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Current Affairs - 01 January 2026

A CALL FOR BAN ON 10-MINUTE DELIVERIES



- The **10-minute delivery model** promises ultra-fast doorstep delivery of food and groceries through algorithm-driven task allocation.

- It relies on dense dark-store networks, real-time tracking, and **high-speed last-mile delivery**, with penalties and incentives linked to time targets.

The Case for Banning 10-Minute Deliveries

- **Road Safety & Public Risk:** Ultra-compressed delivery timelines convert public roads into performance arenas, incentivising riders to violate traffic norms to avoid algorithmic penalties and income loss.

E.g. In Bengaluru delivery clusters, traffic police reports show spikes in wrong-way driving and signal jumping during peak “instant delivery” hours, directly linking speed targets to unsafe behaviour.

- **Occupational Health Crisis:** Algorithmic gamification pushes riders into prolonged high-stress cycles, where earnings depend on continuous hyper-alertness, leading to physical exhaustion and psychological burnout.

E.g. Medical clinics around Delhi-NCR dark stores report increased cases of back injuries, wrist strain, and anxiety disorders among riders working 10–12 hour speed-based shifts.

- **Human Rights & Labor Dignity:** Reducing workers to time-optimised “delivery nodes” strips them of rest, autonomy, and humane working conditions, undermining the principle of dignified labour.

E.g. Rider protests near quick-commerce warehouses highlight the absence of toilets, shade, or rest areas, revealing systemic neglect of basic workplace dignity.

- **Regulatory Misalignment:** The instant delivery model circumvents the employer’s duty of care by treating safety risks as individual choices rather than structural obligations.



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E.g. This directly conflicts with the Code on Social Security, which mandates health protection and accident safeguards for platform-based workers.

Challenges in Regulating Instant Delivery:

- **Consumer Dependency:** Once hyper-convenience becomes habitual, political resistance grows against any regulation perceived as reducing consumer comfort.

E.g. During recent gig-worker strikes, public backlash against service suspensions revealed how instant delivery has become a perceived necessity rather than a luxury.

- **Algorithmic Opacity:** Opaque algorithms mask penalties through ranking and visibility controls, making regulatory detection and enforcement extremely difficult.

E.g. Instead of explicit fines, platforms silently deprioritize slower riders via “shadow-banning,” reducing orders without leaving auditable evidence.

- **Policy Arbitrage:** Inconsistent state-level regulation allows platforms to concentrate operations in regions with weaker labour protections.

E.g. States like Rajasthan with specific gig-worker laws contrast sharply with states lacking any framework, enabling regulatory evasion.

- **Revenue vs. Safety Trade-off:** Speed restrictions may reduce order volumes, creating fear among workers that safety reforms will cut their already less incomes.

E.g. Many riders hesitate to support bans as surge incentives linked to fast deliveries form a significant portion of daily earnings.

- **Evasive Business Modeling:** Platforms adapt language without changing pressure, maintaining unsafe expectations under new branding.

E.g. Rebranding “10-minute delivery” as “Fastest” or “Priority” preserves the same speed incentives while bypassing explicit bans.

India should pivot to a “safe delivery economy” with transparent pay, enforceable protections, and social security that actually reaches riders. Regulating speed models now will prevent a future where convenience is subsidised by injury, debt, and silent coercion.



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FARMER SUICIDES IN INDIA



- Farmer suicides refer to deaths by suicide among cultivators and agricultural labourers, recorded annually by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

- It is a key indicator of agrarian distress, reflecting failures in income security, credit access, crop stability, and rural livelihoods.

Trends (1995–2023):

- **Scale of crisis:** Around 3.94 lakh farmers and agricultural labourers died by suicide over 28 years—about 13,600 deaths annually.
- **Regional concentration:** Southern and western India account for ~72.5% of all cases; Maharashtra and Karnataka are persistent epicentres.
- **Peak years:** The crisis intensified post-1995 (WTO entry), peaking between 2000–2009; 2002 was the deadliest year.
- **Crop-linked distress:** Expansion of Bt cotton in rain-fed regions raised input costs and risk, aggravating indebtedness amid weak price support.
- **Temporary relief phase:** Suicides declined after 2010, coinciding with MGNREGA, expanded insurance, and debt relief—lowest during 2015–2019.
- **Recent reversal:** 2023 saw a ~75% rise over 2022, partly due to delayed Covid-era reporting but also renewed shocks (droughts, price crashes).

