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 **Offline Centre Location:**
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1. Vodafone-Idea dues frozen by Centre; timeline relaxed

Why in the News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved freezing Vodafone Idea Ltd. (VIL)'s Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues worth ₹87,695 crore for five years.
- These frozen dues will now be rescheduled for repayment between FY 2031–32 and FY 2040–41.
- However, AGR dues already finalised by the Supreme Court for FY 2017–18 and 2018–19 remain unchanged, and must be paid between FY 2025–26 and FY 2030–31.
- The government currently holds a 49% equity stake in VIL, and the move is aimed at protecting competition in the telecom sector, ensuring continuity of services for 20 crore subscribers, and safeguarding government financial interests.

Breathing space

The Union government has a 49% equity stake in VIL, from a previous relief intervention for the struggling firm



Helping hand: The move will protect the interest of 20 crore consumers, says govt. FILE PHOTO

■ Dues for 2017-18 and 2018-19 fiscals, finalised based on a Supreme Court order, will now have to be paid over 2025-26 to 2030-31 fiscal **without any change**

■ **DoT to reassess** the frozen dues as per Deduction Verification Guidelines

Background

- **AGR Dues Issue:** AGR refers to the revenue used to calculate licence and spectrum fees payable to the government. In 2019, the Supreme Court upheld DoT's definition of AGR, widening the revenue base and creating huge liabilities for telecom companies.

Financial Stress in the Telecom Sector:

- Vodafone Idea has been under a severe debt burden and subscriber loss.
- Previous reliefs included:
 - 4-year moratorium on spectrum dues
 - Option to convert interest dues into government equity (leading to 49% stake)

- **Sector Structure:** The Indian telecom market is now highly concentrated, dominated by Jio and Airtel. Collapse of VIL could result in a duopoly, which may harm competition and consumer welfare.

Features

AGR Dues Freeze

- ₹87,695 crore dues frozen for 5 years
- Repayment shifted to FY 2031–32 to FY 2040–41

Past Dues Unchanged

- FY 2017–18 and 2018–19 dues already finalised by the Supreme Court
- Payable between FY 2025–26 and FY 2030–31

Reassessment Provision

- Dues as of 31 December 2025 may be reassessed based on audit and deduction verification
- The decision will be binding on both sides

Public Interest Justification

- Protects:
 - Government stake value
 - Spectrum & AGR revenue streams
 - 20 crore subscribers
 - Competition in the sector

Government Stake

- GOI retains 49% equity
- No debt write-off — only deferment

Challenges

Moral Hazard

- Critics argue that frequent reliefs may encourage corporate risk-taking.

Fiscal Impact

- Government revenue realisation gets deferred.

Operational Weakness

- **Vodafone Idea still faces:**
 - High debt
 - Weak balance sheet
 - Slower 5G rollout
 - Subscriber losses

Investor Confidence

- **Market uncertainty remains until:**
 - Tariffs rise
 - Fresh capital is infused

Legal Sensitivity

- Supreme Court AGR verdict limits government manoeuvring.

Competition Risk

- If VIL still fails, India risks becoming a near-duopoly market.

Way Forward

Strengthen VIL's Financials

- Equity infusion by promoters and investors
- Monetisation of assets

Tariff Rationalisation

- Industry moving toward sustainable pricing.

Regulatory Certainty

- Simplify the AGR structure
- Reduce a litigation-driven policy environment

Ensure Consumer Interest

- Maintain service continuity and quality
- Prevent predatory pricing behaviour

Promote Long-Term Sector Health

- Support infrastructure sharing
- Encourage innovation and 5G rollout
- Balance revenue needs with sector viability

Conclusion

The freezing and rescheduling of Vodafone Idea's AGR dues is a stabilisation measure aimed at preventing systemic stress in the telecom industry, safeguarding government equity value, and preserving competition. While it offers critical short-term relief, Vodafone Idea must still undertake structural financial and operational reforms to survive in a consolidating market. Long-term regulatory clarity and sustainable tariffs remain essential for ensuring the health of India's telecom ecosystem.

