



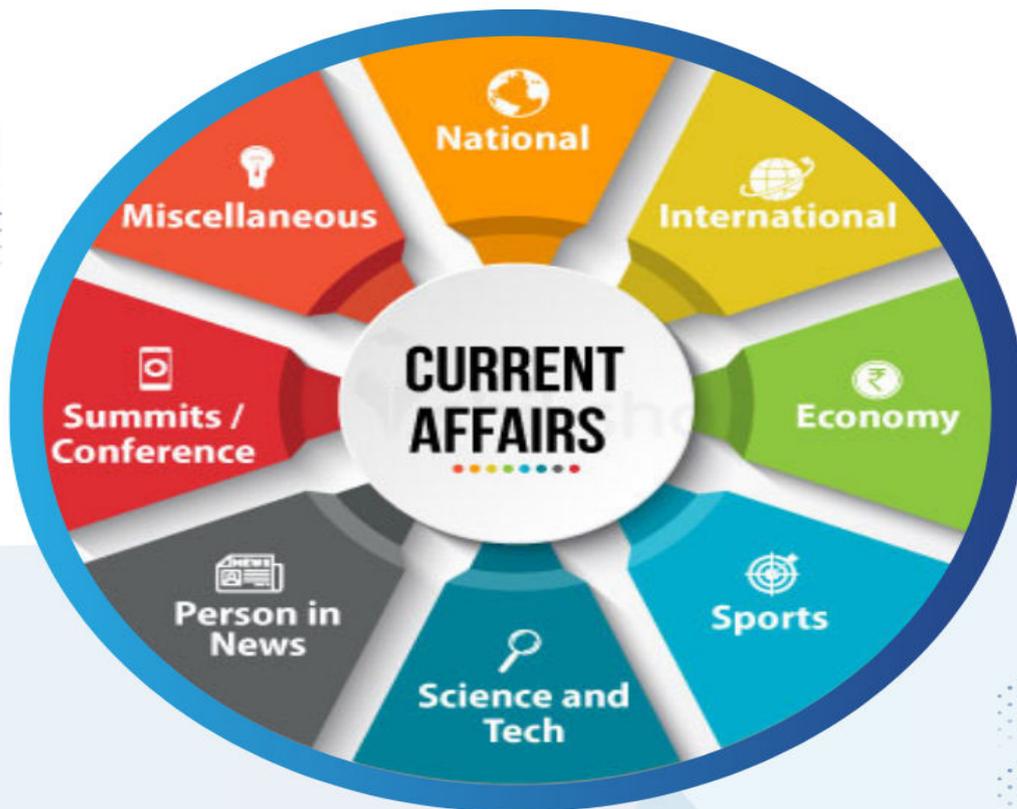
“ We help you reach for the star ”

# **VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY** & **STUDY CENTRE**

## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION**

**DATE: 10/02/2026 (TUESDAY)**



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## 1. Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and Electoral Roll Integrity

The Supreme Court recently scrutinized the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process in West Bengal, flagging the use of "restrictive" software tools by the Election Commission (EC) that fail to account for linguistic and cultural nuances in voter data.

- **Critique of Algorithmic Rigidity:** The SC observed that the EC's software tools lack tolerance for "natural differences" in Indian names, such as phonetic variations (e.g., 'Roy' vs. 'Ray') or common middle names like 'Kumar', leading to unnecessary mass summons.
- **Scale of Discrepancies:** Out of approximately 1.4 crore individuals flagged for 'logical discrepancies,' nearly 70 lakh were called for hearings over minor clerical or naming inconsistencies, raising concerns regarding voter harassment and administrative overreach.
- **Extended Timeline for Redressal:** A Bench headed by CJI Surya Kant directed the EC to extend the 'claims-and-objections' phase beyond the February 14 deadline to ensure no genuine voter is disenfranchised due to technical hurdles.
- **Role of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs):** The Court clarified that while micro-observers assist in the process, the final statutory authority to include or exclude names remains solely with the EROs, maintaining the established legal hierarchy.
- **Security and Accountability:** The State DGP has been ordered to file an affidavit regarding allegations of orchestrated violence and destruction of documents at verification centers, highlighting the intersection of law and order with electoral purity.
- **Human Resource Deployment:** To expedite the process and ensure accuracy, the Court sanctioned the temporary deployment of 8,505 additional State personnel to assist the EC in SIR operations.



### Key Definitions

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A rigorous process undertaken by the EC to clean and update electoral rolls, involving door-to-door verification or intense scrutiny of "logical errors" to eliminate duplicates and fake entries.
- **Logical Discrepancies:** Errors identified by software algorithms where data points (like age, name, or relation) do not align with predefined patterns, often triggering a manual verification requirement.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 324:** Vests the "superintendence, direction, and control" of elections and the preparation of electoral rolls in the Election Commission of India.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Sections 15 to 25 govern the preparation and revision of electoral rolls, ensuring that every citizen has the right to be registered unless disqualified.
- **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960:** Provides the procedural framework for the preparation of rolls and the mechanism for filing claims and objections.
- **Right to Vote:** While not a fundamental right, the SC has consistently held it as a "statutory right" and a "constitutional right" essential for a vibrant democracy.



