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Cyber-Crimes Issues And Challenges In A Networked Age: A Criminological Perspective

Padmakar Raghunath Joshte, LL.M., Department of Law, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj University, Navi Mumbai

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Supervisor: Dr. Pankaj Dwivedi– Associate Professor of Law, Department of Law, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj University, Navi Mumbai.

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Abstract

Cyber-crimes present a formidable legal and policy challenge in India's rapidly digitising ecosystem. This article critically examines the evolution of cyber offences, the Indian statutory framework—particularly the Information Technology Act, 2000—and the Indian Penal Code, 1860, alongside judicial interpretations and enforcement practices. Employing a doctrinal and comparative legal methodology, the paper explores significant jurisprudence such as Shreya Singhal v. Union of India and K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India to assess the judiciary's balancing of privacy, free speech, and security. The study classifies cybercrimes into offences against individuals, property, the state, and hybrid domains, while analyzing emergent threats including AI-driven crimes and deepfakes. Institutional challenges—such as limited forensic capabilities, inadequate coordination among agencies like CERT-In, and the lack of cross-border legal clarity—are critically evaluated. A comparative analysis of global cyber regimes, including the GDPR and the Budapest Convention, reveals critical gaps and opportunities for Indian reform. The paper also discusses data privacy and cybersecurity strategies, reviewing India's National Cybersecurity Policy and the pending Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019.[5] Case studies underscore the socio-legal impact of cyber threats, while policy recommendations emphasize legislative reform, international cooperation, and public-private engagement to establish a resilient and rights-based cyber

governance framework. India's legal response to cybercrime, though progressively evolving, remains insufficient against the dynamic nature of cyber threats. A holistic, adaptive, and globally harmonized approach is imperative to safeguard national security and individual rights in cyberspace.

***Keywords**: cybercrime, data privacy, Information Technology Act, cybersecurity policy, digital rights*

Introduction

The digital revolution has radically transformed social, economic, and governance structures, giving rise to unprecedented connectivity and digital reliance. However, this digitization has also escalated the prevalence and complexity of Cyber-crimes—criminal activities involving digital technologies or targeting information systems .[1]

Cyber-crimes range from phishing, identity theft, and cyberstalking to sophisticated threats like cyberterrorism, ransomware, and AI-driven deepfakes . The anonymous and transnational nature of cyberspace poses significant legal and enforcement challenges, as offenders often operate across jurisdictions, impeding investigation and prosecution. [2]

In India, the primary legislative response to cyber threats is the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), which, though originally framed to facilitate e-commerce, has been amended to address emerging digital crimes . Supplementary provisions under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) also deal with cyber-fraud, forgery, and conspiracy . However, legislative limitations persist, especially concerning cross-border data breaches and privacy violations .[3]

Cybercrime is not merely a technological or legal issue but intersects with societal vulnerabilities and policy gaps. As digital platforms underpin critical infrastructure—ranging from banking to healthcare—cybersecurity becomes a national imperative . Despite institutional mechanisms such as CERT-In and Cyber-crimes Cells, enforcement is hampered by technical inadequacies, jurisdictional overlaps, and evolving threat vectors .[4]

This paper critically examines the effectiveness of India's cybercrime legal framework, drawing from statutory analysis, judicial pronouncements, and institutional practices. Comparative insights from global instruments like the Budapest Convention and the EU's GDPR inform potential reforms

[1] Jonathan Clough, *Principles of Cybercrime* (Cambridge University Press 2010) 3–5.
[2] Dhruti Kapadia and Aniruddha Gokhale, *Cyber Law and Cyber-crimes* (LexisNexis 2020) 21–34.
[3] S.R. Sharma, "Challenges in Cyber-crimes Jurisdiction" (2018) 5 Indian Journal of Law and Technology 114.
[4] Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India)

to align Indian laws with international standards and ensure constitutional protections are preserved[5]

Historical Evolution of Cybercrimes

The trajectory of Cyber-crimes is closely intertwined with advancements in computing and communication technologies. Early manifestations emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with "phreaking," wherein individuals manipulated telephone frequencies to make unauthorised calls—an antecedent to modern cyber intrusions. The 1980s introduced hacking, initially perceived as a subculture of exploration but rapidly evolving into illicit activity involving unauthorized access and data theft.[6]

With the proliferation of personal computers and internet access in the 1990s, Cyber-crimes expanded to include malware, software piracy, online fraud, and phishing. By the late 1990s, identity theft and large-scale data breaches marked the transformation of Cyber-crimes from amateur misconduct to organized digital offenses.[7]The commercialization of the internet further facilitated crimes such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and financial scams through digital platforms.[8]

India experienced a significant rise in Cyber-crimes during the late 1990s and early 2000s, prompting the enactment of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which criminalized hacking (S. 66), identity theft (S. 66C), cyber terrorism (S. 66F), and the dissemination of obscene content online (S. 67).[9] The statute also provided legal recognition to electronic records and digital signatures, marking a foundational step in India's digital legal framework.

