

FROM DREAMS TO DESTINY

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A Journey Towards Civil Services



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A Farming Family. Resolute Mom.

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MY MOTHER — THE ‘KGF MOM’

A dreamer from a small village who believed her children were destined to excel — and moved the family to Hyderabad to prove it.

“Proper education is the greatest gift a parent can give a child.”

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Born Administrator vs. Clueless Graduate

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THE MYTH

Born with a plan.
A clear line from Class 6
to the Civil Services.

THE REALITY

An engineering student
who had no idea the
UPSC even existed.

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The Familiar Blueprint

Every Telugu engineering graduate knows this script.

01

Land the highest campus placement your college can offer.

02

Prepare for GRE / TOEFL, head to the USA for a Master's.



I CHOSE OPTION ONE

Deloitte — Business Analyst, Life Sciences & Healthcare

Great pay. A brilliant team. Real work-life balance. On paper, everything a young graduate could ask for.

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PART TWO — NOT A CHILDHOOD DREAM

The First Crossroads

Settle or Strive? I chose to shoot for the stars.

337

out of 340 — GRE Score

ADMITS ROLLED IN FROM

Georgia Tech • UMass Amherst • Purdue

“I felt like my life was completely set... or so I thought.”

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PART THREE — THE HIMALAYAN CALLING

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A trek to the Himalayas. A question that would not let go.

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“Thirty years from now, if you come back to these mountains... will you be satisfied with the work you've done?”



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PART THREE — THE HIMALAYAN CALLING

The Honest Inventory

What can I work at for hours without watching the clock?

● **Visual design & storytelling**

● **Filmmaking (True crime)**

● **An investigative, puzzle-solving mind**

● **Hands-on community service**

PART FOUR — TESTING THE WATERS

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Privacy Screens & NCERTs

A corporate cubicle. A privacy screen. Class 6th–10th social studies textbooks, read in secret.

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“The very subjects that felt soporific in school suddenly felt breathtakingly fascinating.”

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PART FIVE — THE MARATHON

Not a Sprint. A Real-Life Game of Snakes & Ladders.



Climb close to the top — and one setback can still send you tumbling to the bottom of the board.

Demystifying the Exam

Pattern & Syllabus — The Three Stages

STAGE 1

Prelims

Objective, elimination round. General Studies & CSAT. Qualifying in nature — clears the field for Mains.

STAGE 2

Mains

Subjective, written answers. This is where your rank is actually decided. 9 papers — 7 of which count for merit.

STAGE 3

Interview/Personality Test

Assess the suitability for a career in public service. Tests mental alertness, logical exposition, balance of judgement, depth of interest, leadership, and integrity.



THE HOLY COMPASS

Do not read a single page of any textbook until you've familiarized the syllabus. The syllabus tells you what to read — Previous Year Questions (PYQs) tell you how to read it. Together, they are your only real compass in this vast ocean.

MINDSET FIRST



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*Before you prepare for any exam,
you have to prepare yourself for that exam.*

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PART SIX — CRACKING THE UPSC CODE

Prelims Mindset

It's You vs. UPSC — Play the Game Smart



Treat Prelims like a game: It's you vs. UPSC. Stay calm, play smart, and focus on the question in front of you.



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Get comfortable being uncomfortable: Uncertainty is part of the game. Learn to decide even when you don't know everything.



Common sense is syllabus too: Knowledge matters, but so does logical thinking and the ability to eliminate options.



Watch the language of the question: A single word can completely change what is actually being asked.



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Derive answers with limited knowledge: You won't know every fact — train yourself to extract the maximum from what you do know.



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Nobody starts perfect: Improvement comes from consistent effort. Keep learning, adapting, and showing up.

Sometimes ignorance is bliss. Half knowledge can be more dangerous than no knowledge — don't be Abhimanyu in the Chakravyuh.

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Prelims in Practice

Applying the strategy to real PYQs, live.