2. Woman's earning capacity does not absolve father of parental responsibilities, says HC

Why in the News

- The Delhi High Court has ruled that a mother's earning capacity does not absolve the father of his legal and moral duty to support his children.
- The Court emphasised that child maintenance is a shared parental responsibility and not a favour or a penalty against the non-custodial parent.
- In this case, the Court ordered the father to pay ₹25,000 per month towards the maintenance of his three minor children.



Background

- Child maintenance is a legal obligation under Indian family law, ensuring that both parents contribute to the upbringing and welfare of children.

Often, disputes arise when:

- One parent claims financial incapacity, or
- Argues that the earning spouse should bear the bulk of responsibility.

Courts have consistently held that child welfare is paramount, irrespective of marital disputes.

Features

Shared Responsibility

- Maintenance recognises both parents' joint duty to provide for the child.
- It is not charity or punishment, but a legal right of the child.

Mother's Income ≠ Father's Exemption

- A working mother cannot be expected to carry the full financial, emotional, and physical burden alone.
- The Court rejected arguments that the mother's income justified a lesser contribution from the father.

Realistic View of Child Needs

- Costs include not only food and schooling, but:
- Healthcare
- Social activities
- Hobbies
- Outings
- Everyday living costs

These cannot be narrowly calculated like business expenses.

Truthful Income Disclosure Required

- The Court criticised the father for suppressing his actual income.

- Maintenance must reflect true financial capacity.

Maintenance Ordered

- Father to pay ₹25,000/month for three children aged 11, 7 and 5.
- Mother earning approx. ₹34,000/month will continue contributing.
- The wife did not seek maintenance for herself.

Challenges Highlighted

- Income concealment by non-custodial parents
- Under-estimation of childcare costs
- Gender bias assumptions - that mothers must sacrifice more
- Lengthy litigation is delaying relief
- Informal sector incomes are hard to verify

Way Forward

Strict enforcement of truthful income disclosure

- Including affidavits and financial scrutiny

Child-centric assessment

- Courts should calculate needs holistically.

Guideline-based maintenance

- To ensure uniformity and fairness.

Awareness of parental duties

- Maintenance is a right of the child, not a spouse-to-spouse dispute.

Strengthen legal timelines

- Faster interim relief to custodial parents

Conclusion

The Delhi High Court reaffirmed that parenting responsibilities do not end with separation or divorce. A mother's employment cannot be used as a shield by fathers to avoid contributing to their children's upbringing. Child maintenance is grounded in the child's welfare and right to dignified development, reflecting the principle of shared parental responsibility.

3. Second edition of India-UAE military exercise concludes in Abu Dhabi

Why in the News?

The second edition of the India-UAE joint military exercise, DESERT CYCLONE-II, concluded at Al-Hamra Training City in Abu Dhabi on December 30.

The exercise strengthened defence cooperation, interoperability, and operational coordination between the Indian Army and UAE Land Forces, particularly in urban and sub-conventional warfare scenarios under a UN mandate.



Background

- India–UAE relations have rapidly expanded from economic cooperation to strategic defence engagement in recent years.
- The first edition of Desert Cyclone was held in Rajasthan in 2023.
- Defence cooperation includes:
 - Joint military exercises
 - High-level exchanges
 - Maritime security coordination
- UAE is the home to a large Indian diaspora and is a key partner in West Asian regional stability.

Features of Desert Cyclone-II

Duration and Location

- Held from December 18–30 in Abu Dhabi.

Participating Troops

India: 45 personnel from The Mechanised Infantry Regiment

- UAE: 53 Mechanised Infantry Battalion

Training Focus

- Urban warfare & sub-conventional operations
- Conducted under UN peacekeeping mandate scenarios

Practical Drills Conducted

- Room intervention & building clearance
- Heliborne operations
- Air-assault missions
- Platoon-level joint assaults
- Standardisation of Tactics, Techniques & Procedures (TTPs)

Approach

- Combined classroom + field-based training
- Emphasis on interoperability & mutual trust

Significance

- Strengthens operational readiness in urban conflict scenarios.
- Supports India's role as a security partner in West Asia.
- Enhances military diplomacy and people-to-people military engagement.
- Contributes to regional peace and stability.
- Reinforces the UAE as a key strategic defence partner.

