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Mahbub ul Haq and Human Development

A Tribute

Sanjaya Baru

Mahbub ul Haq led a multi-faceted life, but he will be remembered, in south Asia especially, for his contribution to the notion of 'human development', as which few ideas in development policy have in recent times captured the imagination of economists, policy-makers, political activists and aid agencies.

NOTHING captured Mahbub ul Haq's undying faith in human endeavour and his sense of purpose and optimism better than the closing sentence of a book he wrote bringing together his life's work: "Human destiny is a choice, not a chance".¹ It is out of this conviction that Haq worked till his dying day.

Mahbub ul Haq, economist, politician, diplomat, propagandist, died at the age of 64 on July 16, 1998, in New York. Born in 1934 in Jammu in pre-partition India, Haq graduated from Government College, Lahore, in 1953, secured a master's degree from King's College, Cambridge in 1955 and a doctoral degree in economics from Yale University, USA, in 1957. At Cambridge he befriended Amartya Sen and Manmohan Singh and through his life he made friends with scores of Indian economists, politicians and mediapersons. My association with Haq began in Stockholm in 1992, at a workshop on the Human Development Report, and was sustained through periodic interaction, the last being in New Delhi earlier this year, when he came to launch the second South Asian Human Development Report. Haq led a multi-faceted life, but it is his contribution to the notion of 'human development' for which he will be remembered, especially in south Asia. This essay is an obituary and a tribute.

Mahbub ul Haq's journey to the Human Development Report began as an economist at Pakistan's Planning Commission (1957-70). His initial ideas on growth and development (*The Strategy of Economic Planning*, Oxford University Press, 1963) were reshaped by his experience in government and exposure to the world. Haq questioned many of his own early premises in his second book (*The Poverty Curtain*, Columbia University Press, 1976) in which are set out the building blocks of his later work on human development. At the World Bank (1970-82), Haq was not only a key aide of Bank president Robert McNamara but also the principal architect of the Bank's

annual publication, the *World Development Report*.

Returning home to Pakistan in 1982, Haq served his government as finance, commerce and planning ministers till 1988. During this period he tried building economic bridges with India but also helped fund the Pakistan bomb. His critics both in Pakistan and India never allowed him to live down the consequences of some of the decisions he took as finance minister, but on his part Haq always liked to remind them that as finance minister he had done more for the human development agenda than any of his predecessors. In 1989 Haq moved to New York where he became a special advisor to the UNDP administrator and set up the Human Development Report Office to produce an annual report. No other report of a UN agency has received as much attention or been as controversial as the HDR. The credit for the report's popularity and 'notoriety' goes almost entirely to Haq.

HAQ AND THE HDR

Few ideas in development policy have, in recent times, captured the imagination of economists, policy-makers, political activists and aid agencies as much as the Human Development Reports (HDR), written by a team led by Mahbub ul Haq and published annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).²

Concepts such as the human development index (HDI) and the gender-related HDI, called the GDI, have become as popular in the discourse on development as ideas on the relationship between economic growth and human development. In less than half a decade the HDR has evolved from being merely an annual report published by the UN system into an agenda for action for governments and NGOs and a catalyst for new thinking in development economics.

The HDR has helped focus public and official attention, at the global, national

and local levels, on the 'human' dimension of development policy. "People are the real wealth of a nation", said HDR 1990. "The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives". Said HDR 1996: "Human development is the end – economic growth a means". Equally the HDR has forced all societies to look inward and examine the range of persisting inequalities and inequities – between men and women, between social classes, between ethnic groups and between regions. Said HDR 1996, the last report that Haq was formally associated with, "Widening disparities in economic performance are creating two worlds – ever more polarised. Everywhere, the structure and quality of growth demand more attention – to contribute to human development, poverty reduction and long-term sustainability...for policy-makers everywhere, the focus must be on strengthening the links between economic growth and human development."