29. Consider the following :

1. Butterflies
2. Fish
3. Frogs

How many of the above have poisonous species among them ?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

66. With reference to coal-based thermal power plants in India, consider the following statements :

1. None of them uses seawater.
2. None of them is set up in water-stressed district.
3. None of them is privately owned.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

16. Consider the following statements :

1. Some mushrooms have medicinal properties.
2. Some mushrooms have psycho-active properties.
3. Some mushrooms have insecticidal properties.
4. Some mushrooms have bioluminescent properties.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

98. Consider the following statements :

1. Other than those made by humans, nanoparticles do not exist in nature.
2. Nanoparticles of some metallic oxides are used in the manufacture of some cosmetics.
3. Nanoparticles of some commercial products which enter the environment are unsafe for humans.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 1 and 2
- (d) 2 and 3

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Choosing Your Optional

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500 marks in Mains — often the line between the merit list and falling short.

GENUINE INTEREST & BACKGROUND

You'll spend 300–400+ hours on this one subject. Without real interest, burnout during revision is a real risk. A Humanities, Engineering, Commerce, or Science background helps — but it isn't mandatory.

OVERLAP WITH GS & ESSAY

PSIR overlaps heavily with GS-2 & Essay. Sociology / Public Ad overlaps GS-1, GS-2, GS-4 & Essay. History / Geography overlaps large chunks of GS-1 directly.

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RESOURCES & MENTORSHIP

High-scoring technical optionals (Engineering, Maths) need accessible guidance, quality test series, and good evaluation. Make sure standard texts, notes, and solved PYQs exist in your medium.

SCORING POTENTIAL VS. PREDICTABILITY

Humanities: predictable resources, strong GS overlap, top scores usually cap near 280–300+. Technical: higher ceiling (320+) if your steps are right, but a steeper curve and minimal GS overlap.

The 4-Step Funnel Strategy

What I followed to choose mine.

01

INITIAL BRAINSTORMING

List subjects based on your academic background or general curiosity. Aim for a broad pool of 5 to 6 optionals.

02

THE NCERT 'TEST DRIVE'

Pick up the basic NCERT textbooks (roughly 100–150 pages each) for your shortlist. Read with an open mind to gauge your organic curiosity, comfort, and comprehension speed.

03

THE SHORTLIST (TOP 2–3)

Eliminate subjects that felt dry, dense, or uninteresting during the NCERT read.

04

FINAL DECISION FILTER

Compare your top 2–3 finalists against the Determinants Matrix — syllabus length, GS overlap, PYQ predictability, and guidance availability — to declare your winner.

Mains Mindset

Mocks Are for Strategy. The Exam Is for Execution.

Use mocks for planning and strategy — the final exam is only for execution. Walk in auto-pilot ready.

Before entering the hall, mentally answer one possible question — kindle your brain into the exam's thinking pattern and time demand.

- **Finish the entire paper**, no matter what — with 2 minutes to spare.

- **Condition your time management** through consistent mock practice.

- **Success is execution:** being able to execute what you already planned.

- **Fix your final strategy** and stick to it in the exam, no matter what.

- **Analyze the syllabus and PYQs** closely before you begin.

- **Ace reading the question:** you should see your answer's structure just by reading it.

- **Attempt every question**, even the ones on which your knowledge is feeble.

- **Don't compartmentalize the syllabus** — cross-link across all the papers.

PART SIX — CRACKING THE UPSC CODE

Mains Answer Checklist

What every high-scoring answer has in common.



Stick to the core demand of the question



Develop a good structure and presentation



Answer all components of the question



Keep readymade intros and conclusions ready



Link current affairs with the static portion before concluding, wherever there's scope



Give as many relevant examples as possible



Fill the given space — don't leave it half used



Short, tight sentences with keywords — not stories



12 points for a 10-marker, 18 for a 15-marker — a mix of specific and generic points



Substantiate each point with data, committee reports, or a reputed organisation's observation

Attempting a GS Paper

Coverage beats perfection, every single time.

