



THE 10-MINUTE MIRAGE: SPEED, SWEAT, AND THE HIDDEN ‘COST OF CONVENIENCE’

ABSTRACT

In early 2026, India saw a major shift in the way major e-commerce giants branded, they departed from their previous followed and widely competitive-aggressive marketing strategies like the ‘10-minute delivery promise’. But this shift was not an isolated event, it was a product of repeated media, public and parliamentary attention on the nature of atrocities faced by the ‘delivery boys’ that actually worked around the clock to fulfil the brand’s promise. This issue was first brought in focus by *Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha* during his zero-hour discussions. The branding strategy undertaken by e-commerce giants, reflects a growing concern over labour rights, road safety, and the ethical limits of ultra-fast commerce. While the withdrawal of such branding is symbolically significant, it also exposes deeper structural issues within India’s gig economy that remain unresolved.

INTRODUCTION

India, now officially the world’s most populous country, also possesses one of the largest and fastest-growing workforces. And as the nation urbanizes and consumption expands, the demand for goods and services rises simultaneously. We often believe, that this demand is met through complex systems of trade and commerce, satisfied by large-scale logistics and networks of rapid, last-mile delivery systems. While this might be true on a macro-level, the focus on growth metrics and digital innovation, often overlook the human infrastructure that actually sustains this ecosystem. At the ground level, the responsibility of fulfilling this ever-accelerating demand falls on the ‘gig workers’, we know as delivery riders from *zepto, blinkit, swiggy* platforms, who form the invisible backbone of India’s urban economy. This dependency is particularly felt in the densely populated cities, where time is treated as a scarce commodity, these workers bridge the gap between digital convenience and physical delivery. Yet, their role is shaped by intense performance pressures, minimal labour protections, and algorithm-driven management systems. The rise of ‘10-minute delivery’ promise amplifies these pressures, embedding *unrealistic expectations* into everyday transactions.



THE HUMAN COST OF ULTRA-FAST DELIVERY

The '10-minute delivery' model gained prominence in India's quick-commerce sector around the years 2021-2023, with companies like *Blinkit*, *Zepto*, *Swiggy Insta-mart*, *Big basket*, etc. marketing *ultra-fast* fulfilment as a competitive advantage over other players. But over time, and rightfully so, concerns began to surface regarding the actual feasibility and 'human cost' of such promises. *Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha* brought these issues into parliamentary discourse, highlighting how such branding indirectly coerced delivery personnel into unsafe and exploitative working conditions¹. This intervention contributed to a broader policy response, with the *Union Labour Ministry* reportedly urging e-commerce platforms around January 2026 to reconsider or discontinue '10-minute delivery' branding, this reflects a shift from uncritical acceptance of platform efficiency toward scrutiny of its labour implications².

The pressure created by ultra-fast delivery commitments operates as a 'double-edged sword'. On one side, workers who are more often than not, underpaid, overworked (sometimes even 15-16 hrs non-stop) and incentivized through per-delivery commissions, are compelled to meet strict deadlines, engage in rash driving, traffic violations, and heightened accident risks³. On the other hand, the general public is also exposed to these risks, as the urgency embedded in delivery timelines, create an unsafe environment on the road⁴. These are not empty speculations, but backed by official data. According to the most recent report of the *Ministry of Road Transport and Highways*, road safety data in India already indicates high vulnerability for two-wheeler riders amounting to nearly 4.8 lakh accidents 'recorded' during the 2023 calendar year, and a 4.18% increase in accidents with 2.61% increase in fatalities compared to the previous year (2022)⁵.

¹ PTI, *AAP's Raghav Chadha Demands Ban on 10-Minute Delivery Services, Protection for Gig Workers*, The Hindu, Dec. 5, 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/aaps-raghav-chadha-demands-ban-on-10-minute-delivery-services-protection-for-gig-workers/article70361292.ece>.

² The Hindu Bureau, *On Union Labour Ministry's Intervention, Quick Commerce Platforms to Stop 10-Minute Delivery Practice*, The Hindu, Jan. 13, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/union-labour-ministry-intervenes-quick-commerce-platforms-to-stop-10-minute-delivery-practice/article70504896.ece>.

