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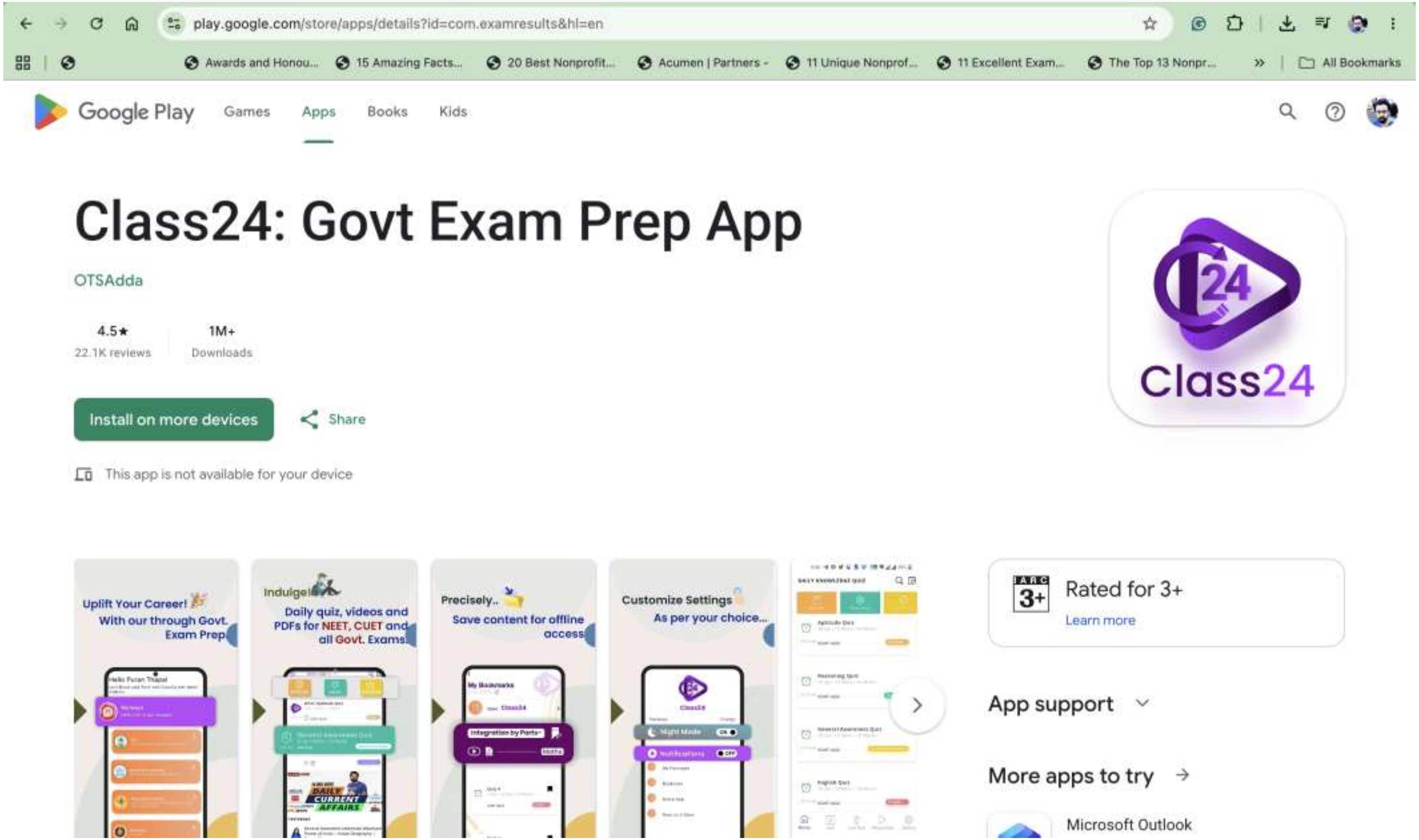
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INSIDE

'Ethanol draws in moisture and pollutes petrol'

NEW DELHI
Petrol pump owners claim ethanol's affinity for water is leading to contamination of E20 stock during monsoons and in coastal areas since existing storage tanks were designed for conventional petrol. This came even as videos of collection of muddy water from fuel dispensers went viral. » PAGE 12

Bombay HC asks Centre to reply to Kamra's appeal

MUMBAI
The Bombay High Court has directed the Centre to file an affidavit by July 29 over stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra's challenge to the constitutional validity of Sahyog Portal and the 2025 amendment to Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. » PAGE 4

'Bulldozer justice' contempt pleas shifted to HCs

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court has passed a 'standard order' shifting contempt petitions alleging continued instances of 'bulldozer justice' to High Courts, reasoning it was too unwieldy to hear them all, and many would require an enquiry into facts. Such razing of properties and homes was an "arbitrary use of power", it had held earlier. » PAGE 4

ISRO memo seeks to curb exodus of critical personnel

BENGALURU
With about 100 ISRO personnel quitting the agency in various centres across the country, the Department of Space has issued a direction not to accept any requests for voluntary retirement or resignation from scientific and technical personnel of Group 'A' associated with the Gaganyaan or other important projects till their realisation. » PAGE 3

Frame policy to release elderly, sick inmates: SC

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Thursday directed all States and Union Territories to put in place, within three months, a uniform policy governing the premature release of elderly and terminally ill prisoners, saying they are entitled to a humane and time bound mechanism for remission or early release on compassionate grounds. » PAGE 6

Wangchuk frail; Delhi HC orders monitoring

- He has lost over 9 kg; doctors maintain vigil as his health worsened on 19th day of hunger strike
- Solicitor-General says activist undergoes a daily check-up; govt. says it will intervene if required
- PIL seeks urgent intervention, 'use of force' if needed to protect noted environmentalist's life

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

With activist Sonam Wangchuk's health condition worsening on the 19th day of his indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, the Delhi High Court ordered the Union and Delhi governments to ensure regular monitoring of his health.

Doctors warned on Thursday that Mr. Wangchuk's health condition had entered a critical stage. Satish Lamba, a doctor who has been examining Mr. Wangchuk regularly, said he has lost over 9 kg, but remains "mentally alert". However, Dr. Lamba warned later in the evening that his body was likely consuming muscles and his organs may be next.

Mr. Wangchuk's "blood sugar today is 80 mg/dl, and his pulse is 72 bpm," Dr. Lamba said. He said that doctors were maintaining "extra vigilance" and that at his current stage, Mr. Wangchuk's uric acid levels were likely elevated as his muscles were likely being broken down by his body. He now weighs 56.9 kg.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi High Court ordered that Mr. Wangchuk be "regularly medically checked up by government doctors." A Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta whether any mechanism was in place to monitor Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Mehta submitted that Mr. Wangchuk undergoes a daily health check-up.

Holding ground: Wangchuk on hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi demanding resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over exam irregularities. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

"He [Mr. Mehta] further assures the court that depending upon the opinion of the doctors, whatever medical intervention is needed to check the deteriorating health condition of Mr. Wangchuk will also be taken," the court recorded in its order.

The Division Bench passed the direction while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by advocate and activist Rakesh Kumar Saini.

The petition sought urgent intervention to safeguard Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Saini sought intervention "even if forcibly" to save Mr. Wangchuk's life.

Mr. Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over issues concerning the country's education system. On Thursday, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)'s protest site filled up substantially as more high-profile figures arrived at Jantar Mantar to register their support.

Three student supporters from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)'s student outfit, the All India Students' Association (AISA), were also at a critical stage of their current hunger strike, Sai Balaji, a former AISA president, said in a statement.

"Aameen is at risk of a hypovolemic shock due to dehydration, Neha's RBS levels hover around a dangerous 49 mg/dl and Manish has lost more than 10% of body mass," Mr. Balaji said. Three other students had ended their strike in recent days, one of whom had been hospitalised and is recovering.

