paved by price stability, write RBI officials led by Patra. REUTERS**

**Bringing down inflation and stabilising inflation expectations will revive consumer spending, boost corporate revenues and profits thus giving an incentive for private capex, RBI officials led by Deputy Governor Patra write in the monthly bulletin**

Taming inflation and anchoring inflation expectations is key to helping revive consumer spending and private capital expenditure and thereby supporting growth, RBI officials wrote in an article in the bank's monthly bulletin released on Friday.

"Recent national accounts data and corporate results when read in conjunction clearly show that inflation is slowing down personal consumption expenditure. This, in turn, is moderating corporate sales and holding back private investment in capacity creation," the officials, including Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra, wrote in the article on 'State of the Economy'.

"Bringing down inflation and stabilising inflation expectations will revive consumer spending, boost corporate revenues and profitability, which is the best incentive for private capex," they added.

Private consumption spending, which expanded by a sluggish 2.8% in the January-March quarter, as per latest NSO data, is estimated to have actually contracted 3.2% sequentially.

The RBI's officials cited Governor Shaktikanta Das's comments after the Monetary Policy Committee voted to leave interest rates unchanged this month that monetary authorities would need to move towards ensuring inflation was aligned with the "primary target of 4%".

Refuting the view that the RBI's flexible inflation targeting was the single-minded pursuit of a single target, the officials emphasised that contrary to critics' perception, the central bank's approach was ultimately "a growth



preservation and promotion monetary policy framework".

"It is axiomatic that the path to high but sustainable inclusive growth has to be paved by price stability," the officials stressed.

"Once this is realised, the trade-offs and dilemmas confronting the conduct of monetary policy fade away," they added.

## 'MOST STATES FAILED TO MEET THEIR CAPITAL SPENDING TARGETS IN FY23'



Large States like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra faltered significantly in their capital spending plans for 2022-23 while just six States managed to come close to meeting their capex targets, as per a Bank of Baroda report based on data from 25 States.

While the Centre met its infrastructure spending targets last year, as per its stated commitment to pump prime the economy till private investments rebound, States' performance had been disparate and disappointing, the bank's economists noted.

The 25 State governments for which data is available now managed to spend only 76.2%, or ₹5.71 lakh crore, from their planned capex of ₹7.49 lakh crore for 2022-23.

"The two largest States in terms of planned capex, U.P. and Maharashtra had an outlay of ₹2.19 lakh crore, which is 29.2% of the total capex of these 25 States," the bank's economics research team observed. "Their combined achievement was just 70% which has brought down the average for the entire sample," they added.

The worst performance was recorded in Andhra Pradesh, which met just 23% of its capex target, followed by Tripura, Nagaland and Haryana, which spent less than 50% of their target.

Only four States — Karnataka, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Bihar — met or exceeded targets while Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh came very close at more than 98% of the target. Eleven States crossed the 80% threshold, including Tamil Nadu (89.9%) and Gujarat (89.5%).

"The under-achievement phenomenon is not really new as the rate was around 72% in 2019-20, though it had improved to 95% in 2021-22. The States certainly have to improve their record here in order to push forward the investment cycle as the private sector will take some time before coming in a broad-based manner," the report's authors concluded.

## MICRON TO PRODUCE FIRST SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP AT INDIA PLANT BY DEC. 2024: VAISHNAW

The \$2.7-billion semiconductor assembly and testing plant to be built by U.S.-headquartered Micron in India will produce its first chip in six quarters, that is, by December 2024, said Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw.

The plant would create 5,000 direct and 15,000 indirect jobs, Mr. Vaishnaw said on Friday. Micron's decision to build the plant was announced on the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States.

Terming semiconductors a "foundational technology" used in most electronic appliances like phones and computers besides cars, Mr. Vaishnaw said the investment signalled a milestone for the Indian semiconductor ecosystem.

The manufacturing input for the plant, which Mr. Vaishnaw said would be brought from Japan, would be made into chips and sold to manufacturers in India and abroad, though a break up of how much was expected to be sold domestically and abroad was not provided.

Mr. Vaishnaw added that the groundwork to domestically synthesize hundreds of chemicals and gases involved in semiconductor manufacturing had been laid. Ultra-pure water (UPW), which is required in semiconductor manufacturing in large quantities, would be manufactured for the Micron plant, Mr. Vaishnaw said in response to a query.

The government revised incentives offered to manufacturers under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, first in September 2022, and subsequently in this month, and invited previously ineligible applicants to re-apply for benefits.