### Additional Key Points for Analysis

- **Cultural Sensitivity in Tech:** The case highlights the need for "Ethical AI" and culturally aware algorithms in governance to prevent the marginalization of communities based on linguistic diversity.
- **Administrative Burden:** Mass verification exercises based on rigid software parameters can strain state resources and discourage voter participation.
- **Judicial Oversight:** The intervention showcases the Judiciary's role as a watchdog to ensure that administrative efficiency does not override the fundamental democratic right of adult suffrage.

### Conclusion

While the purification of electoral rolls is essential for "free and fair elections," the process must be empathetic to India's socio-cultural fabric. Technology should act as an enabler rather than a barrier. The Supreme Court's insistence on "scant tolerance" for natural variations serves as a reminder that data-driven governance must be tempered with human judgment and regional context.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Functions and responsibilities of the Election Commission, Representation of People's Act, and Judicial interventions in electoral reforms.
- **Governance:** Impact of technology and e-governance on citizen rights and administrative accountability.
- **Ethics:** Balancing technological precision with social inclusivity and the ethical implications of algorithmic bias in public service.

## 2. India-US Interim Trade Deal: The DDGS & GM Feed Controversy

The recently announced India-US interim trade deal has brought **Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS)** into the spotlight. While the deal aims to boost bilateral trade, the inclusion of this protein-rich byproduct has triggered a significant debate regarding Genetically Modified (GM) imports and their impact on Indian agriculture.

- **Market Access and Tariff Rationalization:** Under the February 2026 pact, India has agreed to reduce or eliminate tariffs on several US agricultural products, including DDGS, red sorghum for animal feed, and soybean oil, while the US has lowered tariffs on Indian exports like textiles, leather, and seafood to **18%**.
- **The GM Contention:** The primary concern stems from the fact that US-produced DDGS is derived from **Genetically Modified (GM) corn**. While India prohibits the cultivation of GM food crops (allowing only GM cotton), this deal marks a significant shift by facilitating the entry of GM-linked products into the animal feed supply chain.
- **Impact on Domestic Farmers:** Farmer organizations, including the RSS-linked Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), fear that cheap, high-quality US imports will depress domestic farm-gate prices for maize and soybean—the primary raw materials for Indian animal feed.





- **Support for Livestock Sector:** Proponents, including the poultry and dairy industries, welcome the move. They argue that US DDGS is nutritionally superior (higher protein, lower aflatoxins) and more cost-effective than domestic alternatives, which could reduce the overall cost of milk and meat production.
- **Regulatory Safeguards:** The Government of India has maintained a "red line" on direct GM grain imports (maize/soybean for human consumption) and dairy products. It asserts that processed items like DDGS and soybean oil do not carry "live" modified organisms and are safe under existing FSSAI guidelines.

### Key Definitions

- **Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS):** A high-protein byproduct of the ethanol fermentation process. It is used as a nutrient-dense substitute for soybean meal or corn in poultry, cattle, and aqua feed.
- **Transgenics (GM Crops):** Organisms whose genetic material has been altered using genetic engineering techniques to include specific traits like pest resistance or herbicide tolerance.
- **Farm-gate Price:** The market value of a product minus the selling costs (transport, marketing, etc.); essentially the net price a farmer receives for their produce.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21 (Right to Life):** Interpreted by the Judiciary to include the right to safe and wholesome food, often cited in petitions against unregulated GM imports.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** The umbrella legislation under which the **1989 Rules** govern the manufacture, use, import, and export of hazardous microorganisms or genetically engineered organisms.
- **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC):** The apex body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) responsible for approving the environmental release and import of GMOs.
- **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** Empowering the **FSSAI** to regulate the safety and labeling of GM-derived food products. FSSAI recently mandated a "GM-free" certificate for 24 specific food imports.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (GEAC, FSSAI); Bilateral agreements involving India and their impact on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Technology missions; Economics of animal-rearing; Awareness in the fields of Bio-technology.

### Conclusion

The India-US interim deal represents a delicate balancing act between diplomatic trade interests and domestic food sovereignty. While the import of DDGS may modernize India's livestock industry by providing cheaper, high-quality feed, it necessitates a robust regulatory framework to prevent "backdoor" GM entry and to protect the livelihoods of millions of maize and soybean farmers. The long-term success of such deals depends on transparent scientific risk assessments and ensuring that technological advancements do not undermine rural economic stability.



### 3. The Hallyu Wave in India: Socio-Psychological and Strategic Implications

The **2024 Overseas Hallyu Survey** by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) reveals that India has emerged as the global leader in K-content consumption. While this highlights deepening cultural ties, a tragic suicide case in Ghaziabad involving three sisters has sparked an urgent national debate on the psychological "addiction" to foreign pop culture and the risks of extreme fandom.

- **Global Consumption Leader:** Indian consumers spend an average of **18.6 hours** per month on K-content (K-Pop, K-Dramas, etc.), the highest among 26 surveyed nations, surpassing Thailand (**18.4 hours**) and Indonesia (**17.0 hours**).
- **High Favourability Rating:** Approximately **84.5%** of Indian respondents view Korean cultural content positively, leading to a surge in demand for Korean fashion, skincare (K-Beauty), and language learning (Korean is now the 4th most accessed language on Duolingo in India).
- **The "Dark Side" of Fandom:** Extreme attachment, often termed "Parasocial Relationships," has led to cases of identity loss, cultural disconnection, and mental health crises among Indian adolescents, as seen in the recent Ghaziabad tragedy.
- **Digital Addiction and Escapism:** The Economic Survey 2024-25 flagged a worrying rise in screen-related mental health issues. K-content often serves as a form of "escapism," which, when unregulated, transitions into digital addiction and social isolation.
- **Soft Power and Glocalization:** The "Hallyu" (Korean Wave) serves as a potent tool for South Korea's soft power diplomacy. In India, this has evolved through "glocalization," where local audiences contextualize Korean themes of family and tradition, which resonate with Indian values.
- **Economic Cross-Pollination:** The craze has direct economic impacts, with Korean food imports to India growing by over **160%** in recent years and K-beauty imports rising **50%** year-on-year, creating a specialized market segment.