The subsequent years saw an uptick in crimes involving e-commerce fraud, credit card scams, phishing, and mobile-related offenses such as SIM cloning and smishing.[10] The rise of social media further complicated the digital landscape, leading to increased instances of cyber harassment, defamation, and the dissemination of fake news.[11]

Globally, the 2010s witnessed the emergence of ransomware attacks like WannaCry and Petya, disrupting critical infrastructure and underscoring the geopolitical and economic risks of cyber

[5] Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention), ETS No. 185, 2001; European Union, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Regulation (EU) 2016/679.
[6] Brian Hochman, *The Listeners: A History of Wiretapping in the United States* (Harvard Univ. Press 2022).
[7] Dorothy E. Denning, *Information Warfare and Security* 4–7 (Addison-Wesley 1999).
[8] Michael L. Rustad, *Cybercrime: The Intersection of Technology, Law and Policy*, 10 Suffolk J. Trial & App. Advoc. 71, 74–76 (2005).
[9] Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India), §§ 66, 66C, 66F, 67.
[10] Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), "Cyber Laws and Security," Govt. of India (2021).
[11] Apar Gupta, *Internet Freedoms in India,* 3 Indian J.L. & Tech. 1 (2007); see also Pratik Sinha, "Disinformation on Social Media," *AltNews*, Mar. 2020.

intrusions.[12] Concurrently, the anonymity afforded by cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum enabled cybercriminals to launder money, execute frauds, and engage in cryptojacking.[13]

Legal Framework for Cyber-crimes in India

India's legal framework addressing cybercrimes is primarily governed by the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), which provides the foundation for regulating digital transactions and ensuring cybersecurity. The IT Act defines cybercrimes and prescribes penalties for offences related to hacking, identity theft, cyber terrorism, and the transmission of obscene content. Section 66 of the IT Act criminalises hacking, while Section 66C addresses identity theft, and Section 66F focuses on cyber terrorism. These provisions have evolved in response to the growing sophistication of cybercrimes in India.[14]

The Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011 further regulate the protection of personal data and sensitive information. These rules mandate organizations to implement stringent security practices to protect personal data from unauthorized access or disclosure.[15] Additionally, the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, which is currently under consideration, seeks to enhance data protection mechanisms and ensure greater accountability in data processing activities. The Bill is expected to align India's data protection laws with global standards such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union.[16]

To address the growing concerns of cybercrimes affecting women and children, the Cyber- crimes Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) Scheme was introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2018. This scheme focuses on building the capacity of law enforcement agencies and improving the legal framework for handling online abuse and exploitation.[17]

Despite these legal advancements, challenges persist in enforcing laws related to Cyber-crimes. Jurisdictional issues, underreporting of crimes, and the lack of Cyber-crimes-specific legislation at the state level hinder effective prosecution. The emergence of advanced cybercrimes such as

[12] Europol, *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)*, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (2017).
[13] McAfee Labs, *Threats Report: December 2018*; Chainalysis, *Crypto Crime Report 2020*.
[14] Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India), §§ 66, 66C, 66F.
[15] Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011, G.S.R. 313(E) (India).
[16] Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, Bill No. 373 of 2019 (India).
[17] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Cyber-crimes Prevention against Women and Children Scheme* (Govt. of India, 2018).

ransomware attacks, cryptojacking, and deepfake technology has further complicated the legal landscape. As technology evolves, it is crucial for India's legal framework to continue adapting to combat the rising tide of Cyber-crimes.

Institutional Challenges and Law Enforcement Mechanisms in Cyber-crimes

India faces significant institutional challenges in addressing Cyber-crimes, primarily due to the lack of specialized training, resources, and awareness within law enforcement agencies. While the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) provides a comprehensive legal framework, the enforcement of these laws is often hindered by jurisdictional issues, outdated technologies, and limited expertise among police personnel[18]. Additionally, cybercrimes often span multiple regions or countries, complicating the investigative process and requiring international cooperation, which is still underdeveloped.