Challenges & Considerations

- Regional security volatility in West Asia
- Need for continuous capability alignment
- Balancing partnerships with multiple regional actors
- Maintaining high interoperability standards

Way Forward

Sustain regular joint training

- Across domains: land, air, maritime

Expand scope

- Counter-terrorism
- Intelligence sharing
- Logistics cooperation

Promote UN peacekeeping collaboration

- Joint doctrine development

Leverage strategic geography

- Maritime security in the Indian Ocean & Gulf region

Conclusion

Desert Cyclone-II underscores deepening India-UAE defence ties, showcasing shared commitment to regional stability, counter-terrorism readiness, and peacekeeping preparedness. The exercise strengthens interoperability and enhances the ability of both armies to operate together in modern, urban conflict environments - reinforcing the strategic depth of the bilateral relationship.

4. Decade after GMR's ouster, AAI to study Maldives request to run airport.

Why in the News?

- The Maldives has requested India's Airports Authority of India (AAI) to assist in managing the Hanimaadhoo International Airport, which has recently undergone major upgradation.
- The Civil Aviation Ministry has asked AAI to study the proposal and explore engaging Indian companies for airport management.
- This development gains significance as it comes over a decade after the Maldives cancelled a major airport contract with Indian firm GMR in 2012 and asked the company to leave the country.
- The upgraded airport is seen as a major economic catalyst for the northern Maldives.



Background

Hanimaadhoo International Airport

- Operational since 1986
- Recently redeveloped with India-supported financing
- Funded partly through an \$800 million EXIM Bank Line of Credit
- Upgradation executed by Indian firm JMC Projects for \$136.6 million

2012 GMR Episode

- GMR won a \$511 million contract in 2010 to upgrade and operate Male International Airport
- In 2012, the Maldives cancelled the deal, citing legal issues and declared it void ab initio
- GMR staff were evicted within seven days
- The episode strained bilateral economic ties and investor confidence

India-Maldives Relations

- The Maldives are strategically important in the Indian Ocean Region
- India remains a key development and infrastructure partner

Features of the Current Proposal

Request Origin

- Maldives conveyed the proposal during the airport inauguration (Nov 9, 2025), attended by India's Civil Aviation Minister as PM's special envoy.

Role of AAI

- Asked to:
- Study feasibility
- Explore the engagement of Indian companies
- Assess operational support requirements

AAI Profile

- Owns 113 airports in India
- Manages 26 State government airports
- Some AAI airports are run by private players like GMR, GVK, and Adani Group

Airport Upgrades Include

- 2,465-metre runway (A320 compatible)
- New terminal capacity:
 - 1.3 million passengers annually

Expected to:

- Boost tourism
- Enhance regional connectivity
- Generate employment

Strategic Relevance

- Supports the regional economic development of the northern Maldives
- Strengthens India-Maldives civil aviation cooperation

Challenges

Past trust deficit

- GMR contract cancellation remains a sensitive precedent

Political climate in Maldives

- Leadership shifts influence foreign policy orientation.

Strategic competition

- Other powers - particularly China - are active infrastructure players in the Maldives

Operational risks

- Long-term management contracts require regulatory certainty.

Public perception & sovereignty concerns

- Foreign involvement in critical infrastructure can trigger domestic debate.

Way Forward

Confidence-building approach

- Transparent agreements
- Legal safeguards for investments

Incremental engagement

- Start with technical support and training
- Gradually scale involvement

Regional connectivity vision

- Integrate the Maldives into broader Indian Ocean aviation and tourism networks.

Balanced diplomacy

- Maintain economic partnership while respecting Maldivian sovereignty.

Promote sustainable airport operations.

- Green infrastructure
- Local employment generation

Conclusion

The Maldives' request to involve Indian airport experts - despite the GMR dispute a decade earlier - signals renewed trust and pragmatic cooperation. Managing Hanimaadhoo International Airport would not only strengthen India-Maldives strategic and economic ties but also support regional connectivity and development in the northern Maldives. However, success will depend on stable policy frameworks, confidence, and carefully negotiated terms that protect both partners' interests.

5. Centre pre-publishes draft Rules for four Labour Codes.

Why in the News?

The Union Labour Ministry has pre-published the draft Rules under the four Labour Codes on its website.