Ashwini Vaishnaw

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## WARM WELCOME

*The Modi visit further strengthened the ties between India and the U.S.*

**Rolling out the red carpet for Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his state visit to Washington, U.S. President Joseph Biden underlined his belief that the India-U.S. partnership will be one of the “defining relationships of the 21st century”, one that he has had a strong belief in as U.S. Vice-President in the Obama administration.** The phrase mirrored the one used by U.S. President Barack Obama at the state banquet for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2009 — one of the “defining partnerships of the 21st century” — denoting the consistent strengthening of ties over the first two decades of the century. The visit by Mr. Modi, his first state visit to the U.S., has not disappointed votaries of the relationship. The two sides announced new deals involving high-end defence cooperation, semiconductor industry investments, and a partnership in quantum and advanced computing and AI. The deal for co-production of jet engines in India — White House called it “trailblazing” — will involve an unprecedented level of technology transfer. India’s decision to join the 11-nation mineral security partnership for critical minerals, where China has a global monopoly, and cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, particularly in clean energy, will strengthen future cooperation here. Finally, India’s move to sign on to the 27-nation Artemis Accords for cooperation in space

exploration, and the NASA-ISRO partnerships for human spaceflight will also catapult India’s ambitions in the sphere.

It is significant that areas of discord, such as the differences in policies towards Russia’s war in Ukraine, and confrontation with China, where New Delhi has been more diffident, were sidestepped. Perhaps more difficult to sidestep were increasingly loud questions over the state of democracy and human rights in India, which 75 U.S. members of the Congress raised in a letter to Mr. Biden. While some uber-liberal Democrat lawmakers took the extreme step of boycotting Mr. Modi’s address to the joint session of Congress, it would be harder to ignore the pointed words from Mr. Obama in an interview the same day, on India’s minority rights. Eventually, Mr. Modi’s response, in a rare press availability with Mr. Biden, dismissed some misgivings over his administration — he denied alleged discrimination against minorities and a crackdown on dissent. Rights issues are not a bilateral concern, and with his warm welcome, Mr. Biden made it clear he did not share the concern. If Mr. Modi wishes to address public concerns, however, he may find it more effective to make the case in a press conference on his return, emphasising his belief that “if there are no human values and there is no humanity, there are no human rights, then it cannot be called a democracy”.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

*Efforts to reduce gender disparities must continue in earnest*

**India has climbed eight places from last year in the annual Gender Gap Report, 2023, and is now ranked 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity. But this improved statistic, closing 64.3% of the overall gender gap, is hardly a cause for cheer. On the four key markers of the index — economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; political empowerment — India has a window of opportunity to improve in each so that one half of the most populous country in the world may contribute to the economy, growth and overall well-being of society. India has fared well in education, and in political empowerment, with representation of women of over 40% in local governance, thanks to efforts on the ground after the 73rd and 74th Amendments. But, as the report points out, women represent only 15.1% of parliamentarians, “the highest for India since the inaugural 2006 edition”. This should spur Parliament to take it to the next level by acting on the long-pending Women’s Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women, and introduced in 1996. To understand where things stand on women’s participation in politics, consider this: Nagaland, which became a State in 1963, elected its first two women MLAs only in 2023.**

On providing even access for men and women on economic participation and opportunity, India ranks near the bottom, with less than 40% parity. On the one hand, there are upticks in parity in wages and income, but then shares of women in senior positions and technical roles have dropped. Another concern is India’s performance in health and survival, though an improvement in sex ratio at birth has driven up parity after more than a decade of slow progress. It is imperative that girls get access to education through school and college; and they also need paid work. Women end up doing so much unpaid work at home that many do not have the time or the energy to opt for paid work. Providing girls with a job-assured education will automatically improve all development indices including nutrition, and break the vicious cycle of early marriage leading to poor maternal and child health. If the pandemic revealed the fragility of life, it was harder on women, with their labour participation rates dropping, thus reducing household incomes. Often, even if they get a job, women are impeded by patriarchal and cultural norms; besides, they often have to worry about their safety. The pandemic may have stalled progress to achieve gender equality by 2030, but work towards bridging the gap must go on in earnest.

## STRIKE A FINE BALANCE, HAVE A JUST CIVIL CODE

On June 14, the Law Commission of India decided to solicit views and proposals from the public about the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). After a hiatus of just five years, when the Commission had concluded that the ‘UCC is neither necessary nor desirable’, the move now is one that keeps the pot boiling on one of India’s most ideologically as well as politically rivalled issue. Though we believe that the enactment of the UCC in piecemeal manner would be in tune with the spirit of Article 44, the attempt here is to invite attention to one particular consideration that must weigh with the Commission as it undertakes this exercise de novo.