Human development was originally defined by HDR '90 as a "process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect." The report drew attention to two aspects of human development, namely: the formation of human *capabilities* – such as improved health, knowledge and skills – and the use people make of their acquired capabilities – for leisure, productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. When a person's capability is enhanced his choices also widen and he is capable of exercising such choice. According to this concept of human development, income is clearly only one option that people would like to have, albeit an important one. But it is not the sum total of their lives. Development must, therefore, be more than just the expansion of income and wealth. Its focus must be people.

Subsequent HDRs have elaborated on this basic definition of human development, in terms of *enlarging choices* and *improving capabilities*, to underscore the role of *good governance* – in the institutions of state and civil society as well as in global and multilateral institutions. Indeed, the HDRs define good governance in terms of the ability of both governments and other institutions of civil society to create the enabling environment within which human development goals can be attained.

Human development does not merely entail increased investment in the social sectors, the assurance of employment or the elimination of poverty. It includes all these and more.

Haq sought the help of Amartya Sen, Meghnad Desai and Sudhir Anand in constructing an index that he will henceforth be remembered by. Measuring 'human development' in terms of longevity, knowledge and living standard, with equal weight being assigned to each. Haq and his associates constructed the human development index (HDI). Longevity is measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge which is reflected in educational attainment is measured by a combination of adult literacy (two-thirds weight) and combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios (one-third weight); and, finally, standard of living is measured by real GDP per capita valued in terms of purchasing power parity.

The HDR has also served to remind us that the discipline of economics has from its inception been concerned with income distribution and not only the processes of production and consumption of goods and services. The HDR has integrated into its various measures of development a distributional dimension, adjusting the indexes for regional, income and gender imbalances. A key message that Haq sought to send through the HDRs was that not only is income an inadequate measure of development but even other measures which value the 'quality' of life can at best be sub-optimal unless they take account of distributional inequalities.

Haq was always anxious that the HDRs also convey a message of hope. Challenging pessimistic perspectives on failures of growth and development and defeatist development models which suggested that the developing world was condemned to economic backwardness, the HDRs have shown that north-south gaps have been bridged in terms of human development indicators like health and education. Developing countries have in 30 years achieved progress in human development that took industrial countries more than 100 years. In HDR '96 Haq reminded us that "living standards for hundreds of millions have risen. Basic education and literacy have expanded. Access to safe water and sanitation has greatly increased. And the gender gap in basic human capabilities has narrowed considerably, even though significant gaps in opportunities remain."

Haq was deeply impressed by the growth experience of the east Asian economies. He would often recall the story of how in

the late 1950s, he and other Indian and Pakistani economists trained South Korean economists in the intricacies of perspective planning and the writing of five-year plans, but by the 1980s South Korea was holding up examples in development for south Asia to learn from. The more than 7 per cent average annual per capita income growth rate of east Asia in the 1970s and 1980s is the most sustained and widespread development miracle of the 20th century, perhaps all history, and Haq worried that south Asia had not fully imbibed the lessons of this miracle.

Haq also worried about the downside of the post-war growth experience. Income inequalities have widened and gender disparities persist. As HDR '92 showed the richest 20 per cent of the world's people are at least 150 times richer than the poorest 20 per cent and global disparity has doubled over the last 30 years. The overall gap between the top 20 per cent of the global population and the bottom 20 per cent has gone up from a ratio of 30:1 in 1960 to 60:1 in 1991 and has further gone up to 78:1 in 1994. The poorest 20 per cent of the world's population receives only 0.2 per cent global commercial bank lending, 1.3 per cent of global investment, 1 per cent of global trade and a mere 1.1 per cent of global income. Rich and poor countries compete in the global marketplace as unequal partners. If developing countries are to compete on a more equal footing, they will require massive investments in human capital and technological development.

GENDER DIMENSION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Haq was a superb wordsmith and a journalist's delight. Launching the 1995 HDR, on the eve of the Beijing Women's Conference, Haq gave the media a sound-byte it lapped up: "human development, if not engendered, is endangered". Haq offered a comprehensive review of gender bias in development, showing that in no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men. While every country has made progress in developing women's capabilities, women and men still live in an unequal world. HDR '95 introduced two new measures of gender inequality, GDI (gender-related HDI) and GEM (gender empowerment measure).