The draft Rules:

- Mandate a 48-hour work week
- Define workers, wages, employment categories, social security, gratuity and bonus.
- Lay down provisions for women working night shifts
- Extend social security to gig and platform workers
- The public has been given 45 days to submit feedback.

Background

Parliament passed four Labour Codes to consolidate 29 central labour laws:

- Code on Wages, 2019
- Industrial Relations Code, 2020
- Code on Social Security, 2020
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020

Aim:

- Simplify compliance
- Modernise labour regulation
- Expand coverage

Implementation required Rules under the Codes, now published in draft form. These Rules subsume multiple earlier labour rules, ensuring uniformity.



Features

Standard Work Conditions

- 48 hours/week work limit
- Overtime and wage rules aligned to national standards.

Minimum Wage Determination

- Based on a standard working-class family:
 - Employee + spouse + two children (3 adult consumption units)

Key criteria include:

- 2,700 calories/day per unit
- 66 metres of cloth per year
- Housing cost = 10% of food & clothing
- Fuel/electricity/misc = 20%
- Education/medical/recreation = 25% contingency

Minimum wages vary by:

- Geographical region
- Skill level — unskilled to highly skilled

A Technical Committee to advise on skill categorisation.

Floor Wage

- To be fixed by a Central Advisory Board
- Based on minimum living standards.

Social Security Expansion

- Replaces earlier EPF, ESI, gratuity & welfare rules.
- Establishes the National Social Security Board
 - Includes unorganised sector reps
 - 5 representatives of gig and platform workers (rotation basis)

Creche Facility

- Mandatory in establishments with 50+ employees
- For children below six years.

Protection for Women Night-Shift Workers

- Written consent required
- Employers must ensure:
 - Safe transport
 - CCTV surveillance
 - Safety arrangements

Industrial Relations Framework

- Trade unions allowed secret ballot verification
- Worker classification includes:
 - Permanent
 - Temporary
 - Apprentices
 - Probationers
 - Badlis
 - Fixed-Term Employment
 - Casual
- Fixed-term employment based on a written contract.

Significance

- Simplifies India's labour governance architecture
- Seeks to balance:
 - Worker protection
 - Business-friendly regulation
- Recognises gig and platform work formally
- Expands social security inclusion
- Supports female workforce participation.

Challenges

- Implementation coordination is required between the Centre & States
- Possible worker concerns about work hours & contractualisation
- Gig sector regulation remains evolving
- Monitoring night-shift safety compliance
- Concerns about the dilution of collective bargaining rights

- Significant administrative restructuring is required.

Way Forward

- Stakeholder consultations
- Workers, unions, industry, and gig platforms
- Clear and uniform implementation roadmap
- Strong compliance mechanisms
- Worker awareness campaigns
- Periodic review of social security models
- Support for MSMEs during transition

Conclusion

The pre-publication of draft Rules under the Labour Codes marks a major step toward modernising India's labour framework. By defining wage standards, expanding social security - particularly for unorganised and gig workers - and enabling safer working environments, the Rules aim to balance economic flexibility with worker welfare. Effective implementation and cooperation between governments, industry and labour groups will be critical to realising these reforms' full potential.

6. Ban on oral formulations of nimesulide over 100 mg

Why in the News?

The Union Health Ministry has banned all oral formulations of nimesulide above 100 mg in immediate-release form with immediate effect.

The ban has been imposed under Section 26A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, citing serious health risks and the availability of safer alternatives.

The decision follows consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB).

Background

Nimesulide is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used for:

- Acute pain
- Painful osteoarthritis
- Primary dysmenorrhea

It is meant to be used:

- Short-term
- As second-line therapy (when other medicines are ineffective)

Concerns flagged globally and in India over the years:

- Potential liver toxicity (hepatotoxicity)
- Reports of adverse reactions
- Risk-benefit assessment controversies

India has previously reviewed nimesulide safety multiple times; this ban represents a renewed precautionary regulatory stance.