### Autonomy versus authority

The question of personal laws is basically the question of personal and religious autonomy versus the state’s authority to reform familial relations. Since each religious group has cultural autonomy, it is thus being argued that the community should itself come forward to seek reforms. This is the justification for the adoption of internal law reform or voluntary UCC. In fact, the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Indian Succession Act, 1925 are nothing but examples of voluntary adoption of the UCC though the recently enacted love jihad laws by prohibiting inter-faith marriages basically violate the spirit of Special Marriage Act.

There are also regional differences, i.e. Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family in 1975; Muslim marriage and divorces are to be registered in Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand under the 1876 law, and in Assam under 1935

law, and adoption was permissible to Kashmiri Muslims.

At present, not just Muslims but even Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews are governed by their own personal laws. Accordingly, believe it or not, it is the religious identity that determines which personal law would apply to a group of individuals. Even reformed Hindu Personal Law under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 does insist on solemnisation of marriage, through saptapadi (seven steps around fire) and datta (invocation before fire). Section 7(2) of the Act, just like Manusmriti (8.227), provides that marriage is completed on the seventh step. Sapinda relationship, adoption and Hindu Joint Family rules too are based on the Hindu Personal Law.

Surprisingly when two Hindus marry under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (Section 21A inserted in 1976), they continue to be governed by Hindu Personal Law, but if two Muslims marry under this legislation, the Muslim Personal Law (MPL) would no longer govern them. Interestingly, a person who renounces Hinduism too continues to be governed by the Hindu Personal Law. The Constitution was not the starting point but a mere culmination of India’s long-standing integrative traditions. In addition to the provisions that outlaw discrimination in all its forms, the Indian Constitution’s commitment to cultural accommodation is visible through a near-absolute fundamental right in Article 29(1) dedicated exclusively to conserving the distinctive culture of all citizens. However, do Muslims of India have the courage to argue that polygamy or arbitrary unilateral divorce even in anger or while in an intoxicated state could be considered a part of their culture?

### Unity more than uniformity

That said, the Commission must bear in its recommendation that for a diverse and multicultural polity such as India, the proposed UCC must be emblematic of India's 'mosaic model' of multiculturalism. The logic is invariably obvious — a homogenising lithification of identities must not become a mirage for flourishing diversity (something that has consistently remained peculiar to the American model of multiculturalism). After all, unity is far more important than uniformity. The British brought homogeneity amongst Hindus and Muslims by grossly undermining heterogeneity within the two religious communities.

Under the Indian Constitution, the right to cultural autonomy defends the Indian model of multiculturalism. Prominent scholars on multiculturalism such as Rochana Bajpai suggest that the Indian Constitution offers two major approaches with respect to accommodation of difference — integrationist and restricted multicultural. While the affirmative action policies largely land in the first approach's camp, for Ms. Bajpai, "state assistance to minority cultures has been seen as an illegitimate concession [...]" and is often termed as 'appeasement of minorities'.

This, as Ms. Bajpai furthers, leaves cultural difference without any robust constitutional normative underpinnings. In short, it is through these two approaches that the Constitution makes way for cultural accommodation and a celebration of group differences. Accordingly, the 21st Law Commission (2015-18) had boldly favoured equality between men and women in communities rather than aiming for equality between communities. A just code should be the primary goal as just laws are more important than a mere one uniform law.

Having this discussion as the backdrop, India's tryst with preserving its multicultural diversity is often found at the crossroads with values such as secularism. Despite secularism being a fundamental tenet governing the Indian polity, India decided not to adopt the French model of *laïcité*, which strictly prohibits bearing any religious outfit or marker in public; that considers religion in public as a threat (and not a prominent promoter) to the nation's secular fabric — thus pushing it within only the four walls of the domestic household. Indian society, therefore, 'accommodates' and not just 'tolerates' the wide array of group and ethnic differences.

When groups claim and effectuate their multi-ethnic traditions without

impinging on the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens, their traditions and values acquire the status of social mores for they fulfil a much broader purpose of social and national integration.

However, a claim of such broad nature invites limitations inherent — in the name of personal laws and practices, what deserves legal protection and promotion and what does not. Right to cultural-relativism cannot justify continuation of unjust and discriminatory personal laws. Such provisions of the personal laws must be made consistent with substantive equality and gender justice goals espoused in the Constitution.