While there have been calls for Mr. Wangchuk to end his hunger strike, he remained resolute, saying calling off his fast without any response from the government would send a wrong message. Instead, he urged people to strengthen the CJP's proposed Parliament march on July 20.

(With inputs from Sobhan Rocky Singh and PTI)

Fervent surge

The chariots of the Shree Jagannath Temple's deities stand before the temple to start their journey during the annual Rath Yatra in Puri. Two persons were killed and several injured in a crowd surge during the pulling of the chariots on Thursday. BISWARANJAN ROUT (REPORT ON PAGE 4)

11.21 lakh medical aspirants clear NEET re-examination as women outshine men

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A total of 11.21 lakh candidates qualified in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET-UG) 2026 re-examination held on June 21, as the National Testing Agency declared the results on Thursday.

Nearly 20 lakh candidates had appeared for the re-examination following the cancellation of the original exam, held on May 3, due to an alleged paper leak.

These successful candidates are now eligible for admissions into undergraduate medical (MBBS), dental (BDS), AYUSH, and allied courses nationwide.

Two candidates, Aryan Gupta from Punjab and Panshul Bansal from Haryana, secured the highest score of 715 (out of 720 marks). Women aspirants registered a stellar performance, accounting for over 58% of the candidates in the qualified pool. They also outshone men in the overall qualification rate — 56.8% of the women cleared the exam compared with 55.1% of men.

Test hurdle: Nearly 20 lakh students appeared for the re-test following cancellation of the original exam due to a paper leak. PTI

Of the top 136 candidates (scores above 690), 93% cracked the exam on their first attempt, with 99% of them aged between 17 and 19 years.

Nineteen candidates crossed the 700-mark threshold.

The examination was conducted in 13 languages, including English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, and Bengali.

Uttar Pradesh generated the highest number of successful candidates with over 1.7 lakh qualifiers while Lakshadweep recorded 43.

The top 17 ranks (above 705 marks) were distributed across eight States — Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

Among the candidates who qualified, 5.12 lakh belonged to the Other Backward Classes-Non Creamy Layer category, followed by 2.91 lakh from General category; 1.59 lakh from Scheduled Caste category; 98,036 from General-Economically Weaker Sections; 63,716 from Scheduled Tribes; and 3,666 and 303 candidates respectively from Persons with Benchmark Disabilities and Persons with Disabilities categories.

Kudankulam 'data breach' not connected to nuclear activity at plant, says govt.

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

> This (the breach) has nothing to do with the nuclear plant or nuclear security... there is no need for any immediate review because what has happened is not linked to nuclear activity
>
> JITENDRA SINGH
> Union Minister of State for Atomic Energy

> Right now, we aren't contemplating an FIR because it is Reliance's data that has been breached — in fact, Reliance could take such action if they wished to. From our perspective, no data regarding safety has been shared (with Reliance Infrastructure Limited). Such kind of information on BoP (Balance of Plant) is shared with many companies
>
> PRATEEK AGRAWAL, Executive Director, NPCIL

Union Minister of State for Atomic Energy Jitendra Singh on Thursday downplayed concerns regarding the data breach involving electronic files linked to the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu.

"This [the breach] has nothing to do with the nuclear plant or nuclear security," he told *The Hindu* on the sidelines of a press conference. "There's no need for any immediate review because what has happened is not linked to nuclear activity."

The nuclear establishment, on the face of it, does not seem perturbed by the incident. A senior official of Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) — the plant operator — told *The Hindu* that the organisation was not, at present, contemplating a formal police investigation. "Right now, we aren't contemplating an FIR because it is Reliance's data that has been breached — in fact, Reliance could take such action if they wished to. From our perspective, no data regarding safety has been shared [with Reliance Infrastructure Limited]. Such kind of information on BoP (Balance of Plant) is shared with many companies," Prateek Agrawal, Executive Director (CP &CC), NPCIL, told *The Hindu*.

Contract data

NPCIL said in a statement late on Wednesday that the drawings and technical documents reportedly leaked relate only to the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract for the Common Services-Balance of Plant (BoP) package of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) Units 3 and 4, which was awarded to Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. through a public tender in 2018. The corporation stressed that these facilities are conventional in nature, comparable to those used in thermal power plants and other process industries, and are not connected to nuclear safety or nuclear security systems. BoP refers to supporting infrastructure, auxiliary systems, and components required to make the plant operational and excludes the core generating equipment.

The State-run utility said it had shared only indicative drawings and technical specifications with bidders as part of the tendering process. Based on these inputs, Reliance Infrastructure prepared detailed engineering drawings in consultation with the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), which were subsequently reviewed and accepted by NPCIL after verifying that they met the project's technical specifications.

After commissioning two 1,000 Mwe VVER reactors, the KKNPP is constructing four more similar units with Russian technical know how at Kudankulam, which is all set to house India's biggest nuclear park with reactors generating 6,000 MW nuclear power.

According to a *Reuters* report, over 19,000 highly sensitive files dating between 2016 and mid 2025 and linked to KKNPP's engineering blueprints on control, cooling and ventilation systems, list of vendors and suppliers supplying equipment, operational files on meeting records, reviews of joint inspection by the Indian and Russian engineers, insurance policies, etc., had been accessed by well-known ransomware group World Leaks.

The leak reportedly originated from a server hosted by third party provider, Yotta, belonging to the plant's contractor Anil Ambani's Reliance Group.

Cong. to 'strongly oppose' move to reintroduce delimitation Bill

Kharge urges Modi to convene an all-party meeting on the Bill; party identifies Ram Temple row, 'corrosion' of educational institutions, and foreign policy failures as key issues for the Monsoon Session; INDIA bloc to hold strategy meet on Monday

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

The alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and the "systematic corrosion" of educational institutions, were among the key issues identified by the Congress parliamentary strategy group on Thursday for the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge along with leaders Jairam Ramesh, P. Chidambaram and others during the meeting. ANI

The party also resolved to strongly oppose any attempt by the Centre to reintroduce the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which proposes to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha and initiate the delimitation exercise.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to convene an all-party meeting before any revised version of the Bill is introduced. "I would, once again, request you to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the government's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," he said.

In a post on X after the meeting, Mr. Kharge said the party would hold the government accountable over the alleged "*chanda chori*" (donation theft) at the Ram Temple, paper leaks, the "systemic corrosion" of the education system, institutional capture, the breaking of political parties, corruption, inflation, foreign policy failures, ethanol blending, deforestation, and the alleged assault on the rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minorities.

The strategy meeting, chaired by Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, was attended by Mr. Kharge, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and senior leaders K.C. Venugopal, P. Chidambaram, Jairam Ramesh, Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari, Kumari Selja, Gaurav Gogoi, and Manickam Tagore, among others.

Addressing a press conference, Congress's communications chief Jairam Ramesh alleged that the Union government was attempting to revive the delimitation Bill after failing to secure the required two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha in April.

'Will maintain unity'

"The Congress party has consistently maintained that it will strongly oppose the delimitation Bill and will continue to do so. We will also make every effort to maintain the unity and solidarity of all Opposition parties," he said, adding that the party would also oppose the proposed Constitutional amendment relating to the removal of Ministers facing 30 days of custody. The Congress would oppose the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, any amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, and proposed changes to the National Food Security Act, if they were introduced during the session, he said.

He accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of "splitting parties" to manage a two-thirds majority by "cunningness".

Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Kharge were in touch with all the parties that had supported the Congress on April 16 and 17 in defeating the government's delimitation Bill, he added. The Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance will also hold its strategy meet on Monday, to evolve its joint strategy.

Referring to Mr. Ramesh's comments, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said that instead of making political statements, the Congress leadership should focus on its own internal issues.

Bills on FCRA, *Vande Mataram* listed for Monsoon Session

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which seeks to amend the 1971 law to make the intentional insult of, or disruption during, the singing of the National Song *Vande Mataram* a punishable offence is among the five new Bills listed by the government for the coming Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Apart from these, the government has listed the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, which was introduced during the Budget Session of Parliament, and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhisthan Bill, 2025, which is currently under the consideration of a Joint Committee of both Houses.