#### Key Definitions

- **Hallyu (Korean Wave):** A Chinese term meaning "Korean Wave," referring to the global surge in popularity of South Korean culture since the late 1990s.
- **Parasocial Interaction:** A one-sided relationship where a media consumer develops a strong emotional or "intimate" bond with a celebrity or fictional character, often leading to unrealistic expectations in real life.
- **Glocalization:** The adaptation of global cultural products to fit local tastes and traditional contexts, making them more relatable to a specific domestic audience.



## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court has expanded the Right to Life to include the **Right to Health**, which encompasses mental well-being and a "dignified environment" for children.
- **Article 39(f):** A Directive Principle mandating the State to ensure children are given opportunities to develop in a healthy manner and protected against moral and material abandonment.
- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** Provides a legal framework to protect the rights of persons with mental illness and mandates the government to provide affordable mental health services.
- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** Aimed at regulating content on OTT platforms and social media to protect minors from harmful or addictive content.

## Government Initiatives for Mental Well-being

- **Tele MANAS (2022):** A 24/7 toll-free helpline (14416) providing mental health counseling across India.
- **National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS):** India's first policy framework aimed at reducing suicide mortality by **10%** by 2030 through school-based interventions and crisis centers.
- **MANAS App:** A mobile-based platform launched to promote mental well-being and offer self-care tools for stress management.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian Society (Impact of globalization on Indian culture, issues related to youth and adolescents).
- **GS Paper II:** Social Justice (Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Education).
- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security (Challenges of digital addiction and the role of social media in shaping public psychology).

## Conclusion

While the Hallyu wave fosters international cultural exchange and boosts economic ties between India and South Korea, its "intensive" consumption by the youth necessitates a balanced approach. The shift from "admiration" to "obsession" highlights a critical gap in digital literacy and mental health support. Addressing this requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving parents, educators, and policy-makers to ensure that global cultural trends enrich Indian youth without compromising their psychological stability.

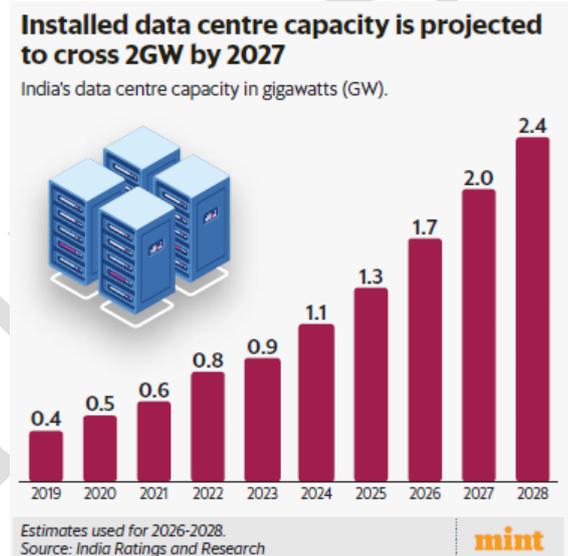
## 4. Budget 2026: Tax Holiday and the Future of India's AI Infrastructure

In the Union Budget 2026-27, the Government of India announced a landmark **21-year tax holiday** (extending until **2047**) for foreign cloud service providers. This strategic move aims to transform India into a global "compute superpower" and attract an estimated **\$200 billion** in investments, though it must navigate significant resource constraints.

- **Fiscal Incentive Structure:** To qualify for the tax holiday, foreign cloud providers must use data centers owned by Indian companies and notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**). Additionally, services to Indian users must be routed through an Indian reseller, ensuring domestic value capture.



- **AI-Driven Capacity Surge:** Data center capacity is projected to cross **2.4 GW by 2028**, up from **1.3 GW in 2025**. This growth is primarily fueled by AI workloads, which are expected to account for **50%** of global data workloads by 2030, necessitating higher power density (**30-50 kW per rack**) than traditional servers.
- **Geographical Dispersion and Tier-II Markets:** While Mumbai (**53%**) and Chennai (**20%**) currently dominate, the new policy encourages shifts toward Tier-II cities like **Visakhapatnam, Kochi, and Greater Noida**. These regions offer cheaper land and more stable grid capacity, vital for hyperscale AI campuses.
- **The Resource Trilemma:** AI infrastructure expansion faces a "triple threat" of scarcity: **Power** (demand to hit 57 TWh by 2030), **Water** (one 100MW campus uses water equivalent to a town of 85,000 people), and **Land** (10MW requires roughly 10 acres).
- **Strategic Sovereignty and Jobs:** By anchoring data storage and processing locally, India aims to reduce reliance on overseas centers, improve data latency for startups, and generate significant upstream/downstream employment in the high-tech sector.



