



*For success in a changing world*

## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 03-01-2026**

### **Mapping Perspective**

1. Iran

### **Prelims Perspective**

2. Copper (Cu)
3. Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocua leschenaultii*)

### **Mains Perspective**

4. Market Access Support (MAS) Intervention
5. Behind gig workers' strike on New Year's eve: A call for ban on 10-minute deliveries

## Iran

**Syllabus: GS-1; Geography-Mapping, GS-2; International Relations**

### Context

- Nationwide protests have erupted across Iran, driven by severe economic distress, sharp currency collapse, and rising inflation.

### About Iran:

- **Location:** West Asia; capital: **Tehran**
- **Borders:**
  - **Land:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan (north); Afghanistan, Pakistan (east); Iraq (west); Turkey (northwest)
  - **Maritime:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia
- **Water bodies:** Caspian Sea (north), Persian Gulf & Gulf of Oman (south)



### Geographical Features:

- **Terrain:** Predominantly **Iranian Plateau**, featuring deserts like **Dasht-e Kavir** and **Dasht-e Lut**
- **Mountains:** Zagros (west), Alborz (north)
- **Highest Peak:** **Mount Damavand** – highest volcano in the Middle East
- **Climate:** Arid to semi-arid; subtropical along Caspian coast

- **Major Rivers:** Karun, Dez, Karkheh, Diyala – vital for agriculture
- **Natural Resources:** Oil, natural gas, coal, chromium, copper, iron ore, lead, manganese, zinc, sulphur

### Contextual Importance

- Geopolitics: Strait of Hormuz makes Iran strategically crucial in global energy security
- Economy & Trade: Port disruptions can affect global oil markets
- International Relations: Iran's geography and resources influence its foreign policy and regional power dynamics

## Copper (Cu)

### Syllabus: GS-3; Economics, GS-Environment & Resources

#### Context:

- Copper prices reached a record high in December 2025, crossing \$12,000 per tonne on the London Metal Exchange.

#### About Copper:

- **Symbol:** Cu
- **Occurrence:** Found as free metal; major minerals include chalcocite, chalcopyrite, bornite.
- **Physical Properties:** High conductivity, malleable, corrosion-resistant
- **Recyclability:** 100% recyclable without loss of quality

#### Major Copper Reserves:

- **India:** Rajasthan (Khetri, Jhunjhunu), Madhya Pradesh (Malanjkhand, largest open-pit mine), Jharkhand (Singhbhum belt)
- **Global:** Chile, Australia, Peru, Russia



### Applications:

- Electrical: Wiring, motors, transformers
- Construction: Roofing, plumbing, heating
- Automobile: Wiring, radiators, connectors
- Electronics: Integrated circuits, semiconductors
- Renewable Energy: Solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles

## **Sirkeer Malkoha (Taccocua leschenaultii)**

**Syllabus: GS-3; Environment & Biodiversity**

### **Context:**

- Recently, the rare Sirkeer Malkoha was recorded for the first time in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand, previously known mainly from plains regions.



### **About the Species:**

- **Common Name:** Sirkeer Malkoha / Sirkeer Cuckoo
- **Scientific Name:** *Taccocua leschenaultii*
- **Distribution:** Sub-Himalayan Indian subcontinent; also in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka; patchy presence in Pakistan and Rajasthan.
- **Habitat:** Scrub and thin forests, typically below 1500 m altitude; prefers hilly terrain.
- **Behavior:** Unlike some cuckoos, it does not lay eggs in other birds' nests. Quiet species; males and females look alike.
- **Diet:** Small lizards, insects, berries, seeds.

➤ **Physical Features:**

- Length: 42–44 cm
- Olive-brown upper plumage; lighter underparts with sometimes yellowish tinge
- Long tail, curved red beak with yellow tip
- Grey legs, zygodactyl feet (two toes forward, two backward) for gripping branches and ground movement

**Conservation Status:**

➤ **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern

## **India's status as world's rice leader augurs a water crisis**

**Syllabus: GS-1: Geography – Ground Water Resource.**

**Context:**

- India has emerged as the **world's largest rice producer and exporter**, overtaking China.
- Annual rice production exceeds **140 million tonnes**.
- India accounts for **~40% of global rice exports**, making rice a key strategic agri-commodity.
- However, this leadership is increasingly associated with **severe water stress**, especially groundwater depletion.

### **Why Rice Cultivation Is Water-Intensive**

#### **High Water Requirement**

- Rice requires **3,000–4,000 litres of water per kg** of output.
- Indian rice cultivation uses **significantly more water** per kg than the global average due to:
  - Flood irrigation practices
  - Hot climatic conditions
  - Inefficient on-farm water management

#### **Groundwater Dependence**

- Major rice-producing states such as **Punjab** and **Haryana** rely heavily on groundwater.