The other four new Bills listed by the government are the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, which proposes stricter provisions for delayed registration; the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026; the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

The government has listed five new Bills for the Monsoon Session, set to begin on July 20

Legislative agenda

The legislative agenda circulated among parliamentarians does not include the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks the automatic removal from public office of any person, including the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers, who has been jailed for 30 days, and the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill, which proposed the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats to facilitate the implementation of women's reservation.

The Centre has not formally confirmed or denied reports that it may introduce a revised version of the Bill during the session.

Panel flags autonomy risks under VBSA Bill

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 will lead to the concentration of extensive regulatory powers in a single central regulator, thereby affecting the institutional autonomy, a joint committee of Parliament has noted.

According to the draft report of the joint panel circulated to members, the graded penalty architecture proposed in the Bill cannot be imposed arbitrarily.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December, 2025, following which it was referred to a joint committee. It proposes a massive overhaul of the higher education sector.

"The committee expressed apprehension that concentration of extensive regulatory powers in a single central regulator could lead to bureaucratic or ideological overreach, thereby affecting the institutional autonomy presently available under the existing UGC framework," the draft report said.

On the draw

SC verdicts say state has the duty to preserve life of a person on indefinite fast

NEWS ANALYSIS

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Multiple Supreme Court judgments and orders highlight the state's paternalistic duty of care to preserve the life of a person on a hunger strike without disrupting his right to dissent.

Yet the government has responded to activist Sonam Wanghuk's ongoing fasting at Jantar Mantar with silence for the past 19 days even as an alarmed Delhi High Court asserted on July 16 that the "life of any citizen is precious".

A series of orders of a Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, currently the Chief Justice of India, have similarly stressed the constitutional duty and responsibility of the state to ensure that no harm is caused to the life of a person on an indefinite fast.

The orders were passed during periodic hearings held in the case of Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal during the latter half of the year 2024. The septuagenarian Mr. Dallewal's hunger protest against the controversial farm laws had crossed 20 days at the time.

Hunger strikes are neither unconstitutional nor barred under any law in the country

The court had highlighted that both the Union of India and the State of Punjab must take into consideration the age, medical health issues, and the fact that Mr. Dallewal was a prominent citizen.

The Bench had held that it was the "bounden duty of the State of Punjab, the Union of India and other stakeholders to take all necessary measures to provide immediate adequate medical aid to Mr. Jagjit Singh Dallewal without forcing him to break his fast unless it is imperative to do so to save his life".

In the top court judgment in the *suo motu* case of *In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident*, the court narrated instances of the then United Progressive Alliance government reaching out to Baba Ramdev to dissuade him from going on a hunger strike against corruption in 2011.

It recorded that the then Prime Minister, the late Dr. Manmohan Singh, had gone the "extra mile" to dissuade Baba Ramdev.

"On May 4, 2011, Baba Ramdev had written a letter to the PM stating his intention to go on fast to protest against the government's inaction against bringing back the black money. This was responded to by the PM on May 19, 2011 assuring him that the government was determined to fight with the problem of corruption... and asking him to drop the idea of going on a hunger strike till death," the judgment recorded.

It narrated how four senior Ministers of the UPA government had met Baba Ramdev at the airport when he arrived in Delhi in 2011 to persuade him against the hunger strike.

The court has discouraged the executive from taking a hostile view of persons who want to express their stand by fasting. It has held that the state cannot disrupt the right of expression unless there was a "genuine threat or reasonable bias of communal disharmony, social disorder and public tranquillity".

Hunger strikes are neither unconstitutional nor barred under any law. "It is a form of protest which has been accepted, both historically and legally in our constitutional jurisprudence," it said.

Opposition leaders, film industry members rally behind Sonam Wangchuk

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Even as his fast approached a critical stage on Thursday, activist Sonam Wangchuk's strike attracted more voices of support, with Jantar Mantar's protest site seeing a massive increase in crowds as former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal came to the site.

Life at risk: AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal with Activist Sonam Wangchuk in New Delhi on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Samajwadi Party MP Dimple Yadav also visited Mr. Wangchuk, and urged the Union government to "show some sensitivity" to the protest and initiate a dialogue with the activist.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) has planned a march to Parliament on July 20, a demonstration that Mr. Wangchuk has urged supporters to attend.

The Congress, which has been conducting its own rallies focusing on the NEET leak and CBSE exam irregularities, has maintained its distance, but broke its silence, with party general secretary (Organisation) K.C. Venugopal urging Mr. Wangchuk to break his fast.

The Congress "has been making this very demand [on Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation] for over a month-and-a-half," Mr. Venugopal said.

Mr. Wangchuk's "concerns are our concerns and that of other Opposition parties as well", he added.

The Congress has a '*Chhatron Ki Goonj*' rally planned in Dehradun on Friday, and the same issues will be raised there, party general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam deputy general secretary A. Raja also met Mr. Wangchuk and the three students who are on a fast concurrently nearby on Thursday. Mr. Raja said on X that he "expressed the DMK's support" to the activist.

J&K CM voices concern

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah voiced concern over Mr. Wangchuk's condition. "Politics has its place, but there must also be a room for humanity and compassion," Mr. Abdullah said, ruing that "the government does not seem to pay attention to these matters ... We are also asking for justice".

"The confidence that, with effort and talent, anyone can surpass the children of the rich has started to founder," Mr. Kejriwal said in a speech after meeting Mr. Wangchuk.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray said he would hold a protest in Mumbai on Friday in support of Mr. Wangchuk.

The Supreme Court Bar Association's president, senior advocate Vikas Singh, also met with Mr. Wangchuk. "We need you alive, working and leading from the front," Mr. Singh said, urging Mr. Wangchuk to break his fast.

A few more celebrities backed Mr. Wangchuk. "From the millions of students whose honest efforts were invalidated with barely a shrug; to the millions more who stood up and continue to stand against injustice... I see you," actor Imran Khan said on Instagram. Actors Sonakshi Sinha and Fatima Sana Shaikh too voiced their supported.

INDIA bloc will take a collective call on delimitation: Raut

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

A day after the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) [NCP (SP)] hinted that there could be a rethink in the Opposition's position on the delimitation Bill, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said that Opposition parties will discuss it if the Centre considers the amendments suggested by them.

Sanjay Raut

"If there is an increase in seats by 50%, and if the government brings about the amendment to that effect, then there can be discussion about it," he said while speaking with presspersons in Nagpur.

Mr. Raut said that the decision about the Bill will be taken collectively by all the parties of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance. "No single party will take a call on it. The decision about it will be taken by everyone together. If the government brings up a different proposal, all the parties of INDIA bloc will sit together. I don't think any one party will take its own decision. It will be a collective decision," he said.

Reduced strength

The strength of the Shiv Sena (UBT) in the Lok Sabha has been drastically reduced. From nine MPs, the party has come down to three Lok Sabha members after six of its MPs extended support to Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde. The six MPs met Union Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday.

After the meeting, Mr. Shinde had expressed confidence that the delimitation Bill will sail through smoothly in Parliament this time.

Congress leaders in Maharashtra said they were bracing to face the impact alone. "We will not support the Bill in any condition. It is clear that we will oppose it. The question of rethinking does not arise. With the kind of statements which have been made by the NCP(SP), it is not clear if they will stick together with the INDIA bloc for voting against the delimitation Bill," a senior Congress leader told *The Hindu*. The NCP(SP) has eight Lok Sabha members.

The Congress said that there were questions about the fate of the Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra.

HC gives final two weeks to Kejriwal, Sisodia to respond to CBI's plea in Delhi excise case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday granted a final opportunity to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Durgesh Pathak, to respond within two weeks to the Central Bureau of Investigation's plea against a trial court order discharging them in the liquor policy case.