Analysis of GDI data shows that gender equality does not depend on the income level of a society, with gender inequality prevalent in both developed and developing countries. Equally, it was found, there is no correlation between improvement in gender equality and level of national

income. Ironically, while in most industrial countries, gender inequality has been substantially reduced in education, health and nutrition standards, a gender gap persists in access to economic and political opportunities. The GEM data show that apart from the Nordic countries, where women's representation in parliament is high, in most other countries not more than 10 per cent of parliamentary seats and 6 per cent ministerial positions have gone to women. Women account for only up to 40 per cent of technical and professional jobs and a mere 10 per cent of administrative and managerial positions, even though 46 per cent of the female population has access to primary, secondary and tertiary education. The higher up one goes in the pyramid of economic and political power the greater is the gender gap.

The most damning statistic on gender inequality is the demographic profile of nations. The natural demographic sex ratio favours females with an average of 106 females to 100 males in most societies. For sub-Saharan Africa this ratio comes down to 102:100 and in China, south and west Asia this ratio is 94:100. Economist Amartya Sen has argued that if this ratio is compared with what should have prevailed, as the natural ratio, then it is clear that in Asia (China, south Asia, south-east Asia and west Asia) and north Africa there are over 100 million 'missing women'. The gender bias against females manifests itself in female foeticide, infanticide, nutritional deprivation of the girl child, higher female illiteracy, unequal access to economic, social and political opportunities and the like. Together, these result in effectively curtailing the *choices and capabilities* of women.

All this is not to deny that the gender gap has narrowed in all countries, even if at different rates and women have made considerable progress in a short time in building human capabilities and widening their choices through improved access to health care and education. However, the uncovered distance is still considerable. HDR '95 also analysed women's work and suggested new ways of valuing it, whether it is performed at home or outside the home. Extensive research was undertaken to estimate the time spent by women and men in market and non-market activities. The study, covering both industrial and developing countries, enabled the valuation of household and other unpaid work, performed mostly by women.

A review of the 31 countries in the sample shows that women work longer hours than men in nearly every country. Of the total burden of work, women carry

on average 53 per cent in developing countries and 51 per cent in industrial countries. In industrial countries, while men spend two-thirds of their work time in paid activity (as defined by national accounts statistics) and a third in unpaid work, for women the ratio is reversed. In developing countries, more than three-fourths of men's work is in paid activity. To quote HDR '95: "Men receive the lion's share of income and recognition for their economic contribution – while most of women's work remains unpaid, unrecognised and undervalued".

The value of 'unpaid' work which is not recorded by official national accounts statistics is estimated to be as high as almost half of gross domestic product. If more human activities were seen as market transactions at the prevailing wages, they would yield a large monetary evaluation of national income. A rough order of magnitude comes to a staggering \$ 16 trillion – or about 70 per cent more than the officially estimated \$ 23 trillion of global output. Says HDR '95, "The monetisation of the non-market work of women is more than a question of justice. It concerns the economic status of women in society. If women's unpaid work were properly valued, it is quite possible that women would emerge in most societies as the main breadwinners – or at least equal breadwinners – since they put in more hours of work than men."

GLOBAL COMPACT FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Haq believed that the agenda of human development will have to be implemented both at the national as well as the global level. Policies that seek to reduce inequality within nations must be matched by efforts at reducing them between nations. Towards this end the HDRs have proposed several initiatives, but Haq never tired of reminding the developed industrial economies that they had failed to honour their commitment to the UN to devote a mere 0.7 per cent of their GNP to aid.

Going beyond the specific issues of ODA and debt rescheduling, Haq used HDR '92 to consider in some detail the inequities in the global economic order and called for a reform of international institutions aimed at addressing the problem of global inequality. The HDRs have consistently spoken in favour of a reform and strengthening of the UN system. Apart from recommending the strengthening of the UN's peace-keeping operations, the HDRs have suggested creation of a 22-member UN Development Security Council, with 11 permanent members and 11 rotating

members. The council would arrive at a political consensus on development policy, to be implemented by the appropriate agencies. It would consider all major global issues, including poverty eradication, human development, food security, trade negotiations, commodity prices, debt, development assistance, drug trafficking, refugees and the management of the global commons. Such global institutional reform should also envelop existing multilateral institutions like the World Bank, IMF, GATT/WTO, UNDP, UNEP and so on, to bring all of them on board a common human development agenda that would focus primarily on strengthening the capabilities of global institutions and enable them to make global markets more competitive and open.