³ *Blinkit Delivery Agent Reveals He Earns Rs 763 after Delivering 28 Orders in 15 Hours, Video Sparks Backlash: 'Who's Going to Take Care of Your Employees?'*, The Indian Express (Dec. 15, 2025), <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-in-india/blinkit-delivery-agent-reveals-he-earns-rs-763-after-delivering-28-orders-in-15-hours-video-sparks-backlash-10420867/>.

⁴ *Pressure Was Real: Raghav Chadha Hails End of 10-Minute Delivery Branding*, India Today (Jan. 13, 2026), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/aap-mp-raghav-chadha-blinkit-10-minute-delivery-gig-workers-2851281-2026-01-13>.

⁵ MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS, GOV'T OF INDIA, *ROAD ACCIDENTS IN INDIA 2023*, August 29 2025, <https://morth.gov.in/backend/documents/uploaded/Road-Accident-in-India-2023-Publications.pdf>.



Simultaneously, the labour and humanitarian concerns also become even more acute under extreme weather conditions. Currently, the average day in India looks like anywhere between 30^o-40^o c! Taking note of the same, the *Union Labor Minister*, with a view to safeguard the daily wage workers from extreme heats and heat waves issued an advisory, urging the employers to reschedule their work hours, essentially one that does not require them to work during 11 am-4 pm window⁶⁷. Yet, surprisingly enough, you can still find the ‘deliver boys’, running round-the-clock to deliver your ‘summer-essentials’ in a packed container on their motorbikes, battling summer heats on one hand and traffic lines on the other. Its ironic, how even the Government advisory misses substantial amount of the workforce, (regardless of them being independent contractors and formal employees) when it claims to safeguard the very same people. But this is not the end of their crisis, after surviving the brutal works hours, extreme heat, traffic lines and pollution, they are again penalised in form of penalties, in case they fail to meet their required targets, within the promised ‘10-minute window’. As, if this wasn’t enough, the so-called gig workers are not given any social security benefits either, as they form part of the informal and unorganised sector.

All this combined, only raises a broader structural critique- the narrative of the gig economy which appears as a symbol of flexibility and innovation, is in reality nothing but a pattern of control and exploitation. The algorithmic management systems only dictate routes, time expectations, and performance ratings, leaving the workers with limited, close to no autonomy. The ‘10-minute delivery’ promise, in this context, is less a technological achievement and more an operational burden shifted onto the workforce. Thankfully, the recent removal of such branding suggests an acknowledgment, whether driven by public pressure, regulatory scrutiny, or reputational risk. Lastly, these models may appear efficient and time -saving, but they are not at all socially sustainable.

⁶ Yogima Seth Sharma & Teena Thacker, *Heatwave Alert: Centre Issues Advisory, Work Hours May Shift*, The Economic Times, Apr. 28, 2026, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/heatwave-alert-centre-issues-advisory-work-hours-nay-shift/articleshow/130563660.cms?from=mdr>.

⁷ The Hindu Bureau, *Reschedule Work Hours, Provide Drinking Water to Workers: Centre’s Advisory to States on Heat Wave*, The Hindu, Apr. 28, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/labour-ministry-issues-nationwide-advisory-to-protect-workers-from-heatwave/article70917087.ece>

especially in the Indian subcontinent where traffic rules are practically non-existent and civic sense a myth!⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

The rollback of ‘10-minute delivery’ branding in India marks in a way, even if partial, marks a significant shift in the discourse around gig work and platform accountability. It reflects increasing recognition of the human costs embedded in hyper-speed commerce, brought into focus through political advocacy and public debate. However, *only* removing a slogan does not automatically transform working conditions. There is still, a need for clearer labour protections for gig workers, enforcement of safety standards, transparency in algorithmic management, and alignment of business models with realistic and humane expectations. Without such structural changes, the invisible wheels of India’s urban economy will continue to turn, but at a cost that remains unevenly borne!



⁸ Raghav Chadha Thanks Centre for Removing ‘10-Minute Delivery’ Branding from Quick-Commerce Apps, The Indian Express (Jan. 13, 2026), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/raghav-chadha-delivery-branding-quick-commerce-apps-10471040/>.

⁹ Transforming India’s Road Safety Landscape, Drishti IAS, <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/transforming-indias-road-safety-landscape> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).