### Key Definitions

- **Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS):** (Contextual Note: Though mentioned in trade pacts, in the AI context, energy-efficient cooling and protein-rich byproducts of ethanol often compete for similar industrial resources).
- **Tax Holiday:** A government incentive program that offers a temporary reduction or elimination of taxes for businesses to encourage investment in a specific sector.
- **Hyperscale Data Centers:** Massive business-critical facilities designed to support robust, scalable applications, typically associated with big data and cloud service providers like AWS or Google.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** Governance involves a mix of Union (IT/Communication) and State (Land/Power) subjects, requiring cooperative federalism for implementation.
- **Infrastructure Status:** In 2022, the Centre granted **Infrastructure Status** to data centers with an IT load above 5 MW, facilitating easier access to low-cost, long-term credit.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** Acts as a regulatory bedrock, influencing data localization requirements and how global firms interact with Indian data centers.
- **Draft National Data Centre Policy (2020):** Proposed the creation of **Data Centre Economic Zones (DCEZ)** and single-window clearances to simplify the setup process.

### Conclusion

The 21-year tax holiday is a bold statement of India's digital ambitions, positioning the nation as a global alternative to established hubs like Singapore or the US. However, the success of this "AI Imperative" hinges on a "Sustainable Infrastructure" approach—balancing fiscal red carpets with environmental safeguards to manage the immense power and water footprints of next-generation compute clusters.



## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and growth; Science and Technology (AI and IT infrastructure).
- **Essay/Ethics:** The trade-off between rapid technological advancement and environmental sustainability (Water and Energy stress).

## 5. India's Energy Sourcing Strategy: Strategic Autonomy and Diversification

In a significant diplomatic clarification, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri reiterated that India's energy procurement is governed by **national interest** and **energy security**. This comes amid intense global speculation following a US Executive Order (February 2026) that linked the removal of punitive tariffs on Indian exports to a commitment from New Delhi to phase out Russian crude oil purchases.

- **Multi-Sourcing Strategy:** India maintains a policy of "non-dependency," sourcing crude from dozens of countries. The government asserts that a diversified energy basket is essential for supply chain stability and economic resilience.
- **National Interest as the North Star:** Procurement decisions are driven by a "complex matrix" of factors including adequate availability, fair pricing, reliability of supply, and risk assessment, rather than external geopolitical mandates.
- **Safeguarding the Consumer:** As a developing economy importing **80-85%** of its energy, India's primary objective is to mitigate energy-driven inflation. Ensuring affordable fuel for 1.4 billion people remains the "supreme priority."
- **The "Market-Driven" Defense:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) emphasized that actual sourcing is conducted by public and private oil companies based on commercial fiduciary responsibilities and objective market conditions.
- **Stabilizing Factor in Global Markets:** As one of the world's largest energy consumers, India's diverse procurement strategy acts as a buffer against global supply shocks, preventing excessive concentration in any single geography.
- **Bilateral Balancing Act:** While India has increased energy imports from the US and explored options in Venezuela, it continues to navigate the strategic pressure from Washington while maintaining its long-standing partnership with Moscow.



## Key Definitions

- **Strategic Autonomy:** A foreign policy doctrine where a nation makes decisions based on its own national interests and priorities without being unduly influenced or coerced by other states.
- **Energy Security:** The uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price, encompassing both long-term (timely investments) and short-term (systemic resilience) dimensions.
- **Punitive Tariffs:** Extra duties imposed by a country to penalize a trading partner for perceived unfair trade practices or geopolitical disagreements (e.g., the 25% "extra duty" previously linked to Russian oil).



## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to all matters with respect to which Parliament has the power to make laws, including "Foreign Affairs" (Entry 10, Union List) and "Entertaining relations with foreign countries."
- **Energy Conservation Act, 2001:** Provides the legal framework for efficient use of energy and its conservation, which is a component of the broader energy security landscape.
- **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Act, 2006:** Regulates the refining, processing, storage, and distribution of petroleum products to ensure market stability.

## Strategic Keypoints

- **The "Snap-back" Clause:** The US Executive Order includes a provision to reimpose the 25% tariff if India is found to resume "direct or indirect" Russian oil purchases beyond agreed-upon thresholds.
- **Refinery Calibration:** Most Indian refineries are technically configured for the "Medium-Sour" grade of Russian Urals. Shifting to US "Light-Sweet" crude requires technical downtime and logistical adjustments.
- **Diversification Data:** Russian oil's share in India's basket fell to a 38-month low in late 2025, while US and Saudi imports saw a corresponding rise, reflecting a gradual shift rather than an abrupt break.

## Conclusion

India's energy diplomacy is a masterclass in pragmatism. By refusing to publicly refute or confirm US claims while doubling down on the principle of "national interest," New Delhi preserves its strategic maneuverability. The transition away from Russian oil, if it occurs, appears to be a calculated commercial shift rather than a diplomatic surrender, ensuring that India remains a "stabilizing factor" in the global energy ecosystem without compromising domestic economic health.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy; Economic development and the impact of global trade deals on the national economy.
- **Current Affairs:** Understanding the nuances of "Strategic Autonomy" in a multi-polar world.

## 6. Goldman Sachs Growth Upgrade: Impact of India-US Trade Framework

Goldman Sachs Research has revised India's **Calendar Year (CY) 2026** real GDP growth forecast upward to **6.9%** (from **6.7%**). This 20-basis-point upgrade follows the landmark India-US interim trade agreement, which signaled a significant de-escalation in trade tensions and a reduction in punitive "reciprocal" tariffs on Indian exports.