### Hurdles on the path ahead

Simultaneously, we must understand that when a community feels threatened in any way, whether rightly or wrongly so, the collective esteem of its members becomes woven to the community, and community allegiance becomes much stronger. Therefore, one hopes that the Law Commission of India would not contribute to the rise of reactive culturalism amongst different communities in India, including Muslims. The Muslim community too must understand that the MPL and Islam are not one and the same. The MPL is a jurist given law and is not entirely divine. In fact, it is more appropriate to call it Anglo-Muhammadan law that was derived in certain matters from the erroneously translated secondary sources rather than the Koran and Sunna of the Prophet. British courts treated juristic opinions in the MPL on a par with statutory laws enacted by the legislature and by insisting on the British doctrine of precedent, they further brought in a lot of rigidity in the MPL. If MPL reforms that rely on inter-school borrowing could be accepted by the Ulema way back in 1939, why cannot this be done today? Let the Muslim clergy come forward and lead the MPL reform process by identifying the discriminatory and oppressive issues and adopt the views of progressive jurists.

As the Commission proposes an overhauling secularisation of various socio-religious-cultural practices that have been the mainstay of thousands of religious and ethnic communities since times immemorial, the path ahead is not going to be free from hurdles. In the words of political philosopher Iris Young, as the value of social difference is more relational and is itself a product of social processes, we believe that it will be incumbent upon the Commission to strike a fine balance as it should aim to eliminate only those practices that do not meet the benchmarks set by the Constitution.

## SQUARING THE CIRCLE AT THE INDIA-EGYPT SUMMIT



Mahesh Sachdev

There is a danger that after an adrenaline-rushed and consequential parley in the United States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Egypt (June 24-25, 2023) may appear to be a bit underwhelming. It is anything but.

Historically, India-Egypt ties are perhaps the oldest civilisational link. In 2750 BCE, the Pharaoh Sahure sent ships to the "Land of Punt", which historians identify with peninsular India. By the middle of the second millennium BCE, Egyptian mummies were wrapped in muslin dyed with indigo, both from India.

### Links and some key data

It is this historic inspiration that needs to be invoked while aiming for greater

bilateral relevance and substantiality. While the past century of contacts produced plenty of goodwill and verbal shibboleths — from decolonisation to non-alignment and from Egyptians' Bollywood-frenzy to the addition of lilting Egyptian music in Indian scores — they have delivered little of substance. India's trade with the most populous Arab country stood at \$6,061 million in 2022-23, having declined by 17% over the previous year. Nearly a third of it was petroleum-related. India was Egypt's sixth largest trading partner, while Egypt was India's 38th. Indian investments in Egypt were spread over 50 projects totalling \$3.15 billion, half of the sum contributed by a single company. Egypt has invested only \$37 million in India. There are less than 5,000 Indians in Egypt, nearly a fifth of them being students.

The underperformance of bilateral ties is not due to a lack of bilateral institutional mechanisms, but their efficacy and sense of purpose. India has a Joint Commission, Foreign Office Consultations and at least nine joint working groups. Its Defence and External Affairs Ministers visited Egypt during the past year. It had a bilateral summit less than five months ago when the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, visited India. All this perhaps attests that both India and Egypt have formidable bureaucracies and public sectors adept at rearranging the chairs on the deck.

Opportunities and challenges

If the forthcoming Cairo Summit is not to become yet another event management exercise, it would need to leverage the opportunities while avoiding the pitfalls. Egypt is a large country (population 105 million) and economy (\$378 billion). It is politically stable and its socio-economic conditions are quite similar to India. Egypt's largest imports are refined petroleum, wheat (world's largest importer), cars, corn and pharmaceuticals — all of which India has the potential to supply.

Moreover, the Egyptian government has an ambitious infrastructure development agenda, with 49 mega projects including the construction of a New Cairo (\$58 billion), a \$25 billion nuclear power plant and a \$23 billion high-speed rail network. During 2015-19, Egypt was the world's third-largest arms importer. These present opportunities for India.

But these opportunities are offset by serious challenges. To begin with, the Egyptian economy is in a serious crisis. The huge financial commitments have coincided with a static economy, pandemic, global slowdown and the Ukraine conflict. Consequently, tourism has dropped and imports such as cereals have become costly. Annual inflation is above 30% and the currency has lost more than half its value since February 2022. Foreign exchange scarcity has forced the deferral of payments for such essentials as wheat. While a \$3 billion bailout package was negotiated with the International Monetary Fund six months ago, it is conditional on the tough economic reforms which are sputtering, due to entrenched interests and crony capitalism.

The affluent Gulf Arab states initially supported the Egyptian economy with nearly \$30 billion, but have been lately reluctant citing various governance issues in Egypt. Egypt's foreign debt is over \$163 billion (43% of the GDP) and its net foreign assets are minus \$24.1 billion. The acute forex situation compelled the government to issue in January 2023 an order for the postponement of projects

with a large foreign currency component and cuts to non-essential spending.