HDR '94 proposed a new design for development co-operation which, apart from reiterating the role of ODA, suggested the creation of global safety nets and a new framework of global governance. The framework of development co-operation will have to be altered to link foreign assistance to commonly agreed policy objectives – particularly poverty reduction strategies, productive employment opportunities and the goals of sustainable human development. It would require apportioning a certain share of ODA for human development, broadening the concept of development co-operation to also include trade, investment, technology and labour flows. An important proposal of HDR '94, made in the context of the UN Social Summit's search for additional funding for human development, was global taxation. HDR '94 supported the proposal of Nobel Prize-winning economist, James Tobin, to impose a levy on international currency transactions. A mere 0.5 per cent levy on such transactions, it was estimated, would yield an annual revenue of US \$ 1.5 trillion. This is more than adequate to finance the entire global human development agenda.

HUMAN SECURITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The 1990s, a period in which the Human Development Reports have taken shape, began with the end of the cold war. From the very first report, the HDRs have greatly emphasised the immense potential of funding the global human development agenda by capturing the 'peace dividend' that the end of the cold war was expected to create. Equally, the HDRs have urged other countries which have high defence budgets to consider diverting resources from military uses to peaceful purposes.

HDR '94 challenged the traditional notion of 'security' stating, "The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people... For most people, a feeling of insecurity arises from worries about daily life than from the read of a cataclysmic world event. Will they and their families have enough to eat? Will they lose their jobs?..."

Human security said HDR '94, "is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity". It defined human security as safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression; and, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. "Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development".

Ironically, both developed and developing countries spend far too much money on military security, diverting precious resources away from human development concerns and thereby have deepened the crisis of human security rather than resolved it. The human development paradigm views excessive military expenditure as a drain on national and global resources which could otherwise have been spent on human priority concerns and helped ensure human security worldwide. In 1980, Iraq, Somalia and Nicaragua had the highest ratios of military to social spending. By the 1990s, these countries were beginning to disintegrate. By contrast, Costa Rica invested one-third of its national income in the education, health and nutrition of its people and nothing in the army, which had been abolished in 1948. Costa Rica's human development profile is understandably superior to that of the other three, and of most other developing economies.

HDR '94 suggested a 3 per cent annual reduction in global military spending, with 20 per cent of the savings by rich nations and 10 per cent of those by poor nations earmarked for global human security. Equally the value of greater transparency in military spending and arms purchases, on the part of all governments and companies, has been repeatedly stressed.

TRENDS IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Haq did not want the HDR to be only a message of hope but also saw it as an early warning system. The analysis of inter-temporal and inter-regional trends shows significant improvement in human development indicators across all

countries. It also shows wide disparities in levels of human development between nations and within countries.

While Nordic countries come out on top, with the best human development indicators, sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia find themselves at the bottom of the heap. The countries which have experienced significant improvement in human development indicators within a lifetime include the 'miracle' economies of east Asia, including Malaysia, Thailand and China, and some countries in the west Asia like Tunisia, Turkey, Syria and Iran. The two countries which moved up from 'low' human development status to 'high' human development status between 1960 and 1992 were the Republic of Korea and Portugal, with Malaysia and Thailand closely behind them (HDR '94). Other high performers include Botswana and Costa Rica.

Between 1960 and 1993, the overall HDI for the developing countries increased from 0.260 to 0.563, and even the least developed countries made a clear progress, registering an average HDI value of 0.331 in 1992. HDR '96 reported an average HDI value of 0.379 for sub-Saharan Africa, 0.444 for south Asia, 0.633 for Arab states and east Asia (including China and 0.877 excluding China), 0.646 for south-east Asia and Pacific, 0.824 for Latin America and the Caribbean, 0.773 for eastern Europe and CIS and 0.909 for industrial economies. The world average was 0.746 for HDI and 0.600 for GDI.