- Reasons:
  - Limited surface water availability
  - Expansion of tube-well irrigation
- Groundwater levels have declined from **30–40 feet to over 100–200 feet** in many areas.
- Several blocks are classified as “**over-exploited**” or “**critical**”.

### Policy-Induced Drivers of Water Stress

#### Minimum Support Price (MSP) Bias

- Repeated increases in rice MSP have:
  - Encouraged monocropping of paddy
  - Reduced incentives for crop diversification
- Rice remains economically safer than pulses or millets despite higher water costs.

#### Power and Input Subsidies

- Free or highly subsidised electricity:
  - Makes groundwater extraction artificially cheap
  - Encourages excessive pumping
- Fertiliser and procurement policies further lock farmers into paddy cultivation.

### Key Impacts

#### 1. Groundwater Depletion

- Extraction far exceeds recharge rates.
- Deep aquifers are non-renewable in the short term.
- Even normal or excess monsoons fail to reverse long-term depletion trends.

#### 2. Rising Cost and Farmer Stress

- Deeper borewells → higher capital and energy costs.
- Small and marginal farmers are disproportionately affected.
- Long-term viability of rice farming is under threat.

#### 3. Food Security vs Water Security Trade-off

- India already produces **more rice than domestic consumption needs**.
- Export-driven production intensifies water stress without proportionate food security gains.

- Raises concerns over exporting “**virtual water**”.

#### 4. Climate Vulnerability

- Over-reliance on groundwater reduces resilience to:
  - Erratic monsoons
  - Heat stress
  - Climate-induced droughts

### Government Responses and Limitations

#### Crop Diversification Efforts

- Some states offer **financial incentives** to shift away from paddy.
- Examples include per-hectare subsidies for alternative crops.
- Limitations:
  - Incentives are temporary
  - Lack assured procurement and MSP support like rice

#### Technological Solutions (Under-utilised)

- Water-saving methods:
  - Direct Seeded Rice (DSR)
  - Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD)
- Adoption remains limited due to:
  - Risk perception
  - Knowledge gaps
  - Absence of strong institutional backing

#### Way Forward

- **Rationalise MSP and subsidies** to reflect water scarcity.
- Promote **agro-ecological suitability-based cropping**.
- Scale up **micro-irrigation and water-efficient rice technologies**.
- Strengthen **groundwater governance**:
  - Community-based management
  - Aquifer mapping and monitoring
- Align agricultural trade policy with **long-term water sustainability**.

## Market Access Support (MAS) Intervention

**Syllabus:** GS-3: Indian Economy – Export Promotion.

### **Context:**

The Government of India has launched the **Market Access Support (MAS) Intervention** under the **Export Promotion Mission** to strengthen global market access for Indian exporters—especially **MSMEs** and **first-time exporters**.

### **What is MAS Intervention?**

- A **government-backed programme** providing **financial and institutional support** to help Indian exporters **access and expand** in international markets.
- Focuses on **curated trade promotion** and **buyer-engagement activities** to deliver measurable outcomes.



### **Institutional Framework**

- **Sub-scheme:** Implemented under **NIRYAT DISHA**
- **Implemented by (jointly):**

- Department of Commerce
- Ministry of MSME
- Ministry of Finance

### Aims

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

### Key Features

- **Market Access Activities:**
  - Buyer-Seller Meets (BSMs), **Mega Reverse BSMs**, international trade fairs, exhibitions, and trade delegations
- **Advance Planning:**
  - **3-5 year rolling calendar** of approved events for predictability and continuity
- **MSME Focus:**
  - **Minimum 35% MSME participation**; priority to smaller and new exporters
- **Financial Rationalisation:**
  - Revised cost-sharing norms
  - Event-wise financial ceilings
  - **Partial airfare support** for exporters with turnover up to **₹75 lakh**
- **Digital Governance:**
  - End-to-end online processes via **trade.gov.in** (approvals, fund release, monitoring, feedback)
- **Outcome Tracking:**
  - Mandatory online feedback on **buyer quality, leads generated, and market relevance**; data-driven guideline refinement
- **Technology Push (Upcoming):**
  - **Proof-of-Concepts (PoCs)** and **product demonstrations** for tech-intensive and sunrise sectors

### Significance

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- Enhances **global competitiveness** through better buyer access and market intelligence
- **Lowers entry barriers** for MSMEs and first-time exporters
- Supports India's objective of **diversifying exports** beyond traditional markets and products

## **Behind gig workers' strike on New Year's eve: A call for ban on 10-minute deliveries**

**Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy – Labour Reforms.**

**Context:**

- On **31 December 2025**, gig workers across multiple Indian cities undertook a **nationwide log-off/strike** from app-based food delivery and quick-commerce platforms.
- The strike was strategically timed on **New Year's Eve**, one of the highest-demand days for platform services.
- It followed earlier protests during Christmas, indicating **escalating labour unrest** in the gig economy.