- **Trade-Led Growth Impulse:** The primary driver for the upgrade is the reduction of US tariffs on Indian goods—from roughly **25%** to **18%**. This brings India's tariff exposure in line with regional peers (**15-19%**) and is estimated to provide an incremental annualized boost of **0.2 percentage points** to the GDP.



- **External Balance Improvement:** Lower tariffs and improved export competitiveness are expected to narrow India's **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**. Goldman Sachs lowered its CAD estimate by **0.25% to 0.8% of GDP** for CY 2026, reflecting a more resilient external sector.
- **Geopolitical Dividend:** The US executive order withdrawing the additional **25% levy**—previously imposed as a penalty for India's purchase of Russian oil—removes a significant "national security" trade barrier, benefiting sectors like electronics, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.
- **Monetary Policy Pivot:** With downside risks to growth receding and GDP momentum staying robust, the RBI's **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** maintained the repo rate at **5.25%** in February 2026. Goldman Sachs suggests the interest rate easing cycle has likely concluded, with stability now the priority.
- **Investment Sentiment:** Beyond immediate trade gains, the deal is expected to mitigate "trade-policy uncertainty," potentially unlocking a fresh cycle of private capital expenditure (capex) in the latter half of 2026 as global firms look to "de-risk" and diversify supply chains.



### Key Definitions

- **Basis Points (bps):** A standard unit of measure for interest rates and other percentages in finance; **100 bps** equals **1%**. A 20-bp upgrade means a **0.2%** increase.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** A measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the products it exports.
- **Reciprocal Tariffs:** Trade duties imposed by one country on another that match the rates the other country imposes on its goods, often used as a tool for "fair trade" negotiations.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** Confers the Union Government exclusive power over **Foreign Loans** (Entry 37) and **Trade and Commerce with foreign countries** (Entry 41), providing the legal mandate for the India-US trade deal.
- **RBI Act, 1934:** Specifically Section 45ZB, which mandates the **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** to determine the policy rate (Repo Rate) required to achieve the inflation target while keeping growth in mind.
- **Finance Act (Annual):** The vehicle through which the Indian government implements changes to its own customs and import tariffs following international trade agreements.

### Economic Indicators at a Glance (2026 Forecasts)

Metric	Previous Forecast	Revised Forecast	Key Reason
Real GDP Growth	6.7%	6.9%	Lower US Tariffs (18%)
Current Account Deficit	1.05% of GDP	0.8% of GDP	Improved Export Inflows
Repo Rate	5.00% (Expected)	5.25% (Hold)	Resilient Growth Momentum



## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **Prelims:** Concepts like CAD, Repo Rate, and specific details of major trade agreements (India-US Interim Pact 2026).

## Conclusion

The growth upgrade by Goldman Sachs underscores a "Goldilocks" scenario for the Indian economy—where trade tailwinds from the US pact provide stimulus without the need for further monetary easing. However, the sustainability of this **6.9%** growth will depend on how effectively the government manages the transition away from Russian oil and whether the domestic private investment cycle truly ignites in response to reduced global trade friction.

## 7. EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and Indian Steel Exports

In early February 2026, the Steel Secretary, Sandeep Poundrik, confirmed that despite a recent trade deal between India and the European Union (EU), Indian steel exports will face sustained pressure from the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This policy, which effectively functions as a carbon tax on imports, poses a structural challenge for India's carbon-intensive manufacturing sectors.

- **Impact on Primary Export Market:** Europe accounts for approximately **two-thirds** of India's total steel exports. The operationalization of CBAM from January 1, 2026, forces Indian mills to either pay steep carbon levies or risk losing market share in their most critical destination.
- **Technological Vulnerability:** Most Indian steel is produced via the **Blast Furnace–Basic Oxygen Furnace (BF–BOF)** route, which is significantly more carbon-intensive than the **Electric Arc Furnace (EAF)** route common in the EU. This technological gap translates into a direct fiscal penalty under CBAM.
- **Economic Cost and Competitiveness:** Projections suggest that the carbon tax could increase the landed cost of Indian steel in the EU by **15–22%**. This price shock threatens the thin margins of Indian exporters and may lead to a shift in trade flows toward regions with less stringent climate-linked trade barriers, such as Africa and the Middle East.
- **Inclusion in Trade Negotiations:** While the **India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** framework signed in late January 2026 slashed tariffs on over **90%** of goods, CBAM remained a non-negotiable "climate measure" from the EU's perspective, leaving Indian steel without a "green carve-out."
- **Government Support and "Green Steel":** The Ministry of Steel has signaled intervention through incentives for decarbonization, support for MSMEs in carbon accounting, and a push for **"Made-in-India" branded green steel** to meet global environmental standards.





## Key Definitions

- **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** A climate-linked trade tool that imposes a levy on imported goods (like steel, cement, and aluminum) equivalent to the carbon price paid by domestic EU producers under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS).
- **Carbon Leakage:** A situation where companies move production to countries with laxer emission constraints to avoid carbon costs, potentially leading to a global increase in total emissions.
- **Embedded Emissions:** The total greenhouse gas emissions generated during the entire production lifecycle of a product, including raw material extraction and manufacturing.

## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Grants Parliament the power to make laws for implementing international treaties or agreements, which is crucial for aligning domestic industrial policy with global climate and trade obligations.
- **Article 51-A(g):** Specifies the Fundamental Duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, providing a moral and constitutional basis for the industry's green transition.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** The primary legislative framework under which the Indian government can regulate industrial emissions and mandate "green" manufacturing standards.
- **WTO Principles (GATT Article XX):** India has frequently cited the "General Exceptions" clause, arguing that climate measures like CBAM must not be used as "disguised protectionism" or arbitrary trade barriers.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral and global agreements; effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests (Non-tariff barriers).
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Export-led growth); Infrastructure (Steel sector); Environment (Climate change and international trade).
- **Mains Analysis:** The conflict between "Common But Differentiated Responsibilities" (CBDR) and unilateral trade-linked climate policies.

## Conclusion

CBAM represents a paradigm shift where **environmental compliance is now a prerequisite for market access**. For India, the challenge is two-fold: defending its trade rights at multilateral forums like the WTO while simultaneously accelerating the high-cost transition to low-carbon technology to protect its industrial competitiveness.

## 8. Chandrayaan-4: India's Strategic Leap in Lunar Sample Return

Following the historic success of Chandrayaan-3, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has advanced its lunar roadmap by identifying a landing site for **Chandrayaan-4**. Approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2024 with a budget of **₹2,104.06 crore**, this mission transitions India from "landing on the Moon" to "returning from the Moon," a feat currently achieved only by the USA, Russia, and China.

- **Primary Mission Objective:** The core goal is a **Lunar Sample Return**, involving the collection of approximately 2-3 kg of lunar soil (regolith) and rocks from the Moon's South Polar region and bringing them safely back to Earth for high-fidelity laboratory analysis.



- **Landing Site Selection:** ISRO has zeroed in on a site near **Mons Mouton** in the lunar South Pole (latitudes ~84°S to 86°S). This "low-hazard zone" offers a slope under 10°, minimal boulders, and nearly 12 days of continuous sunlight, crucial for powering the solar-dependent lander and rover.
- **Mission Complexity & Architecture:** To overcome lift capacity constraints of the **LVM3** rocket, the mission involves **two separate launches**. The five constituent modules (Propulsion, Descender, Ascender, Transfer, and Re-entry) will perform a complex **space docking** maneuver in Earth orbit before proceeding to the Moon.
- **Technological Milestones:** Chandrayaan-4 will demonstrate critical "foundational technologies" for future crewed missions, including autonomous docking/undocking, lunar surface lift-off (Ascender module), and high-speed atmospheric re-entry with a sample capsule.
- **Strategic Timeline:** Slated for launch in **2028**, the mission serves as a precursor to the **Bharatiya Antariksha Station (2035)** and the ultimate goal of landing an Indian on the Moon by **2040**.
- **Scientific Significance:** Returning samples from the unexplored South Pole is vital for detecting **water ice** and understanding the Moon's geological evolution, which cannot be fully achieved via in-situ (on-site) experiments alone.



### Key Definitions

- **Lunar Regolith:** The layer of loose, heterogeneous superficial deposits covering solid rock on the Moon.
- **Docking and Undocking:** The process where two separate spacecraft align and physically join (dock) or separate (undock) in orbit; a prerequisite for complex deep-space missions.
- **Sample Return Mission:** A mission designed to collect material from a celestial body and return it to Earth for study.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51-A (h):** Part of Fundamental Duties, it mandates Indian citizens to "develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform."
- **Indian Space Policy, 2023:** A framework that defines the roles of ISRO (R&D focus), **IN-SPACE** (regulator for private sector), and **NSIL** (commercial arm), transitioning ISRO toward advanced exploration.
- **Outer Space Treaty (1967):** An international treaty (ratified by India) that declares space as the "province of all mankind" and prohibits sovereignty claims over celestial bodies.
- **Liability Convention (1972):** Holds the "launching state" (India) internationally liable for any damage caused by its space objects on Earth or in flight.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Awareness in the fields of Space.



- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **Mains Perspective:** Importance of space diplomacy, indigenous docking technology as a strategic asset, and the economic potential of the "Space Economy."

## Conclusion

Chandrayaan-4 is not merely an incremental step but a transformative mission that establishes India's capability for **end-to-end lunar operations**. By mastering the art of returning from another celestial body, ISRO is setting the stage for sovereign human spaceflight and long-term lunar habitation, aligning with the "Amrit Kaal" vision for 2047.

## 9. Global Energy Shift: Japan's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa and the Nuclear Renaissance

On **February 9, 2026**, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) successfully restarted the **No. 6 reactor** at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant. This marks a pivotal moment in Japan's energy trajectory, as the world's largest nuclear facility returns to service following an operationally induced pause in January and a nearly **14-year hiatus** post-Fukushima.

- **World's Largest Capacity:** With seven reactors and a total potential output of **8.2 Gigawatts (GW)**, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the largest nuclear power station globally. The restart of Unit 6 (1.36 GW) is the first step in bringing the entire complex back to full operational capacity.
- **Technological Rectification:** The restart was delayed by an "overly sensitive" alarm setup in the inverter system controlling the reactor's **control rods**. TEPCO adjusted these settings after verifying that the hardware was intact, emphasizing a "safety-first" protocol to regain public trust.
- **Strategic Energy Re-embrace:** Under the leadership of Prime Minister **Sanae Takaichi**, Japan is aggressively pivoting back to atomic energy. This shift aims to achieve **Carbon Neutrality by 2050**, reduce dependency on volatile fossil fuel imports, and meet the massive power demands of a growing **AI and data center** ecosystem.
- **Fukushima Legacy & Scrutiny:** As the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant, TEPCO remains under intense regulatory and public oversight. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa restart is a "litmus test" for the company's ability to manage high-risk infrastructure in a post-disaster era.
- **Roadmap to Commercial Operations:** Following the restart and criticality confirmation, the unit is scheduled to begin trial power transmission by mid-February, with a target date of **March 18, 2026**, for full commercial operations.