The developing countries have in 30 years achieved progress in human development that took industrial countries more than 100 years. Living standards for hundreds of millions have risen. Basic education and literacy have spread significantly, along with mass communication. Mortality rates for infants, children and women have fallen. Access to safe water and sanitation has greatly increased. And the gender gap in basic human capabilities has narrowed considerably, even though significant gaps in opportunities remain.

But, as HDR '96 observed, the record of human development over the past 30 years is a mixed picture of unprecedented human progress and unspeakable human misery – of human advances on several fronts and retreats on several others. HDR '96 has prepared regional balance sheets of progress on human development:

Life expectancy: The analysis shows that between 1960 and 1993, life expectancy in developing countries increased by more than a third, from 46 to 62 years and 30 developing countries now have life expectancies of 70 years or more. Much

of the progress in life expectancy reflects improvement in the longevity of women. Between 1970 and 1990 women's life expectancy increased by nine years, 20 per cent more than the increase for men.

However, in eastern Europe and the CIS countries one of the most striking symptoms of social and economic upheaval is a fall in life expectancy. In industrial countries life expectancy has continued to increase, with an average of above 75 years. While rising life expectancy is a major human development achievement, it also brings with it two attendant problems of financing the health care of the aged and generating enough revenue from the working population to finance the social security of the elderly.

Health: Health standards have also improved in developing countries, though the unfinished agenda remains enormous. Progress has been made in under-five mortality, which in developing countries fell from 243 deaths per thousand live births to less than 100 during 1960-94, though in sub-Saharan Africa the rate is still 174. Broader access to health services, safe water and sanitation and the mobilisation of private services, such as for immunisation, have made the difference. Public spending on health in developing countries increased from a mere 0.9 per cent of GDP in 1960 to 2 per cent of GDP in 1993.

Alongside such progress there has been much deprivation – both across social and income groups and between countries. Deprivation in health is on the rise in eastern Europe and the CIS countries and limited progress has been made in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. The worst affected remain young children and women. HIV/AIDS has become one of the world's leading public health problems, along with persistent diseases like tuberculosis and malaria.

Educational attainment: Investment in social services in developing countries shows up in higher literacy rates and greater numbers of children enrolled in school. Between 1960 and 1993, the literacy rate in the 15 years and above age group in developing countries increased from 43 per cent to 61 per cent. Latin America has an average rate of 86 per cent, while sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia have 55 per cent and 49 per cent respectively.

School enrolment rates have also improved, with the net enrolment rate in developing countries going up during 1960-91 from 48 per cent to 77 per cent at the primary level and from 35 per cent to 47 per cent at the secondary level. In keeping with trends in other social sectors,

there has been a slippage on the educational front also in eastern Europe and the CIS countries. In the 1990s, primary and secondary enrolment rates fell by 4 per cent-6 per cent in Russia and Bulgaria. While enrolment rates have been high in industrial countries, some of them worry about declining standards and reduced numbers in applied and natural sciences.

Admittedly, there are several shortcomings with any shorthand measure of development and the HDI has received its share of criticism. HDR '95 in particular, and other HDRs have addressed each of these criticisms. The criticism has ranged from dissatisfaction with the choice of variables and the paucity of data to disagreement with the weights allotted to each variable and the measurement of income (see chapter 6, HDR '95). Some commentators wrongly charged the HDR with promoting an 'anti-growth' bias in development policy while others worry about the non-inclusion of political and environmental criteria in the evaluation of human development.