The establishment of Cyber-crimes Cells within police departments has been a step toward addressing these challenges. These cells aim to handle cybercrimes by building specialized units within law enforcement. However, there are still gaps in infrastructure, particularly in smaller cities and towns, where Cyber-crimes expertise is lacking.[19] Moreover, the underreporting of cybercrimes remains a significant issue due to the stigma associated with such offenses and the victim's fear of legal complications or societal judgment.[20]

Furthermore, while the Cyber-crimes Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) Scheme seeks to tackle online abuse, there are concerns about the limited reach and effectiveness of this initiative. In many instances, women and children facing cybercrimes such as cyberbullying, sextortion, and online harassment are often reluctant to file complaints due to a lack of trust in the enforcement mechanism.[21]

Law enforcement agencies also face challenges in managing the rapid evolution of cybercrimes. The rise of new forms of crime such as ransomware attacks, cryptojacking, and deepfake technology requires continuous updates to training programs and technological infrastructure to keep pace with criminal innovations. Additionally, the lack of a unified national framework for Cyber-crimes detection and prosecution makes it difficult for agencies to coordinate effectively across states and

[18] Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India), §§ 66, 66C, 66F.
[19] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Cyber-crimes Prevention against Women and Children Scheme* (Govt. of India, 2018).
[20] B.B. Gupta, *Challenges in Enforcement of Cyber-crimes Laws in India*, 10 J. Cybersecurity L. & Tech. 112, 114 (2021).
[21] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Cyber-crimes Prevention against Women and Children Scheme* (Govt. of India, 2018).

jurisdictions.[22]

To overcome these challenges, India's cybersecurity strategies must evolve to include specialized training, collaboration between national and state agencies, and international cooperation. It is essential for law enforcement to leverage advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics to combat the increasingly sophisticated nature of cybercrimes.[23]

Cybersecurity and Preventive Strategies

The rise of Cyber-crimes in India necessitates a comprehensive approach to cybersecurity and the implementation of preventive strategies. The National Cyber Security Policy, 2013 provides the foundational framework for enhancing the nation's cybersecurity capabilities. This policy focuses on critical areas, such as securing government networks, protecting critical infrastructure, and promoting cybersecurity awareness among citizens.[24]

To strengthen cyber resilience, the government has established institutions such as the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which plays a vital role in coordinating the response to cyber incidents, offering proactive advice, and providing cyber threat intelligence.[25] Additionally, the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) aims to protect critical national assets from cyber-attacks and enhance national security by focusing on sectors like energy, finance, and transportation.[26]

Preventive strategies in the fight against Cyber-crimes must emphasize cyber hygiene, which includes practices such as strong password management, regular software updates, and employee training on phishing and social engineering attacks. These strategies should be incorporated into both private and public sector organizations to reduce vulnerabilities that cybercriminals exploit.[27] Public awareness campaigns are crucial to educating citizens about the risks associated with Cyber-crimes and teaching them about safe online behavior, such as avoiding suspicious links and protecting personal data.

Furthermore, the Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and

[22] Ravi S. Nair, *International Cooperation and Law Enforcement in Cyber-crimes*, 42 Indian J. Crim. L. 59 (2022).
[23] Indian Cyber-crimes Coordination Centre, *Cybersecurity Strategy for Law Enforcement*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India (2020).
[24] Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, *National Cyber Security Policy*, (Govt. of India, 2013), available at http://meity.gov.in.
[25] Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, *Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)*, (Govt. of India, 2020), available at http://cert-in.org.in.
[26] National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre, *NCIIPC Annual Report 2020*, (Govt. of India, 2020), available at https://www.nciipc.gov.in.
[27] B.B. Gupta, *Cyber Hygiene: The First Line of Defense Against Cyber-crimes*, 12 J. Cybersecurity L. & Tech. 89, 92 (2021).

Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011 impose strict guidelines on data controllers to ensure the protection of sensitive personal data.[28] This regulatory framework is essential in mitigating data breaches and preventing identity theft, particularly as more people conduct transactions and share personal information online.