Features of the Ban

What is Banned

- Oral immediate-release formulations containing nimesulide above 100 mg

What is NOT Banned

- Oral formulations below 100 mg
- Sustained/extended-release tablets
- Topical gels/creams
- Suppositories

Legal Basis

- Imposed under Section 26A, Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
- Implemented immediately

Reason for Ban

- **Government satisfied that:**
 - Higher-dose immediate-release oral forms pose health risks
 - Safer alternatives exist

Scope

- Applies to manufacture, sale, and distribution

Medical Context

Benefits

- Pain relief
- Fever control
- Anti-inflammatory action



Risks

- Liver toxicity

- Particularly with prolonged or high-dose use
 - Risk increases in vulnerable patients
- Hence, recommended restricted, cautious use only.

Relevance to Fixed-Drug Combinations (FDCs)

- Nimesulide is sometimes combined with other drugs

FDCs are popular due to:

- Enhanced therapeutic effect
- Lower cost
- Better patient adherence
- The ban directly affects high-dose immediate-release oral FDCs containing nimesulide.

Challenges

Regulatory enforcement

- Monitoring manufacturing & retail compliance

Clinician awareness

- Need for updated prescribing practices

Patient safety

- Preventing misuse or over-the-counter sale

Pharmaceutical sector impact

- Reformulation & stock adjustments

Clear communication

- Avoid confusion regarding permitted formulations

Way Forward

Strengthen pharmacovigilance

- Track adverse drug reactions

Educate healthcare providers

- Promote safe prescribing

Public advisory

- Discourage self-medication

Encourage safer analgesics

- Use clinically established alternatives

Review NSAID safety periodically

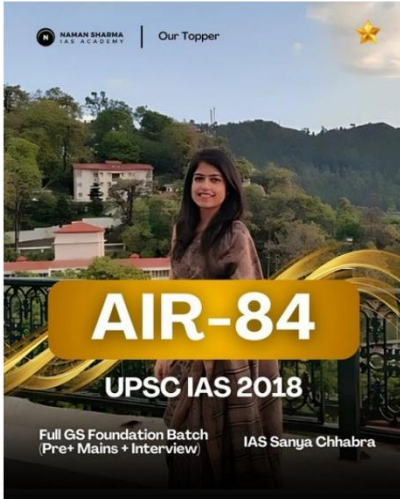
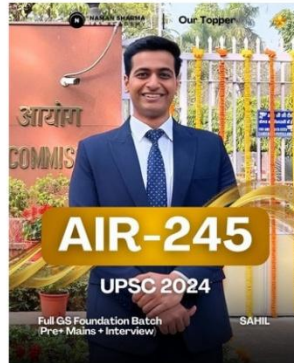
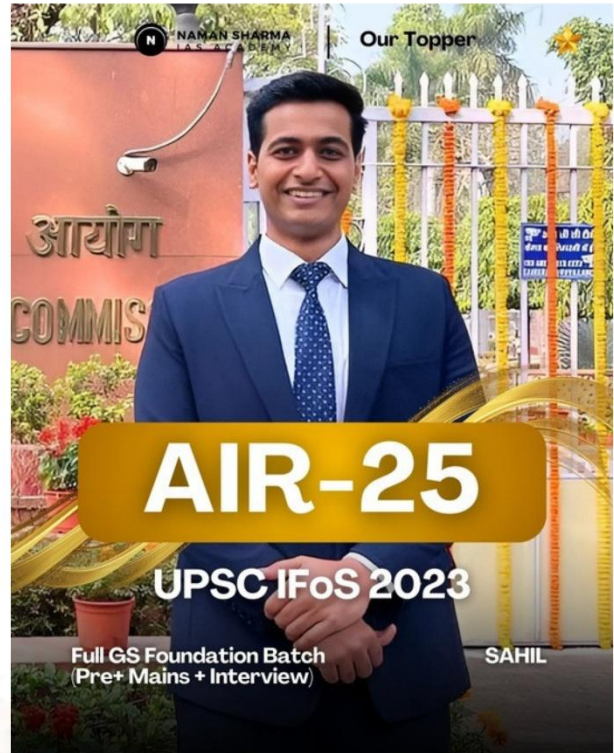
- Based on evolving global evidence

Conclusion

The Centre's move to ban oral immediate-release nimesulide above 100 mg reflects a precaution-first approach to public health, prioritising patient safety in light of potential liver toxicity risks. While lower-dose and controlled-release forms remain available, the decision underscores the need for judicious use of NSAIDs, stronger regulatory oversight, and increased awareness among prescribers and patients about medication safety.



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