Justice Manoj Jain deferred hearing on CBI's revision petition after none appeared for the discharged accused persons due to work abstention by high court lawyers in protest against the proposed enhancement of the pecuniary jurisdiction of Delhi's district courts.

The court listed the case for hearing arguments on behalf of the investigating agency on August 17.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, said the three AAP leaders were earlier given several opportunities by the High Court to file their replies, and the case has been "sufficiently delayed."

'Fixed time frame'

"In any case if I am giving a date, we will make it clear that they would be at liberty to file a reply," Justice Jain responded. The judge added that a time frame shall be fixed for hearing submissions on behalf of the discharged accused persons.

"Although opportunity was granted to them earlier on several occasions, in view of interest of justice, one last and final opportunity is granted to them to file replies within two weeks from today," the court ordered.

PM speaks to Amir of Qatar, condoles loss

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and conveyed his heartfelt condolences on the passing of the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. He said the late leader's enduring legacy will continue to guide the two countries.

SC verdicts say state has the duty to preserve life of a person on indefinite fast

NEWS ANALYSIS

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In the top court judgment in the *suo motu* case of *In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident*, the court narrated instances of the then United Progressive Alliance government reaching out to Baba Ramdev to dissuade him from going on a hunger strike against corruption in 2011.

It recorded that the then Prime Minister, the late Dr. Manmohan Singh, had gone the "extra mile" to dissuade Baba Ramdev.

"On May 4, 2011, Baba Ramdev had written a letter to the PM stating his intention to go on fast to protest against the government's inaction against bringing back the black money. This was responded to by the PM on May 19, 2011 assuring him that the government was determined to fight with the problem of corruption... and asking him to drop the idea of going on a hunger strike till death," the judgment recorded.

It narrated how four senior Ministers of the UPA government had met Baba Ramdev at the airport when he arrived in Delhi in 2011 to persuade him against the hunger strike.

The court has discouraged the executive from taking a hostile view of persons who want to express their stand by fasting. It has held that the state cannot disrupt the right of expression unless there was a "genuine threat or reasonable bias of communal disharmony, social disorder and public tranquillity".

Hunger strikes are neither unconstitutional nor barred under any law. "It is a form of protest which has been accepted, both historically and legally in our constitutional jurisprudence," it said.

- The article discusses several **Supreme Court judgments** stating that:
- **Hunger strikes are legal** in India.
- A person has the **constitutional right to protest peacefully**.
- At the same time, the **State has a constitutional duty to protect the life** of a person undertaking an indefinite fast.
- This issue has recently arisen in the case of **Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal**, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike.

Issue	Supreme Court's View
Hunger strike	Constitutional and legally permissible
Right to protest	Protected under Article 19
Right to life	Protected under Article 21
State's duty	Must preserve life through medical care
Can government forcibly end the fast?	Only if necessary to save life
Can government stop peaceful protest?	No, unless it threatens public order or communal harmony

3. Constitutional Articles Involved

Article	Provision	Relation to Case
Article 19(1)(a)	Freedom of Speech	Right to express dissent
Article 19(1)(b)	Peaceful Assembly	Right to peaceful protest
Article 21	Right to Life	State must protect protester's life
Article 14	Equality before Law	Equal protection to every citizen

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4. What did the Supreme Court say?

The Court emphasized that:

A. Hunger strike is legal

The Court clearly stated:

> Hunger strikes are **neither unconstitutional nor prohibited under any law in India.**

It is a recognized democratic form of protest.

B. State has a duty to save life

Even if a person voluntarily begins an indefinite fast,

the government **cannot remain a silent spectator**.

It must

- provide medical assistance,
- monitor health,
- persuade the person to end the fast,
- intervene when life is in immediate danger.

C. Do not suppress dissent

The Court warned governments against treating hunger strikes as hostile acts.

Peaceful protest is part of democracy.

Restrictions are justified only if there is:

- violence,
- public disorder,
- communal tension,
- threat to national security.

Particular	Details
Person	Jagjit Singh Dallewal
Profession	Farmer leader
Issue	Protest against farm-related demands
Nature	Indefinite hunger strike
Supreme Court	Directed Punjab Government and Union Government to ensure proper medical treatment
Court's emphasis	Save life without unnecessarily forcing him to end the protest

6. Baba Ramdev Example (2011)

The Supreme Court referred to the **Ramlila Maidan Incident**.

Background

- Baba Ramdev announced an indefinite fast against black money and corruption.
- Then Prime Minister **Dr. Manmohan Singh** personally wrote to him.
- Senior Union Ministers met him at Delhi airport.
- The government attempted to persuade him to withdraw the fast.

The Court appreciated this approach, saying the government should first try **dialogue and persuasion**, rather than confrontation.

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7. Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012)

Case:

In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012)

The Supreme Court held:

- Peaceful protest is a democratic right.
- The State should facilitate peaceful protests.
- Excessive use of police force violates constitutional rights.
- The executive should act reasonably and proportionately.

8. Balancing Two Constitutional Rights

Right	Holder	Constitutional Basis
Right to Protest	Citizen	Article 19
Right to Life	Citizen	Article 21
Duty to Protect Life	State	Article 21

The Court held that these rights should be **balanced**, not treated as conflicting.

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9. Responsibilities of the Government During Hunger Strikes

The State should:

- Ensure continuous medical monitoring.
- Provide emergency treatment when necessary.
- Engage in dialogue with protesters.
- Avoid unnecessary force.
- Protect law and order.
- Respect democratic dissent.

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10. When Can the State Restrict a Hunger Strike?

Restrictions may be justified if the protest causes:

Situation	Government Can Intervene?
Violence	Yes
Riots	Yes
Threat to public order	Yes
Communal tension	Yes
National security concerns	Yes
Mere peaceful fasting	No

11. Landmark Judgments Related to Protest Rights

Case	Year	Principle
Kameshwar Prasad v. State of Bihar	1962	Peaceful demonstration is protected, though strikes by government employees may be restricted.
Himat Lal Shah v. Commissioner of Police	1973	Citizens have a right to hold public meetings subject to reasonable regulation.
Ramlila Maidan Incident (In Re)	2012	Excessive force against peaceful protesters is unconstitutional.
Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India	2018	Right to protest must be balanced with rights of other citizens.
Jagjit Singh Dallewal Case	2024–26 proceedings	State has a duty to preserve the life of a person on an indefinite fast while respecting the right to protest.

IN BRIEF

Windfall tax on diesel, ATF up, levy on petrol exports cut

The Centre has increased the windfall gains tax on exports of diesel and ATF, while lowering the levy on petrol for the fortnight beginning July 16. The Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on diesel exports has been hiked to ₹15.5 a litre from ₹6.5 a litre. Similarly, SAED on ATF exports has been raised to ₹14.5 per litre from ₹7.5 per litre. However, the export duty on petrol has been cut to ₹2.8 per litre, from ₹4 per litre. PTI

Govt. lists Bill to replace FII tax exemption Ordinance

The Government listed a Bill it plans to table in the Monsoon Session of Parliament to replace June Ordinance which had exempted foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) from capital gains tax and tax on interest from investment in government securities. It exempted from tax "interest on Government security and any capital gains arising from sale, exchange or transfer of such government security" by any FII and BIS. PTI

'SP Group raises $650 million via debut dollar debt sale'

Shapoorji Pallonji Group has raised $650 million through its debut dollar debt issue, completing the dollar tranche of a delayed dual-currency bond fundraising, three sources aware of the matter said on Thursday. Mercury Finance, an SP Group company, sold three-year dollar securities at a yield of 14.80%, with an option to redeem them after one year, *Reuters* reported last Friday. BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, subscribed to these bonds. REUTERS

Revised CAFE III unveiled for stakeholder suggestions

The latest draft broadly mirrors the second circulated earlier this year by retaining a flatter weight-adjustment curve, thereby reducing the compliance advantage available to heavier SUVs

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday released the third draft of the fuel efficiency norms for passenger vehicles set to kick off from April 2027, proposing to recognise ethanol, compressed biogas (CBG) and other biofuels in compliance calculations by allowing manufacturers to claim specified reductions in declared tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions.