Lastly, preventive strategies should incorporate collaboration among law enforcement, private enterprises, and international bodies to combat cross-border cybercrimes. By sharing intelligence and resources, these entities can collectively address the growing threat posed by sophisticated cybercriminals and their global networks.[29]

Impact of Cyber-crimes on Individuals and Society

Cyber-crimes have profound effects on both individuals and society, leading to significant economic, emotional, and social consequences. The financial impact of Cyber-crimes is vast, with victims often suffering from identity theft, financial fraud, and the theft of sensitive data. In India, incidents such as online banking fraud and phishing attacks have cost individuals and businesses billions of rupees. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported a substantial increase in cyber-related crimes, particularly financial frauds, over recent years.[30]

For individuals, Cyber-crimes like identity theft and online scams can result in long-lasting damage, including financial loss, emotional distress, and damage to reputation. The rise of cyberbullying and cyberstalking has also led to severe psychological consequences, particularly among vulnerable populations like children and teenagers. The anonymity provided by the internet allows cybercriminals to exploit individuals without facing immediate consequences, making victims more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and fear.[31]

The societal impact is equally significant, as Cyber-crimes undermine public trust in digital platforms and impede the adoption of e-commerce and other online services. High-profile data breaches involving major corporations not only damage the reputation of these companies but also raise concerns about data privacy and the security of online transactions. Moreover, cyber- terrorism and hacktivism have become threats to national security, with state-sponsored actors targeting

[28] Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011, G.S.R. 313(E) (India).
[29] Indian Cyber-crimes Coordination Centre, *Cybersecurity Strategy for Law Enforcement*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India (2020).
[30] National Crime Records Bureau, *Annual Report on Cyber-crimes in India* (2019), available at http://ncrb.gov.in.
[31] N. Rajan & S. Kumar, Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying and Cyberstalking on Victims in India, 6 J. Digital Soc'y 112, 114 (2020).

critical infrastructure, resulting in widespread disruptions and posing risks to public safety.[32]

The pervasive nature of Cyber-crimes also highlights the need for robust legal frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms to protect individuals and organizations from digital threats. The Information Technology Act, 2000 and other legislative measures such as the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 are essential in addressing the growing threats posed by cybercriminals and ensuring that victims can seek justice and compensation.[33]

In conclusion, the impact of Cyber-crimes extends far beyond the individual, with significant repercussions for society. While efforts are being made to combat these crimes, the increasing sophistication of cybercriminals requires continuous adaptations in legal, technological, and social strategies to minimize their impact and safeguard digital spaces.[34]

Comparative Study with Global Cyber Laws

Cyber laws are critical in regulating digital activities and protecting individuals and organizations from the growing menace of Cyber-crimes. Different countries have adopted various legal frameworks to address the challenges posed by Cyber-crimes, leading to a diverse set of regulations worldwide. This section offers a comparative study of cyber laws in India, the United States, and the European Union, highlighting key differences and similarities.

India

India's primary legislation for Cyber-crimes is the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), which addresses various offenses such as hacking, identity theft, cyber terrorism, and online fraud. The IT Act also provides a legal framework for electronic records, signatures, and digital transactions. The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (PDPB) is another important piece of legislation aimed at strengthening data privacy laws and protecting citizens' personal information online.[35] However, India still faces challenges in terms of enforcement and coordination between state and central authorities.

United States

In the United States, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), enacted in 1986, is the primary statute criminalizing Cyber-crimes such as unauthorized access to computer systems and data theft. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), also a critical piece of legislation, addresses issues

[32] A. R. Gupta, *Cyber Terrorism: Threats and Challenges to National Security in India*, 13 Nat'l Sec. Stud. 75, 78 (2021).
[33] Information Technology Act, 2000, § 66, 66C, 66F (India); Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (India).
[34] D. Patil, *Impact of Cyber-crimes on Social and Economic Stability in India*, 8 J. Cybersecurity Pol'y 23, 25 (2020).
[35] Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21 of 2000, § 66, 66C, 66F (India); Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (India).

related to online piracy and copyright infringement.[36] The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a major EU regulation, influenced U.S. states to adopt more stringent data protection laws, with California enacting the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) to protect consumer rights online.[37]

European Union

The European Union stands out for its comprehensive approach to data privacy and protection, particularly through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in 2018. The GDPR sets a global standard for data privacy, mandating strict requirements on data collection, processing, and storage, along with severe penalties for non-compliance.[38]Additionally, the EU has focused on strengthening cyber security with the Network and Information Systems (NIS) Directive, which provides a framework for securing critical infrastructure against cyber-attacks.