#### Pitfalls to avoid

With this backdrop in mind, Indian summitters in Cairo may need to carefully balance their exposure to Egypt with the opportunities on hand. India may countenance manageable eco-political risks to partake Egypt's lucrative opportunities through various innovations such as the EXIM line of credit, barter, and rupee trading. It should, however, avoid a repetition of its experience of Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s of having to defer its hard-earned construction project dues until they had to eventually be paid off by the Indian taxpayer. Moreover, such an arrangement may set a precedent other similarly placed friendly countries may cite. India may, instead, consider trilateral funding arrangements for such projects in Egypt or elsewhere with its partners in the Gulf, the G-20 or the multilateral financial institutions.

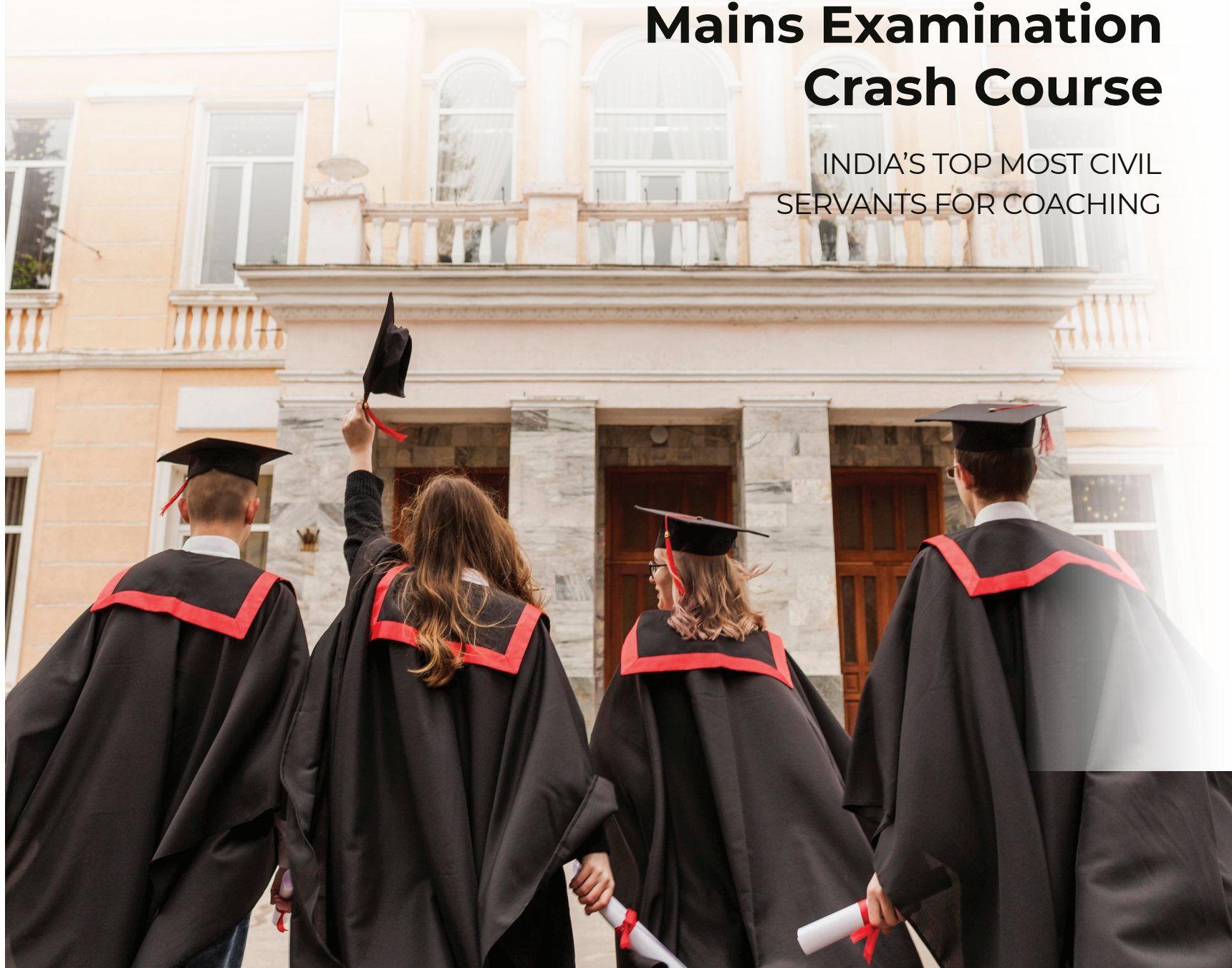
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