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WHAT'S DISASTROUS

14

Excellent Answers

2

Average Questions

4

Questions Left

THE IDEAL

12

Good Answers

6

Average Answers

2

Below-Average Answers

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GS1 Strategy

Maps & Diagrams — Make Them a Habit, Not an Afterthought



Draw immediately after the intro: make maps and diagrams a default habit, not an afterthought.



One map per geography answer: that's the goal — but keep it relevant, don't force it in.



Brainstorm map opportunities: for every PYQ and mock. During revision, think of a map for each topic you study.



Add technical detail, not just outlines: e.g., mark the differing reasons for floods across regions.

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Box it in: enclose every map or diagram with a legend.



Practice regional maps too: they come in handy well beyond geography — Art & Culture needs them too.



Maps aren't just geography: spread of Bhakti culture, regional art forms, temple architecture, famine distribution under British rule all map well.

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GS1 Strategy

Beyond the Map — History, Society & Precision

- **Write from multiple perspectives:** layer in different dimensions, not just one angle.
- **Leave no space empty:** in the booklet — it plays a real psychological role.
- **Integrate geography, environment & DM:** the exam has shifted — questions increasingly blend the three.
- **Add specificity in History:** dates, personalities, and events make an answer credible.
- **Quote sources in Art & Culture:** travellers, kingdoms, and kings.
- **Lean into GS1's certainty:** it rewards thorough practice more predictably than other papers.
- **For Society, add value:** case studies, best examples, Kurukshetra summaries, newspapers.
- **Think local and global:** pull examples and case studies from both contexts.
- **Expand the impact:** show how a social phenomenon affects different stakeholders.

GS2 Strategy

Governance, Polity & International Relations

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- **Maximize points, stay crisp:** write as many points as you can, kept concise.
- **Anchor in case law:** lean on case laws, committees, and constitutional provisions.
- **Open IR answers with relevance:** start by establishing the current relevance of the body or relationship.
- **Use IR's dimensions:** Economic Relations, Energy Relations, Climate Relations, Common Platforms.
- **Sequence matters:** IR questions (9–10, 19–20) are the most scoring — don't leave them for last.

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GS3 Strategy

Economy, Environment, Agriculture & Security

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● **Data is the differentiator:** substantiating every point with data is the key to GS3 marks.

● **Map agriculture, DM & security:** use maps wherever these topics come up.

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● **Address every part of the question:** specifically, not generically.

● **Lean on committees:** extensively, to support your points.

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● **Think the full agriculture chain:** land, seeds, input support, fertiliser, marketing, crop failure, FPI, extension support.

● **Use frameworks for impact questions:** Economy, Social, Governance, Environment.

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● **Security & DM are low-hanging fruit:** maximise your marks here.

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GS4 Strategy

Ethics — Every Line Should Reflect the Syllabus's Values



Build a keyword bank: for every ethics term — definition, one real-life example, one personal example, relevance for officers.



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Map broad case-study themes: from PYQs. Keep examples, anecdotes, and value conflicts ready for each — prefer real-life examples.



Avoid binary thinking: in case studies — not ‘blood transfusion vs. saving the mother’ — take a practical approach.

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Quote legal & constitutional terms: in case studies, use syllabus keywords, and present actionable ideas.



Study toppers' copies closely: understand their approach, then build your own style from the best of what you see.



Every line should reflect ethical values: from the syllabus — consistently, throughout the paper.

Interview Mindset

A rare conversation with career bureaucrats — be yourself.

(d) Other extracurricular activities and interests (Such as hobbies etc.)

| 1. LOGO DESIGNING, POSTER ART, AND VEXILLOLOGY 2. COMMUNITY LAKE RESTORATION 3. STRENGTH TRAINING AND DISTANCE RUNNING



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- **Be honest and humble**, and project the best version of yourself.
- **This is a rare opportunity** to speak with bureaucrats whose combined experience is 5x your age.
- **Convince the board** that you are trustworthy, sincere, and honest.
- **Let your answers feel genuine**, not rehearsed.