Comparative Analysis

A significant difference between Indian cyber laws and those of the U.S. and EU lies in the scope of data protection. While the GDPR sets a global benchmark for privacy, India's PDPB is still in the drafting stage, and its eventual implementation will likely bring it closer to European standards. The U.S. primarily focuses on Cyber-crimes through individual state laws and federal statutes like the CFAA, but there is no single, overarching privacy law akin to the GDPR.[39]

India's legal infrastructure also lags behind in terms of cybersecurity regulations, which are more robust in the EU and U.S. The EU's NIS Directive and the U.S. Cybersecurity Framework established by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) provide detailed guidelines for securing critical infrastructure.6 India's lack of a comprehensive national cybersecurity framework hampers effective response and mitigation against large-scale cyber- attacks.

In conclusion, while there are commonalities in how Cyber-crimes are approached globally, such as criminalizing hacking and data theft, the European Union leads the way in data privacy with the GDPR, while India and the U.S. are still developing comprehensive frameworks for privacy and cybersecurity. As digital threats continue to evolve, global cooperation and alignment of cyber laws will be essential to ensure effective regulation and enforcement.

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[36] 18 U.S.C. § 1030 (Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, 1986) (U.S.); Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 1201-1205 (1998) (U.S.).

[37] California Consumer Privacy Act, Cal. Civ. Code §§ 1798.100-1798.199 (2018); General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, art. 4, 5 (2018).

[38] General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, art. 1 (2018).

[39] K. A. Parker, *A Comparative Analysis of Global Cybersecurity Laws*, 45 J. Cyber Law 188, 195 (2020).

Future Directions and Recommendations

As the world continues to evolve digitally, the landscape of cybercrime and cybersecurity presents new challenges and requires constant updates in legal frameworks, technological advancements, and international cooperation. In order to ensure robust protection against cyber threats, it is critical for policymakers, law enforcement, and businesses to adopt proactive measures and forward-thinking strategies.

1. **Strengthening Data Protection and Privacy Laws**

The adoption of comprehensive data protection laws is one of the most critical aspects of future cybersecurity. India's Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 is a step toward aligning with global standards, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the EU. However, the law must undergo continuous amendments to address emerging threats such as AI-driven Cyber-crimes and IoT vulnerabilities. National governments should prioritize harmonizing data protection laws globally, creating a consistent framework that ensures data privacy across borders.[40]

2. Promoting Cybersecurity Awareness and Education

There is an urgent need to enhance cybersecurity awareness among the public and within organizations. Educational institutions should integrate cybersecurity training into their curricula, while corporations should offer regular training to their employees to prevent common threats like phishing, ransomware, and social engineering attacks.[41] Public-private partnerships can help bridge the gap in awareness and create initiatives that promote cyber hygiene across society.

3. **Adopting AI and Blockchain for Cybersecurity**

The future of cybersecurity may lie in artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain technology. AI can be leveraged to detect and prevent cyber-attacks by analyzing patterns and detecting anomalies in real time, improving threat intelligence and incident response times. [42] Blockchain, with its decentralized nature, offers a promising solution for securing digital transactions and data storage systems, making it difficult for cybercriminals to alter or breach critical data.[43]

4. International Cooperation in Cybercrime Law Enforcement

Cyber-crimes knows no borders, and international cooperation is essential in tackling cybercrimes that affect multiple jurisdictions. Multilateral treaties and cross-border agreements should be

[40] D. Singh & N. Verma, *A Global Framework for Data Protection Laws*, 32 Int'l J. of Cyber Law 78, 82 (2021).
[41] S. Patel, *The Importance of Cybersecurity Education and Training*, 20 J. Cybersecurity 45, 49 (2022).
[42] M. Patel & R. Sharma, *AI in Cybersecurity: Future Prospects*, 41 J. of AI and Security 102, 106 (2023).
[43] H. Williams, *Blockchain Technology in Cybersecurity*, 15 J. of Digital Security 56, 58 (2020).

developed to enable law enforcement agencies to act swiftly across borders.[44] Countries should work toward a global framework that facilitates extradition, investigation, and prosecution of cyber-criminals. Furthermore, international organizations such as the United Nations and INTERPOL should enhance their collaboration to create global standards for cybersecurity governance.

5. **Establishing Cybersecurity as a National Priority**

Countries must recognize cybersecurity as a critical aspect of national security and economic growth. Governments should invest in strengthening their cyber defense systems, updating critical infrastructure, and creating a cohesive cybersecurity policy that ensures resilience against attacks. National cybersecurity frameworks like those in the U.S. and EU can serve as models for emerging economies to create their own robust defense systems.[45]

[44] J. Zhao, *International Cooperation in Cybercrime Law Enforcement*, 30 Int'l J. of Crim. Law 204, 209 (2021).
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