Suggestions welcome: The latest draft has been released for stakeholder consultation until August 6.

The latest draft has been released for stakeholder consultation until August 6 after a year-long battle between small and big car makers on compliance methodologies.

The latest draft broadly mirrors the second circulated earlier this year by retaining a flatter weight-adjustment curve than the original September 2025 proposal, thereby reducing the compliance advantage available to heavier SUVs. For cars which are below the industry average weight of 1,229 kg also, targets will be easier. The fleet wide emission targets have been relaxed by about 28% compared to the original proposal of last year.

Manufacturers will be required to progressively improve the fuel efficiency of their fleets. The target fuel consumption is proposed to be tightened from 3.996 litre per 100 km (94.76 gCO_2/km) in 2027-28 to 3.327 litres per 100 km (78.90 gCO_2/km) by 2031-32.

Unlike the current framework, compliance will be assessed over two blocks rather than annually – an initial three-year period followed by a second block of two years.

A key feature of the draft is the Carbon Neutrality Factors (CNFs), which recognise the lower lifecycle carbon footprint of renewable fuels such as ethanol, compressed biogas (CBG) and other biofuels.

Under the proposal, manufacturers will be allowed to reduce the declared tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions of their vehicles before compliance is assessed.

CBDT will soon let you see data it has on your foreign assets, income

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The move is to promote voluntary tax compliance.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) will soon allow taxpayers to see the information the tax department has received from abroad regarding their foreign assets and incomes, sources in the CBDT have said.

India receives information from more than 100 countries under the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) framework. This information can include details relating to foreign bank accounts, custodial accounts, certain financial investments, interest, dividends and other specified financial income.

"As of now, information, as received, pertaining to calendar years 2022, 2023 and 2024 has been displayed in the Annual Information Statement (AIS) on the Income Tax e-Filing portal," a source in the CBDT said. "Further, information for 2025 will be displayed in the AIS once it is received in the month of September or October 2026."

The move is being done to enhance taxpayer services and promote voluntary tax compliance, the official added.

He added that the information being made available on the portal only reflects the information that the CBDT has received from its partner jurisdictions, and isn't an exhaustive list.

TechM's Q1 net jumps 28% to ₹1,465 crore

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Tech Mahindra on Thursday posted a 28% increase in first quarter net profit to ₹1,465 crore.

Revenue grew almost 17.7% to ₹15,712 crore. It bagged new deals worth 1,078 million in the quarter, a 33% rise. It reported cash and cash equivalent of ₹9,698 crore in Q1.

The firm indicated it may restart campus hiring as visibility into revenue outlook emerges. It's headcount sequentially reduced by 863 in the first quarter ended June 30 to a a total of 1,46,760.

Wipro Q1 net almost flat, to pay ₹2 dividend

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

Wipro, India's third lead technology firm, reported an almost flat net profit of ₹3,352 crore even as revenue rose in the June quarter. The sub-1% growth in net earnings came amid 11% year-on-year (YoY) increase in revenue to ₹24,479 crore.

Core IT services business generated $2.61 billion revenue, a 1.4% sequential dip and 1% growth YoY. Wipro booked total deals worth $3.4 billion in the first quarter (Q1) of FY27, of which large contracts were valued at $1.6 billion, a sequential increase of 12.9% in constant currency terms.

Wipro expects revenue from its IT Services business segment to be in the range of $2,574 million to $2,627 million, translating as sequential guidance of (-)1.8% to (+)0.2% in constant currency terms.

Cautious outlook

This apparently represents a cautious and muted outlook mostly attributing to market pressures, macroeconomic uncertainties, geopolitical instability, and cuts in discretionary spending by global clients

To pay dividend

"We are also pleased to share the board has declared an interim dividend of ₹2 per share," said CFO Aparna Iyer. "Including this and payouts over the past year, we would have returned over $3 billion in cash to shareholders while continuing to invest steadily for growth."

Moisture-absorbing nature of ethanol is contaminating fuel, claim petrol dealers

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Petrol pump owners claim ethanol's hygroscopic nature or affinity towards water is leading to contamination of E20 stock during monsoons and in coastal areas since existing underground storage tanks were designed for conventional petrol, not higher ethanol blends. The claims come amid viral videos on social media purportedly showing customers collecting what appears to be muddy water, rather than E20 from fuel dispensers.

One such video involved a Toyota Hycross car, which allegedly broke down shortly after refuelling. The automaker blamed fuel contamination as the car was E20 compliant. The maker of the video was later among at least 3 against whom an FIR was filed.

Three petrol pump owners shared concerns over the roll out of E20 with *The Hindu* on the condition of anonymity.

"The underground tanks that store fuel often have some amount of water due to ingress during rains or moisture or condensation or from the fuel tanker that brings petrol to the petrol pump. Now, when the water content in the entire E20 stock in underground tanks exceeds 0.5%, ethanol binds with water because of its hygroscopic nature or affinity for water. This results in phase separation where water-ethanol mixture settles at bottom of the tank, while the petrol forms a separate layer above," said an industry veteran.

'Ethanol's moisture absorption may contaminate E20 fuel.'

As fuel is drawn by the dispensing unit from the bottom of the underground tank, some vehicles may end up being dispensed with this water-rich mixture instead of E20.

"As a result, vehicles may not start, or breakdown after a distance. We come to know about contamination only when such customers come to us with complaints," said a dealer.

Automotive experts say, such contaminated fuel can independently cause fuel injector to malfunction, poor driveability, fuel pump failures and in severe cases, engine damage.

Pump owners said the concerns were compounded in coastal areas where sub-soil water can further contaminate E20 if seals on underground tanks are not properly in place.

Fear of corrosion

A pump owner also feared underground tanks and pipelines made of mild steel could turn susceptible to corrosion because of ethanol's tendency to absorb water, potentially adding to fuel contamination. Some said OMCs replaced seals and washers in petrol dispensing units with neoprene rubber in preparation for E20.

Dealers also said there was a need for creating awareness among vehicle owners to prevent disputes at fuel stations and motorists should be advised on the need for protecting vehicles from rain as well as during washing to prevent water ingression in fuel tanks but the oil marketing companies (OMCs) were actively dissuading them from displaying any informational boards.

"Some petrol pumps had hoardings saying E20 was being dispensed on government order, but OMCs were offended and ordered for them to be removed," said one of the petrol pump operators.

The dealers said they had been instructed to check underground storage tanks for water contamination thrice a day with the frequency increasing to once every two hours in monsoons. Many pumps use a dipstick coated with water-finding paste that turns red in the presence of water. If contamination is detected, the dealer informs the oil marketing company (OMC), which deploys personnel to drain the water from the tank using a hand pump.

Dealers said they were unhappy with the financial burden of the process. They pointed out while they buy the entire stock of E20 from OMCs, they must bear the losses when any contaminated portion was to be discarded.

Zero tolerance

IOCL said in a statement that it has zero tolerance policy to contamination and regular inspections and testing are being carried out regularly.

It's all AI

Technology in focus: An autonomous surface vessel is displayed during an advance manufacturing demonstration by AI-powered technology platform FleetWorks during Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) in Oahu, Hawaii. AFP

South Indian Bank net profit up 17.4% on higher net interest income

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

South Indian Bank (SIB) net profit rose 17.4% year-on-year (YoY) to ₹378 crore as asset quality improved and net interest income increased in the quarter ened June 30 2026.

Onward journey: The net non-performing assets (NPAs) fell to 0.26% from 0.68%, highlighting healthy asset quality.

The bank's net interest income increased 23% YoY to ₹1,025 crore in the reporting quarter. The gross advances increased 17% YoY to ₹1,04,368 crore in the reporting period.