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- **Be precise:** 2–3 short sentences, roughly 30–40 words or 30–60 seconds.
- **Speak clearly**, at a measured, unhurried pace.
- **Be yourself.** The panel wants your genuine perspective, not platitudes.
- **It's okay not to know**, as long as you say so with composure.

A confident “I don't know” is infinitely better than a nervous, incorrect guess.

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The harder you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle.

Key to Success

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Success = Being able to execute what you have planned.

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Core Strategy

How to Approach the Material

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PRINCIPLE 1**Breadth > Depth**

You're applying to be a generalist administrator, not a PhD scholar. Know a little about everything rather than everything about one little thing. Spend three months mastering medieval history, and you'll lose the larger war.

PRINCIPLE 2**Concepts > Rote Facts**

The days of direct, fact-based trivia are largely over — the exam now tests application. Focus intensely on why a policy exists or how a phenomenon occurs, rather than just memorizing dates and numbers.

PRINCIPLE 3**Source Minimization,
Avoid FOMO**

The biggest trap is resource hoarding. Limit yourself to high-quality standard sources — NCERTs and one core reference book per subject. Read one book ten times, rather than ten books one time.

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PART SIX — CRACKING THE UPSC CODE

Execution

Note-Making & Revision Mechanics

METHOD 1**Smart Note-Making**

Don't copy the textbook into your notebook. Condense ruthlessly — notes should only hold the keywords, concepts, and data points you are actually likely to forget.

METHOD 2**Active Recall**

Re-reading highlighted text is a passive illusion of competence. Close the book, pick up a blank sheet, and force your brain to retrieve the answer. Testing yourself is how memory is genuinely built.

METHOD 3**Spaced Repetition**

You will forget what you read today by next month. Schedule revisions at increasing intervals — a day, a week, a month. It's the most scientifically effective way to lock information into long-term memory.

“Do not let best be the enemy of the good.”

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Digital Note Making

How I arranged my notes

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Death Penalty in India

- A capital punishment, also called the death penalty, is the **execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law** of a criminal offence.
- Prior to the CrPC of 1955, the death penalty was the rule and life imprisonment an exception in India for serious crimes. After the amendment of 1955 courts were at liberty to grant either death or life imprisonment
- According to **Amnesty International, 113 countries have abolished death penalty** as a mode of punishment.
- In India, capital punishment is awarded for **murder, gang robbery with murder, abetting the suicide of a child or insane person, waging war against the government, and abetting mutiny** by a member of the **armed forces**. It is also given under some antiterror laws for those **convicted for terrorist activities**. Recently, in 2018, India has introduced death penalty for those who **rape children under age of 12**.
- The death sentence is imposed **only when** the court comes to the conclusion that **life imprisonment is inadequate based on the facts** and circumstances of the case.
- In **Bachan Singh case**, the SC upheld the validity of death penalty and provided that death penalty should be **awarded only in the rarest of rare cases**.
- In **Shatrughan Chauhan vs Union of India**, SC further **humanised the implementation of capital punishment**. Prior to this judgment, the execution of the sentence is entirely in the domain of the executive. This status quo was challenged through this judgement and created **new forms of the accountability of the executive** at all stages of the pardon process, right from the level of the Ministry of Home Affairs all the way up to the office of the President of India.
- 2023: Supreme Court has reiterated the importance of **conducting a psychological evaluation of convicts** who have been awarded death sentence

Arguments for Death Penalty

- **Rarest of rare cases:** The death penalty is imposed only in rarest of rare cases that shock the conscience of society. This is reflective in the fact that in the **last 13 years, only four people have been executed**.
- **Problem of terrorism & neighbourhood:** **India's neighbourhood is not peaceful**, unlike Scandinavia. On the contrary, every day vested interests attempt to destabilize the very idea of our nation from across every border.
- **Controlling law and order:** In 1991, the Supreme Court cited its use in defending law and order as the reason for its