Relevance for UPSC syllabus

- **GS Paper I (Indian Society):** Agrarian distress, regional inequality, rural livelihoods, social vulnerability.
- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Welfare schemes (MGNREGA), role of state interventions, institutional credit, social protection.
- **GS Paper III (Indian Economy & Agriculture):** Agricultural reforms, input costs, crop insurance, MSP, WTO impact, labour markets.



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PRALAY MISSILE



- Pralay is an indigenously developed solid-propellant, quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile designed for high-precision conventional strikes against a wide range of targets.

Aim:

- Provide the Indian Army and Indian Air Force with a rapid-response, high-accuracy conventional strike capability
- Strengthen tactical deterrence and battlefield dominance through precision strikes

Key features:

- **Quasi-ballistic trajectory:** Makes interception difficult for enemy air defence systems.
 - **Range:** ~150 km to 500 km
 - **Type:** Quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile
- **Solid propellant:** Ensures quick launch readiness and high reliability.
- **Advanced guidance and navigation:** Delivers high precision against diverse targets.
- **Multiple warhead capability:** Can carry different types of warheads for varied mission requirements.
- **Salvo launch capability:** Ability to fire multiple missiles in quick succession from the same launcher, enhancing saturation attack potential.

Significance:

- Boosts indigenous missile capability under Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence.
- Enhances India's conventional deterrence without escalating to strategic nuclear use.
- Improves operational readiness and survivability through rapid, accurate strikes.



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MARKET ACCESS SUPPORT (MAS) INTERVENTION



- The Market Access Support (MAS) Intervention is a government-backed programme that provides financial and institutional assistance to Indian exporters for accessing and expanding in international markets through curated trade and buyer-engagement activities.

Initiative under:

- Implemented under the **NIRYAT DISHA sub-scheme**
- Part of the **Export Promotion Mission (EPM)**

Jointly implemented by: The Department of Commerce, Ministry of MSME, and Ministry of Finance.

Aim:

- Strengthen global market access for Indian exporters
- Support MSMEs, first-time exporters and priority sectors
- Promote export diversification into new and emerging markets
- Enable predictable and outcome-driven export promotion

Key features:

- **Market access activities:** Support for Buyer-Seller Meets (BSMs), Mega Reverse BSMs, international trade fairs, exhibitions and trade delegations.
- **Advance planning:** A **3–5 year rolling calendar** of approved market access events to ensure continuity and predictability.
- **MSME focus:** Mandatory **minimum 35% MSME participation** in supported events, with prioritisation of smaller and new exporters.
- **Financial rationalisation:** Revised cost-sharing norms, event-wise financial ceilings and **partial airfare support** for exporters with turnover up to ₹75 lakh.
- **Digital governance:** End-to-end online processes via **trade.gov.in**, including approvals, fund release, monitoring and feedback.



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- **Outcome tracking:** Mandatory online feedback on buyer quality, leads generated and market relevance, with data-driven refinement of guidelines.
- **Technology push:** Upcoming component for **Proof-of-Concepts and product demonstrations** in tech-intensive and sunrise sectors.

AMAZON'S STINGLESS BEES



- Stingless bees are a group of bees that either lack stingers or have non-functional stingers, making them harmless to humans. They are crucial pollinators in tropical ecosystems.

Origin:

- Among the **oldest bee species on Earth**, existing for nearly **80 million years** since the time of dinosaurs.
- Around **500 species globally**, with nearly **half found in the Amazon**.

Habitat:

- Tropical forests across the world.
- Particularly abundant in the **Amazon rainforest**, especially in **Peru**, which hosts over **170 species**.

Key features:

- Primary rainforest pollinators, responsible for pollinating over 80% of Amazonian flora.
- Support globally important crops such as coffee, cacao, avocados and blueberries.
- Deeply embedded in the cultural, medicinal and spiritual traditions of Indigenous communities like the Asháninka and Kukama-Kukamiria.

What it means?

- The legal recognition grants stingless bees inherent rights, including the right to exist, maintain healthy populations, regenerate natural cycles, live in pollution-free habitats, and be legally represented when threatened.