The bank's gross non-profitable assets, as a share of total advances, reduced to 1.35% in the June quarter of the current fiscal as against about 3.6% in the corresponding period of last year.

The net non-performing assets (NPAs) fell to 0.26% from 0.68%, highlighting healthy asset quality.

"During the reporting period, the bank witnessed consistent growth across all targeted segments, with a sharp focus on acquiring quality assets in verticals such as corporate lending, auto loans and gold loans.

Aligned with our strategic intent of 'Profitability through Quality Credit Growth', we successfully onboarded new advances with low-risk profiles, ensuring well-balanced and healthy credit portfolio," said P. R. Seshadri, managing director & chief executive officer.

Give new car that supports E20 to doctor: consumer commission

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission in Raipur ordered a car dealer to provide a new car and an added compensation of ₹1 lakh for mental harassment to a city-based doctor who complained that the vehicle sold to him broke down repeatedly.

Noting the complainant's car did not have an E20 petrol-supported engine, the Commission directed the dealership to provide a model compatible with the said fuel composition.

The manufacturer, Maruti Suzuki, however, claimed the car was E20 compatible and said they would challenge the order.

In his appeal, Dr. Premraj Debta, a nephrologist, said the engine problem with his Maruti Grand Vitara Hybrid Zeta began in November 2024, five months after he bought it. When he took it back to the showroom, he was informed adulterated petrol affected the engine.

The problem arose few more times after which Dr. Debta found the dealership sold him an old model of the car. As matters escalated, the dealership refused a replacement or refund despite warranty.

In his appeal, Mr. Debta had sought ₹80 lakh for the hindrance caused to his work due to breakdowns.

Meanwhile, Maruti Suzuki claimed the car was fully equipped to handle E20 fuel and the Commission's order did not reflect 'several other relevant facts. The firm would take steps to challenge the order before a higher forum'.

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Under the proposal, manufacturers will be allowed to reduce the declared tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions of their vehicles before compliance is assessed.

1. What is CAFE?

CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) is a regulation that prescribes the **average fuel efficiency (or CO_2 emissions)** that a vehicle manufacturer's entire fleet of passenger vehicles must achieve.

Hindi

CAFE (कॉर्पोरेट एवरेज फ्यूल एफिशिएंसी) ऐसे नियम हैं जिनके तहत प्रत्येक वाहन निर्माता को अपनी सभी यात्री गाड़ियों का औसत ईंधन दक्षता (Fuel Efficiency) या औसत CO_2 उत्सर्जन एक निश्चित सीमा के भीतर रखना होता है।

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2. Evolution of CAFE Norms in India

Phase	Period	Key Features
CAFE I	2017–2022	First mandatory fuel efficiency norms
CAFE II	2022–2027	Stricter CO_2 emission limits
CAFE III (Draft)	**2027–2032**	Recognises biofuels, tighter fuel efficiency targets, Carbon Neutrality Factors

3. Why was CAFE III introduced?

Objectives

- Reduce fuel consumption.
- Lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- Improve India's energy security.
- Reduce dependence on imported crude oil.
- Encourage cleaner technologies.
- Support India's **Net Zero by 2070** target.

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4. Major Features of the Revised CAFE III Draft

Provision	Details
Effective From	**1 April 2027**
Consultation	Till **6 August**
Applicable To	Passenger vehicles
Compliance Period	Two blocks (3 years + 2 years)
New Biofuel Recognition	Ethanol, CBG and other biofuels
Carbon Neutrality Factors (CNFs)	Introduced
Fleet-based compliance	Continues

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5. Carbon Neutrality Factors (CNFs)

What are CNFs?

CNFs recognize that certain fuels emit **less carbon over their entire life cycle** than conventional petrol or diesel.

Instead of considering only **tailpipe emissions**, the draft also recognizes **life-cycle emissions**.

Fuels Covered

Fuel	Benefit
Ethanol	Lower lifecycle emissions
Compressed Biogas (CBG)	Renewable fuel
Biofuels	Cleaner carbon footprint

---

6. Tailpipe vs Life-Cycle Emissions

Parameter	Tailpipe Emissions	Life-Cycle Emissions
Measures	Emissions while driving	Entire production to usage
Includes	Exhaust gases only	Farming, production, transport, combustion
Used Earlier	Yes	No
CAFE III	Includes both through CNFs	

7. New Benefit for Automakers

Manufacturers using vehicles compatible with:

- Ethanol
- CBG
- Biofuels

will be allowed to **claim reductions in declared CO_2 emissions** while calculating compliance.

This provides an incentive to invest in cleaner fuel technologies.

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8. Fuel Efficiency Targets

The draft proposes progressively stricter targets.

Year	Fuel Consumption Target	CO_2 Equivalent
2027–28	**3.996 litres/100 km**	**94.76 g CO_2/km**
2031–32	**3.327 litres/100 km**	**78.90 g CO_2/km**

Improvement

- Fuel consumption reduced by about **17%**.
- CO_2 emissions reduced by about **16.7%**.

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9. Compliance Assessment Changes

Current System

Annual compliance.

Proposed System

Block	Duration
Block 1	3 Years
Block 2	2 Years

This gives manufacturers greater flexibility in meeting targets over multiple years.

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10. Weight-Based Adjustment

Existing Issue

Heavier SUVs receive a larger compliance advantage because they are allowed relatively higher emissions.

Revised Draft

- Retains a **flatter weight-adjustment curve**.
- Reduces the compliance advantage available to heavier SUVs.
- Makes targets comparatively easier for lighter cars.

11. Industry Average Weight

The draft uses an industry average vehicle weight of **1,229 kg**.

Vehicle Type	Effect
Below 1,229 kg	Easier compliance
Above 1,229 kg	Reduced advantage compared with earlier proposals

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12. Relaxation Compared with Original Proposal

The third draft is more industry-friendly.

Proposal	Change
Original September 2025 Draft	More stringent
Revised Third Draft	Fleet-wide emission targets relaxed by around **21%**

This reflects consultations with automobile manufacturers.

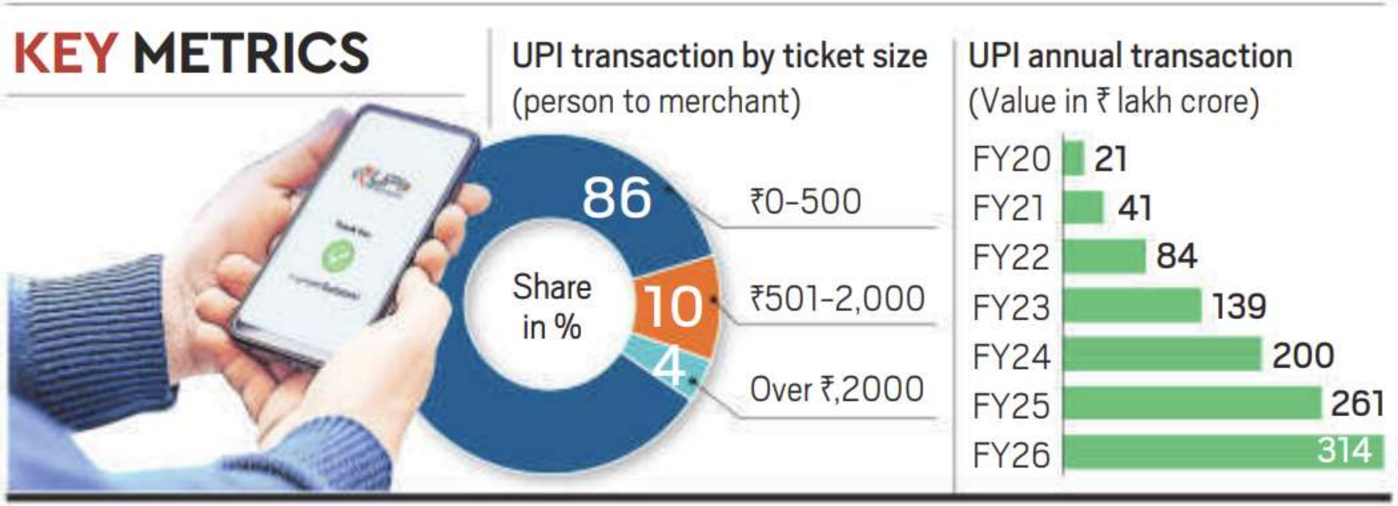
Feature	CAFE	Bharat Stage (BS-VI)
Focus	Fuel efficiency & CO_2 emissions	Air pollutants (NOx, PM, HC, CO)
Applies To	Manufacturer's fleet average	Individual vehicle
Objective	Reduce fuel use & carbon emissions	Improve air quality
Regulator	Ministry of Heavy Industries	Ministry of Road Transport & Highways / MoEFCC through emission standards