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Digital Note Making

How I arranged my notes

India-Myanmar

- Myanmar is important for India because of the **geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries** as well as for the overall **development of North-Eastern Indian states**. India and Myanmar relationship officially got underway after the **Treaty of Friendship in 1951**.
- **Five Bs** are the base of India-Myanmar relations – **Buddhism, Business, Bollywood, Bharatnatyam and Burma teak**

Importance

- Myanmar is **India's gateway to South-East Asia**.
- India - Myanmar **border is highly porous, poorly guarded and located along a remote, underdeveloped, insurgency-prone region** and proximate to opium producing area.
- The border is also vulnerable to the activities of **insurgents and drugs and arms traffickers**.
- Important from the **security POV** as the **influx of sizable numbers of Rohingya** from Myanmar's Rakhine state continues.
- **Success of India's Act East Policy, Neighbourhood first policy** largely depend on its relations with Myanmar.
- Some of the Indian companies such as Essar, GAIL, and **ONGC Videsh Ltd.** have invested in Myanmar's **energy sector**.
- India is building the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport**, a road-river-port cargo transport project, to **link Kolkata to Sittwe in Myanmar** and then **from Myanmar's Kaladan river to India's north-east**.
- India, Myanmar, and Thailand are building the **Asian (IMT) Trilateral Highway**, which will **connect India to ASEAN**.
- As part of India's SAGAR Vision, **India developed the Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state**.
- Myanmar is a **key partner in the fight to end insurgency** in India's northeast.
- **Myanmar's membership of ASEAN, BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga Cooperation** has introduced a regional/sub-regional dimension to bilateral relations and imparted added significance in the context of our "Act East" policy.

Challenges

- **Internal Security** is a major concern for India as the **Indo-Myanmar border is porous**
- **Bilateral trade** between India and Myanmar still **falls short of expectations**.

PART SIX — CRACKING THE UPSC CODE

The Reality Check

Managing Expectations — Beyond the Social Media Topper

8%

clear it on their
very first attempt

3.6

average attempts
for selected candidates

3rd–5th

attempt range where
most selections happen

The mindset takeaway: cultivate “rational detachment.” Treat this as a multi-year marathon and a process to solve — not a single judgment of your intelligence.

PART SIX — CRACKING THE UPSC CODE

Mistakes I Would Avoid

If I were in your position, today.

IGNORING ANSWER WRITING

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Waiting until you “finish the syllabus” to start practicing answers is a fatal flaw — you will never feel 100% prepared. Start writing poorly constructed answers early, so you can write brilliant ones later.

IGNORING THE CSAT



Many brilliant students fail Prelims because they underestimate the aptitude paper. Treat it with the respect it deserves.

ISOLATING COMPLETELY

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Focus is necessary — complete self-imposed isolation is not, and it damages your mental health. Keep a small circle of highly supportive friends or family close.

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Exam is not a skill; it is an art to use your skill.

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Key to Success

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Protecting Your Mental Health

This preparation is an emotional pressure cooker — expect days that feel entirely stagnant.

- Don't stop your hobbies —running, the gym, whatever it is. Physical exertion clears the mental fog.
- Failing a stage — or several — is a normal part of the UPSC journey, not a personal failure.
- Build a safety net of genuinely supportive relationships around you.
- Remember: your life's purpose is larger than any single examination.





My Own Personal Odyssey

Winning the GRE and the US admits felt like winning the Trojan War.

It was only the beginning of a long voyage home, to my true calling in public service.



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***When you want something, all the universe
conspires in helping you to achieve it.***

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Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

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Why I'm Standing Here Today

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INSPIRE

Your confidence that this path
is doable.

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INFORM

The raw, unfiltered realities of
this exam.

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DIRECT

A structured, actionable way
forward.

DREAM BIG

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Do not let fear clip your wings, do not let setbacks define your destination, and never settle for a quiet life when you were born to build a nation.

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**But have a Bigger
“WHY?”**

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AIR 682