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Significance:

- **Global legal first:** First time insects have been granted legal rights anywhere in the world
- **Strengthens conservation:** Provides legal tools to challenge deforestation, pollution and habitat destruction
- **Advances Rights of Nature:** Shifts environmental law from human-centred protection to ecosystem-centred justice

BALTIC SEA



The Baltic Sea is a semi-enclosed, shallow, brackish water body and an arm of the North Atlantic Ocean, making it the largest expanse of brackish water in the world. It has historically served as a major trade and strategic maritime corridor in northern Europe.

Located in: Northern Europe

- Extends from southern Denmark in the southwest to near the Arctic Circle in the north
- Connected to the North Sea through narrow straits such as the Øresund, Great Belt and Little Belt.

Bordering nations: The Baltic Sea is bordered by **nine countries**:

- Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany.
- Eight of these are **NATO members**, adding to its geopolitical significance.

Key features:

- **Low salinity (brackish water):** Due to limited connection with the North Sea and large freshwater inflow from rivers like the Vistula and Oder.
- **Shallow seabed:** Makes undersea cables and pipelines vulnerable to damage and sabotage.



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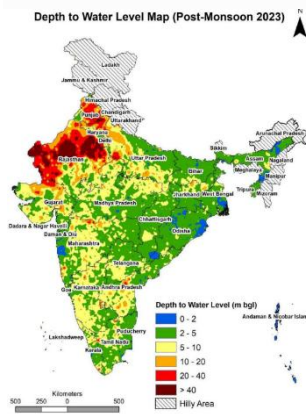


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- **Sub-regions:** Includes the Gulf of Finland, Gulf of Bothnia, Gulf of Riga, and straits like Kattegat and Skagerrak.
- **Strategic infrastructure hub:** Hosts critical energy pipelines, power cables and telecom links.
- **Cold climate and seasonal ice:** Parts of the sea freeze in winter, especially in the Gulfs of Bothnia and Finland.

DYNAMIC GROUND WATER RESOURCE ASSESSMENT REPORT, 2024



Reasons for groundwater depletion in India:

- **Agriculture-driven over-extraction:** Groundwater supports ~62% of irrigation, with water-intensive crops (rice, sugarcane) dominating NW and peninsular India, pushing 11.13% units into 'Over-exploited' category.
- **Highly seasonal rainfall dependence:** Nearly 75% of annual rainfall occurs in just four months (June–September), causing sharp temporal mismatch between recharge and year-round withdrawal.
- **Hydro-geological constraints:** About two-thirds of India lies in hard rock terrains, where groundwater storage is limited to fractured zones, making extraction unsustainable.
- **Energy-subsidy distortion:** Cheap or free electricity encourages indiscriminate pumping, especially in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu where >25% units are Critical/Over-exploited.
- **Urban–industrial pressure:** Rising urbanisation and industrial clusters increase non-agricultural extraction, reflected in 245.64 BCM annual groundwater draft 24.

Initiatives taken to counter depletion:

1. **National Aquifer Mapping Programme (NAQUIM & NAQUIM 2.0):** Scientific mapping and aquifer-level management planning.



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2. **Atal Bhujal Yojana (ATAL JAL):** Community-led demand-side management in water-stressed blocks.
3. **Master Plan for Artificial Recharge (2020):** Proposal for **42 crore structures** to harness **185 BCM** of monsoon rainfall.
4. **Jal Shakti Abhiyan – Catch the Rain:** Nationwide focus on rainwater harvesting and water conservation.
5. **PMKSY – Groundwater component:** Promotes efficient irrigation and conjunctive water use in *Safe*

Challenges associated with groundwater stress:

- **Water security risk:** Groundwater supplies 85% of rural and ~50% of urban drinking water, making depletion a direct human security concern.
- **Regional inequality:** Over-exploitation is concentrated in NW India, western arid regions, and peninsular crystalline belts, creating uneven development outcomes.
- **Quality deterioration:** 127 assessment units (1.88%) are saline, while arsenic and fluoride hazards coexist in quantity-stressed aquifers.
- **Climate vulnerability:** Erratic rainfall and declining irrigation return flows caused a marginal fall in recharge from 449.08 BCM (2023) to 446.90 BCM (2024).
- **Governance fragmentation:** Groundwater is a State subject, resulting in weak regulation, limited pricing signals, and uneven adoption of scientific management norms.

Conclusion:

The 2024 Ground Water Assessment shows cautious optimism, with improved recharge and declining over-exploitation. However, regional stress, climate risks, and governance gaps continue to threaten sustainability. Moving forward, aquifer-based planning, community participation, and climate-resilient water governance are essential for India's long-term water security.