Initiative	Objective
National Biofuel Policy	Increase biofuel use in transport
E20 Programme	20% ethanol blending in petrol
SATAT Scheme	Promote compressed biogas (CBG)
FAME Scheme	Support electric mobility
National Green Hydrogen Mission	Develop clean hydrogen ecosystem

UPI above ₹2,000 may attract 0.5% MDR for large traders

● No levy for biz with turnover of up to ₹1.5 crore

PRASANTA SAHU
New Delhi, July 16



THE CENTRE MAY reintroduce a merchant discount rate (MDR) on UPI transactions of ₹2,000 and above for large merchants to compensate banks and payment service providers for rising operational costs and technology investments, sources said.

The proposed MDR on UPI payments accepted by large merchants won't exceed 0.5% of the monetary value, a source said. MDR is a fee paid by businesses to payment processors for accepting digital payments.

However, merchants and businesses with an annual turnover of up to ₹1.5 crore are likely to be exempt from the levy, irrespective of the transaction amount. A decision on the proposal is expected within a month, the sources added.

Larger merchants are better placed to absorb the MDR or pass on the cost to customers, whereas small businesses have limited ability to do so, the government reckons.

Imposing MDR only on higher-value transactions by larger merchants would not hurt, as transactions of ₹ 2,000 and above account for just 4% of person-to-merchant (P2M) UPI transactions. In comparison, 86% of P2M transactions are below ₹500, while 10% fall in the ₹501-2,000 range, according to FY26 data.

The government scrapped MDR on UPI and RuPay debit card transactions from January 2020 to encourage digital payments and expand merchant acceptance.

1. What is the News?

The Central Government is considering **reintroducing Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** on **UPI person-to-merchant (P2M)** transactions of **₹2,000 and above**, but **only for large merchants**.

Proposed Features

Feature	Proposal
MDR Rate	Up to **0.5%**
Applicable on	UPI transactions **₹2,000 and above**
Applicable to	Large merchants
Small businesses	Exempt (turnover up to ₹1.5 crore/year)
Current Status	Proposal under consideration; no final decision yet

---

2. What is MDR (Merchant Discount Rate)?

Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) is the fee that a merchant pays to banks or payment service providers for accepting digital payments.

Components of MDR

The MDR is shared among:

- Acquiring bank (merchant's bank)
- Issuing bank (customer's bank)
- Payment service provider
- Payment network (e.g., NPCI for UPI)

3. Example of MDR

Transaction Amount	MDR @0.5%	Merchant Receives
₹2,000	₹10	₹1,990
₹5,000	₹25	₹4,975
₹10,000	₹50	₹9,950

---

4. Why is the Government Considering MDR Again?

Since **January 2020**, MDR on **UPI and RuPay debit card transactions** has been **zero** to promote digital payments.

However:

- UPI volumes have grown exponentially.
- Banks and payment service providers bear infrastructure costs.
- Government incentives are insufficient to fully compensate them.
- Sustaining payment infrastructure requires a viable revenue model.

5. Why Only Large Merchants?

Large merchants have greater capacity to absorb transaction costs or factor them into pricing.

Small businesses may find MDR burdensome, so they are proposed to remain exempt.

Proposed Exemption

Business Type	Annual Turnover	MDR
Small Business	Up to **₹1.5 crore**	**No MDR**
Large Merchant	Above ₹1.5 crore	Up to **0.5%** (for eligible transactions)

6. Why Only Transactions Above ₹2,000?

Most UPI merchant transactions are of small value.

Ticket Size	Share of P2M UPI Transactions (FY26)
₹0–500	**86%**
₹501–2,000	**10%**
Above ₹2,000	**4%**

Therefore, the proposal targets only a small share of higher-value transactions.

7. Growth of UPI Transactions

Annual UPI Transaction Value

Financial Year	Value (₹ lakh crore)
FY20	21
FY21	41
FY22	84
FY23	139
FY24	200
FY25	261
FY26	314

Key Trend

- FY20 → FY26: **21 → 314 lakh crore**
- Increase of nearly **15 times** in six years, highlighting rapid adoption of digital payments.

8. What is UPI?

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system that enables seamless fund transfers between bank accounts using mobile devices.

Developed By

Institution	Role
NPCI	Developed and operates UPI
RBI	Regulates the payment ecosystem

---

9. What is NPCI?

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is the umbrella organization for retail payment systems in India.

Key Products

Product	Purpose
UPI	Instant bank-to-bank payments
RuPay	Domestic card payment network
IMPS	Immediate payment service
FASTag	Electronic toll collection
BHIM	UPI-based payment app
NACH	Bulk electronic fund transfers

10. Person-to-Merchant (P2M) vs Person-to-Person (P2P)

Feature	P2P	P2M
Meaning	Individual to Individual	Individual to Merchant
Example	Sending money to a friend	Paying at a shop or restaurant
MDR Proposal	Not applicable	Proposed for eligible transactions

11. Benefits of Reintroducing MDR

Stakeholder	Benefit
Banks	Recover infrastructure costs
Payment Service Providers	Sustainable revenue for operations
FinTech Companies	Better investment in innovation and security
Consumers	More reliable and secure payment ecosystem

12. Concerns

Concern	Explanation
Higher costs for merchants	Large businesses may bear additional charges.
Pass-through to consumers	Merchants may increase prices to offset MDR.
Impact on digital adoption	Some merchants could prefer cash for high-value transactions.
Policy uncertainty	Stakeholders seek clarity on the final framework.

13. Timeline of MDR Policy

Year	Development
2016	UPI launched
Jan 2020	MDR removed on UPI and RuPay debit cards
2020–2026	Government incentivized digital payments through subsidies
2026	Proposal to reintroduce MDR for large merchants on UPI transactions above ₹2,000

Uttar Pradesh Launches Kaushal Setu and Kaushal Sarathi Portals

The Government of Uttar Pradesh launched **Kaushal Setu** and **Kaushal Sarathi** portals on **World Youth Skills Day (15 July 2026)** to strengthen skill development, vocational education, and employment opportunities.

The portals were launched by the **Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission (UPSDM)**.

Objectives

Portal	Objective
Kaushal Setu	Connect trained youth with industries and employment opportunities
Kaushal Sarathi	Career guidance, counselling and skill planning

Kaushal Setu Portal

Purpose

Acts as a **digital bridge ("Setu")** between

- Skilled youth
- Training institutions
- Employers
- Industries

Features

- Online job matching
- Skill certificate verification
- Employer registration
- Industry-wise vacancies
- Digital placement services
- Candidate database

Kaushal Sarathi Portal

Purpose

Acts as a **career mentor (Sarathi)** for youth.

Services

- Career counselling
- Skill assessment
- Aptitude tests
- Course recommendations
- Information on government skill schemes
- Employment guidance

Benefits

Stakeholder	Benefit
Students	Better career planning
Youth	Employment opportunities
Industries	Skilled manpower
Government	Real-time monitoring

About UPSDM

Particular	Details
Full Form	Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission
State	Uttar Pradesh
Objective	Skill training and employment generation

Centre Tightens ISRO Scientist Exit Rules

The Central Government has introduced stricter rules regarding the **voluntary retirement and resignation** of certain ISRO scientists to safeguard sensitive technologies and strategic national interests.