However, as economist Paul Streeten, Haq's academic mentor, observes in a foreword to Haq's book: "Such indexes are useful in focusing attention and simplifying problems. They are eye-catching. They have considerable political appeal. They have a stronger impact on the mind and draw public attention more powerfully than a long list of indicators combined with a qualitative discussion. The strongest argument in their favour is that they show up the inadequacies of other indexes, such as GNP, contributing to an intellectual muscle therapy that helps us to avoid analytical cramps. They can serve as mental finger exercises. They redirect our attention from one set of items to others – in the case of the HDI, to the social sectors: nutrition, education and health. But again, it should be remembered that human development is a much richer concept than can be caught in any index, whether GNP, the HDI or any other."³

DISAGGREGATING THE HDI

No other indicator of development has attracted as much public attention in recent years as the HDI. Not surprisingly, the HDI has been critically analysed, both conceptually and empirically, and its creators have refined the index on both counts. The HDI published in the 1996 report is a more evolved index than the original series published in the 1990 report. There have been definitional changes, for instance the statistical indicators of all three components of HDI, namely, longevity, knowledge and income, have

been refined and expanded. Further, the HDI has been disaggregated to capture income, regional and other disparities.

HDR '90 recognised that any average measure conceals wide differentials and it underscored the value of disaggregated HDI. Subsequent HDRs have deconstructed the HDI to reveal the impact of income, gender and other inequalities. Indeed, the disaggregated HDI has become an even more powerful tool of policy advocacy, helping to focus attention on distributional inequalities in growth and development and guide public policy on provisioning of health, education and other social and economic infrastructural services. Beginning with HDR '93, which dramatically focused attention on the backwardness of the state of Chiapas in Mexico – a year ahead of the political upheaval there – the disaggregation of the HDI has increased the political relevance of the HDR even more.

Disaggregating the HDI has also encouraged countries where relevant data is unavailable at such levels of disaggregation to collect and publish the necessary information. The overall HDI reflects national income, but in many countries, particularly in the developing world, the distribution is badly skewed. This makes it important to discount the income component of the HDI to reflect maldistribution of income.

To account for the income disparity factor, the share of income of the bottom 20 per cent of the population is divided by the share of the top 20 per cent. Multiplying this ratio by the country's overall HDI gives the income-distribution adjusted HDI. HDR '94 computed this indicator for 55 countries. Since no country has a perfect income distribution, adjusting the HDI for income distribution reduces the HDI score for all. Some countries improve their HDI ranking relative to others, having done better in distributing incomes. Thus, while the HDI rank of Brazil slips by seven places because of sharp inequalities, with the ratio between the income share of the bottom 20 per cent of the population and that of the top 20 per cent being 1:32, that of China improves by six places. Among industrial countries, Belgium improves its ranking by nine places while Australia slips by eight.

These adjustments in overall HDI are particularly useful for international comparisons of disparities among countries. For comparisons within countries, HDR '94 felt a more useful approach would be to calculate separate HDIs for different groups – by region, gender, race and so on. Various HDRs have reported specific country studies and the UNDP has supported

research and data collection in UN member countries to enable more countries to construct disaggregated HDI at the sub-national level. In India, region-specific HDIs have been used to encourage backward regions to draw policy lessons from the developed ones in such areas as investing in the girl child, women's education and health and so on. Haq's work is now being carried forward by many state governments in India.

Having set the HDR in motion and having made sure that economists, policy-makers and the media took adequate notice of the reports' contents, Haq returned home to set up the Human Development Centre in Islamabad. There he was busy developing new concepts, like the Human Deprivation Measure (HDM), and refining old ones. His wife and intellectual companion, Khadija (Bani) Haq had already started taking charge of the work at HDC. Haq was preparing for a larger political role in south Asia. Haq worried that south Asia

was slipping behind sub-Saharan Africa in terms of human development indicators. Haq hoped to use the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a platform for a regional agenda for peace and development. Death came prematurely to a man still full of action and an unfinished agenda.

[This tribute draws liberally on the author's monograph 'Human Development Report: A Synthesis' written for the Human Development Report Office, UNDP, New York, June 1997.]

Notes

- 1 Mahbub ul Haq, *Reflections on Human Development*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- 2 The summary of various HDRs offered here is extracted from Sanjaya Baru, 'Human Development Reports: A Synthesis', a monograph prepared for the Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme, New York, June 1997 (unpublished).
- 3 Paul Streeten in Foreword to Haq (1995), pp xi-xii.

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