### **Who Are Gig Workers?**

- Workers engaged through **digital platforms** on a task or contract basis.
- Examples: food delivery riders, quick-commerce delivery personnel.
- Classified as **neither formal employees nor traditional self-employed workers**, leading to regulatory ambiguity.

### **Key Stakeholders**

- **Gig Workers / Delivery Partners**
- **Platform Companies**
  - Zomato
  - Swiggy
  - Blinkit
  - Zepto
- **Unions**

- Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers
- **Government and Regulators**
  - Ministry of Labour and Employment

## Major Demands of Gig Workers

### Road Safety and Delivery Targets

- Demand to **ban the 10-minute delivery model**
- Concerns:
  - Encourages **overspeeding and traffic violations**
  - Increases risk of **accidents and fatalities**
  - Shifts safety burden entirely onto workers

### Fair and Predictable Wages

- Opposition to **low base pay** and over-dependence on incentives
- Concerns over:
  - **Algorithm-driven wage fluctuations**
  - Long distances for minimal compensation
- Demands include:
  - Minimum assured income
  - Transparent pay calculation mechanisms

### Social Security and Legal Protection

- Inclusion under **formal labour protection frameworks**
- Access to:
  - Health insurance
  - Accident coverage
  - Old-age security
- Effective implementation of provisions under the **Code on Social Security, 2020** for gig and platform workers

### Algorithmic Accountability

- Demand for transparency in:
  - Order allocation
  - Ratings and penalties

- Deactivation of worker IDs
- Opposition to **unilateral and opaque algorithmic control**



## Nature of the Strike

- Workers **voluntarily logged off** from apps instead of physical demonstrations.
- Participation varied across cities.
- Some allegations of:
  - Platform pressure to log back in
  - Temporary suspension or threat of account deactivation

## Platform Response

- Introduction of:
  - Surge pricing
  - Higher incentives for active workers
- Public statements highlighting:
  - Minimal disruption
  - Continued belief in quick-delivery business models

## Impact of the Strike

### Short-Term

- Mixed operational impact:
  - Delivery delays in some cities
  - Near-normal services in others

### Long-Term

- Brought gig-worker issues into:
  - Public discourse
  - Policy debates
- Renewed focus on:
  - Safety vs convenience trade-off
  - Sustainability of ultra-fast delivery models

## Governance and Labour Reforms

- Highlights gaps in:
  - Labour law coverage
  - Enforcement mechanisms for gig workers

## Economic Dimension

- Questions sustainability of:
  - Low-cost, high-speed platform capitalism
- Raises concerns on:
  - Formalisation of labour
  - Race-to-the-bottom pricing models

## Ethical Dimension

- Tension between:
  - Consumer convenience
  - Worker dignity and safety

## Challenges in Regulating Gig Work

- Fragmented workforce
- Lack of employer-employee relationship
- High worker turnover
- Strong bargaining power of platforms

## Policies Related to Gig Workers in India

### Code on Social Security, 2020

- **First legal recognition** of gig workers and platform workers in India.
- Defines:

- Gig worker: Person earning outside traditional employer-employee relationship.
- Platform worker: Gig worker engaged via online platforms.

➤ **Key Provisions:**

- Creation of **social security schemes** for gig/platform workers.
- Coverage includes:
  - Life & disability insurance
  - Health & maternity benefits
  - Old-age protection

➤ **Limitation:**

- Schemes are **enabling, not mandatory**
- No guaranteed minimum wage or work hours.

## National Database for Unorganised Workers (e-SHRAM Portal)

- Digital platform for **registration of unorganised and gig workers**.
- Provides:
  - Unique identification number
  - Linkage with welfare schemes
- Helps in:
  - Policy targeting
  - Disaster and social assistance delivery
- **Challenge:** Registration does not automatically ensure benefits.

## Way Forward

- Statutory minimum standards for:
  - Pay
  - Safety
  - Working hours
- Algorithmic transparency norms
- Tripartite dialogue:
  - Government-Platforms-Workers
- Strengthening social security boards for gig workers at State level

### Conclusion

The New Year's Eve gig workers' strike underscores **structural vulnerabilities in India's platform economy**. It signals an urgent need to rebalance innovation with regulation, ensuring that technological efficiency does not come at the cost of worker safety, income security, and dignity.

### Practice Qs:

Q. Gig workers fall in a regulatory grey zone between employment and self-employment. Discuss the governance challenges this creates and suggest institutional mechanisms to address them. (15 marks, 250 words)