Who is Covered?

The policy applies to:

- Group A Scientific & Technical Officers
- Scientists up to **Scientist/Engineer-SG**
- Scientists involved in strategic missions

Including:

- Gaganyaan
- Launch Vehicles
- Satellite Programmes
- Defence & Strategic Projects

Why Were the Rules Tightened?

Concerns

- Brain drain
- Leakage of strategic technology
- Scientists joining foreign private space companies
- National security
- Protection of intellectual property

Major Features

Provision	Details
Cooling-off period	Scientists may have restrictions before joining certain organisations (as per applicable service rules and approvals).
Prior approval	Required before resignation/retirement in sensitive positions.
National security	Given highest priority.

Why is this Important?

India's space sector is expanding rapidly after:

- Space sector reforms (2020)
- Entry of private companies
- IN-SPACe establishment
- Growing international demand

Protecting strategic knowledge has become more important.

About ISRO

Particular	Details
Established	1969
Headquarters	Bengaluru
Founder	Dr. Vikram Sarabhai
Parent Ministry	Department of Space

Important Missions

Mission	Purpose
Chandrayaan	Moon exploration
Aditya-L1	Solar mission
Gaganyaan	Human spaceflight
SPADEX	Space docking technology
NISAR	Earth observation

Jharkhand Gets GI Tags for Four Handloom/Handicraft Products

Products Awarded GI Tag

Product	Category
Bhagaiya Silk	Handloom Silk
Kuchai Silk	Handloom Silk
Munda Jewellery	Tribal Jewellery
Jharkhand Bamboo Craft	Handicraft

What is a GI Tag?

A **Geographical Indication (GI)** is an Intellectual Property Right (IPR) given to products that:

- originate from a specific geographical area,
- possess unique qualities,
- have a reputation or characteristics linked to that location.

Legal Basis

Particular	Details
Law	Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999
Effective	2003
Registry	Chennai
Administered By	Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks (CGPDTM), DPIIT

Benefits of GI Tags

Benefit	Explanation
Legal protection	Prevents misuse of product names
Better prices	Premium branding
Rural employment	Supports artisans and weavers
Export promotion	Improves global recognition
Cultural preservation	Protects traditional knowledge

Difference: GI vs Patent vs Trademark

Feature	GI	Patent	Trademark
Protects	Geographical products	Inventions	Brand names/logos
Validity	Renewable every 10 years	20 years	Renewable every 10 years
Ownership	Community/Producer Association	Individual/Company	Individual/Company

Famous GI Tags of India

State	GI Product
Rajasthan	Kota Doria, Blue Pottery
Uttar Pradesh	Banarasi Saree
West Bengal	Darjeeling Tea
Jammu & Kashmir	Pashmina
Odisha	Odisha Ikat
Karnataka	Mysore Silk
Assam	Muga Silk
Tamil Nadu	Kanchipuram Silk

Country	Approx. Domestic GI Products	Global Position	Remarks
China	**9,946+** (GIs in force)	1st	Largest GI system in the world, covering agricultural products, food, handicrafts, etc. (WIPO)
India	**724 registered GI products** (2026)	Among the top GI countries outside Europe	First GI: **Darjeeling Tea (2004)**. Strong growth due to government promotion. (The Times of India)
United States	**478 protected GIs (mainly through the trademark system)**	Relatively low	The U.S. primarily protects geographical names through **certification and collective trademarks**, rather than a separate GI law. (WIPO)

Parameter	China	India	USA
Total GI-related protections	**9,946+**	**724**	**478**
Main Protection System	Dedicated GI (sui generis + trademark)	GI Act, 1999 (sui generis)	Trademark-based (Certification Marks)
World's First Rank	☑ Yes	✖	✖

Word of the day

Votary:

one bound by vows to a religion or life of worship or service a devoted adherent of a cause or person or activity

Synonyms: adherent, devotee

Usage: *She is a votary of Gandhian philosophy and lives a simple life.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/votary

International Phonetic Alphabet: /'vəʊt(ə)ri/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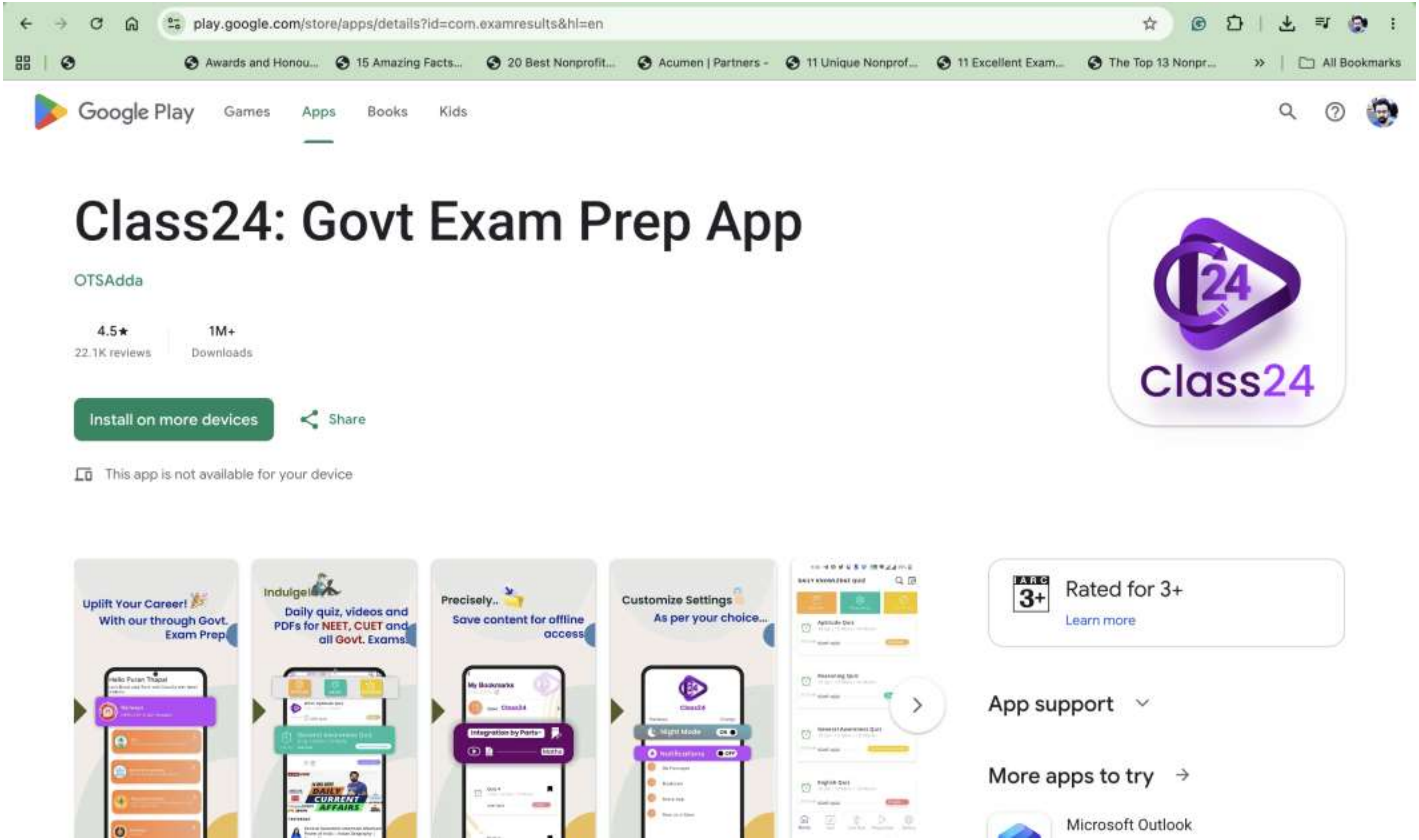
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