## Key Definitions

- **Control Rods:** Components made of neutron-absorbing materials used in nuclear reactors to control the rate of fission or to halt the nuclear chain reaction (scramming).
- **Criticality:** The state of a nuclear reactor when a self-sustaining fission chain reaction is achieved, where each fission event releases enough neutrons to cause exactly one more fission event.
- **Advanced Boiling Water Reactor (ABWR):** The specific design of Unit 6 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, which utilizes water both as a coolant and a neutron moderator to drive turbines.



## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Atomic Energy Basic Act, 1955:** The foundational law in Japan governing the peaceful use of nuclear energy, emphasizing democratic management and public safety.
- **Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA):** An independent administrative body established in 2012 in the wake of the Fukushima disaster to provide stricter safety screenings and oversight for reactor restarts.
- **GX (Green Transformation) Basic Policy:** A 2023 Japanese policy framework that reclassifies nuclear power as a "core" energy source and allows for the operation of reactors beyond the previous **60-year limit** under specific conditions.
- **Article 25 (Constitution of Japan):** Often cited in legal challenges by anti-nuclear groups, it guarantees the "right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living," framing safety as a fundamental right.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests; International relations and global energy diplomacy.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy; Science and Technology; Environmental pollution and degradation (Carbon neutrality goals).
- **Comparative Governance:** Comparing India's **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** and **AERB** with Japan's **NRA** regarding safety protocols and public accountability.

## Conclusion

The revival of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is more than just a utility update; it represents Japan's attempt to reconcile its traumatic nuclear past with an urgent, energy-hungry future. For the global community, it signals that even the most disaster-wary nations are finding nuclear power indispensable for meeting **Net Zero** targets. Success here will likely embolden other nations to extend the lifespans of their aging nuclear fleets.

## 10. The Mineable Self: Human Sociality as the New Global Commodity

In a seminal thesis, Arjun Appadurai argues that the latest frontier of capitalist extraction is no longer physical labor or rare minerals, but the **human self**. This "infinitely renewable" commodity is being mined through our digital interactions, social affinities, and personal narratives, transforming the core of human identity into a super-commodity for the global market.

- **Transition from Industrial to Digital Extraction:** While traditional capitalism focused on "surplus value" from labor, modern digital capitalism extracts value from **human sociality**. Our friendships, family ties, and ephemeral digital footprints are now raw materials for "profiling on steroids."
- **The Global Story Market:** There is a ceaseless hunt for "portable" narratives—local folklore and mythologies from the Global South are troll-mined by publishers and film festivals for their "local flavor" and "universal themes," making locality a resource for global extraction.





- **Impact of OTT and "The Ordinary":** Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming platforms have colonized the media market by shifting from big-studio models to a "democratization of the self." This relies on "extraordinarily ordinary" characters, turning everyday human vulnerabilities into marketable content.
- **Fragmentation of the Individual:** The classical, unified individual is being replaced by an unstable composite of **algorithmic data points**, such as credit scores, consumer profiles, and actuarial charts. The "source of the self" has evolved into the "source of the selfie," where visibility is equated with social and economic worth.
- **The Role of AI and Siri/ChatGPT:** AI bots are now in a race to simulate human emotions and intuitions. This strange symbiosis between the "mineable self" and "artificial intelligence" blurs the line between authentic human judgment and programmed response, making personhood performative.
- **Democratization vs. Exploitation:** While the digital era offers individuals the "right to a story" through YouTube or influencers, it simultaneously renders privacy and trust obsolete, as every act of living becomes a potentially mined and monetized data point.

### Key Definitions

- **Mineable Self:** A concept where an individual's identity, emotions, and social relationships are treated as a renewable resource for economic extraction and data profiling.
- **Surplus Value:** In Marxian terms, the value produced by labor in excess of the cost of that labor; in the digital context, it refers to data generated by users beyond what is needed for the service itself.
- **Parasocial Interaction:** A one-sided relationship where a digital consumer develops an intimate emotional bond with a media character or influencer, which is then monetized by platforms.
- **Mediascapes:** A term coined by Appadurai referring to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and the images of the world created by these media.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Right to Privacy (Article 21):** The Supreme Court in the *K.S. Puttaswamy* judgment declared privacy as a fundamental right, directly challenging the "unbounded mining" of personal sociality.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** India's primary legislation to regulate the processing of digital personal data, aiming to balance the right of individuals to protect their data with the need for lawful processing.
- **Article 51-A (h):** Encourages the development of a scientific temper and spirit of inquiry, which in the digital age includes "digital literacy" to understand how one's data is being commodified.
- **IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2021:** Seeks to hold social media and OTT platforms accountable for content and data practices that impact individual dignity and social harmony.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian Society (Impact of globalization and digital culture on traditional social institutions and identity).
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology (AI and data as commodities); Internal Security (Challenges to privacy and data sovereignty).



- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Ethical issues in "Surveillance Capitalism" and the commodification of human emotions and relationships.

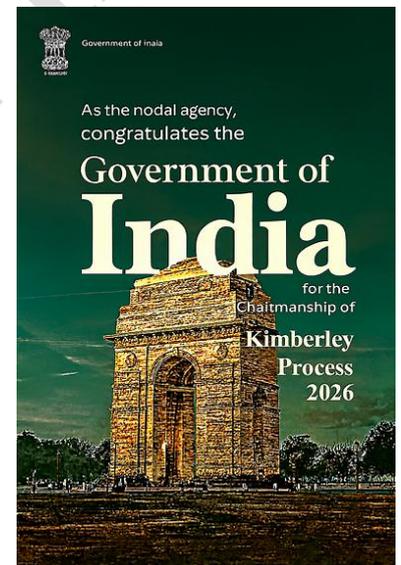
## Conclusion

The rise of the "mineable self" represents a profound reorganization of the global economy, where human experience itself is the primary site of accumulation. While this offers unprecedented visibility and "democratization," it risks eroding the foundations of privacy and authentic social trust. For a developing nation like India, the challenge lies in leveraging digital growth while strengthening the regulatory and ethical guardrails that protect the "sovereignty of the self" from total commodification.

## 11. India's Chairmanship of the Kimberley Process (2026): Refining Global Diamond Governance

India has officially assumed the **Chair of the Kimberley Process (KP) for the year 2026**, succeeding the United Arab Emirates. As a founding member and the world's pre-eminent hub for diamond cutting and polishing, India's leadership comes at a critical juncture marked by geopolitical shifts and mounting pressure for structural reforms within the global diamond trade.

- **Strategic Leadership of the Global South:** This is India's third time leading the KP. By assuming the chair, India positions itself as a bridge between major producer nations (mostly in Africa) and consumer markets (USA, EU, China), aiming to make the process more inclusive and rule-based.
- **Focus on "Traceability" and Tech:** India's 2026 agenda prioritizes the transition from paper-based to **digital, blockchain-enabled KP certificates**. This is expected to curb "mixed origin" certificate fraud and enhance the transparency of the supply chain from mine to market.
- **The "Conflict Diamond" Definition Debate:** A core challenge for India is the long-standing demand by civil society and some member states to expand the definition of "conflict diamonds" beyond "rebel-financed" stones to include systemic state-linked human rights abuses and environmental harm.
- **Safeguarding Surat and Mumbai:** As India processes over **90% of the world's diamonds** by volume, ensuring the integrity of the KPCS (Kimberley Process Certification Scheme) is vital for the survival of the domestic industry, which faces competition from lab-grown diamonds and G7-led sanctions on Russian stones.
- **Capacity Building in Africa:** India plans to establish **Regional Technical Hubs** in key African producing areas to provide forensic and IT support, ensuring that small-scale and artisanal miners are not marginalized by tightening global compliance standards.
- **Tripartite Collaboration:** India will work to revitalize the unique KP structure, which brings together **governments, the diamond industry (World Diamond Council), and civil society**, to break the "consensus-linked inertia" that has hindered reforms for over a decade.



## Key Definitions

- **Conflict Diamonds (Blood Diamonds):** Currently defined by the UN as rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments.



- **KPCS (Kimberley Process Certification Scheme):** An international certification system that imposes extensive requirements on its members to enable them to certify shipments of rough diamonds as 'conflict-free'.
- **Tripartite Setup:** The unique governance model of the KP comprising representatives from Governments, the Diamond Industry, and Civil Society Organizations.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** The primary legal tool in India used to regulate the import and export of diamonds in compliance with international KP norms.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Empowers Indian customs authorities to seize any diamond shipments that lack a valid, tamper-proof KP certificate.
- **Article 253:** Grants the Indian Parliament the power to implement international treaties; the KPCS is implemented in India through executive notifications by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

### Key Statistics & Global Share

Category	India's Share/Position	Global Context
Rough Imports	~40% (Global Total)	Largest importer for processing.
Polishing Hub	9 out of 10 diamonds	surat/Mumbai process 90% of stones.
KP Membership	60 Participants	Represents 86 countries (99.8% production).

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Economics (Industrial policy, Gems and Jewellery sector); Internal Security (Financing of insurgencies via illicit trade).
- **Mains Analysis:** Balancing "Strategic Autonomy" in trade with global human rights expectations and the challenge of consensus-based multilateralism.

### Conclusion

India's 2026 Chairmanship is an opportunity to move the Kimberley Process from a "reactive" mechanism to a "proactive" governance model. By leveraging its technological prowess and diplomatic status as a leader of the Global South, India can ensure that diamonds remain a source of development rather than destruction, while protecting the livelihoods of millions in its own domestic cutting and polishing sector.

## 12. Kerala's Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS): A New High-Speed Rail Vision

In February 2026, the Kerala government accorded in-principle approval for a **583 km-long Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)** stretching from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod. Conceived as a more "socially acceptable" alternative to the contentious SilverLine project, the RRTS aims to integrate the state's urban centers with high-speed, high-frequency rail connectivity.

- **Strategic Shift from SilverLine:** Unlike the SilverLine (K-Rail), which was primarily an **embankment-based** model (at ground level), the RRTS will be predominantly an **elevated viaduct**



system (on pillars). This shift significantly reduces land acquisition and prevents the obstruction of natural water flow—two major points of public and environmental contention.

- **Operational Capabilities:** Designed for speeds of **160-180 kmph**, RRTS train sets are optimized for fast acceleration and frequent stops. This makes it a "middle path" between conventional slow rail and ultra-high-speed bullet trains, tailored specifically for Kerala's dense, linear urban settlements.
- **Multi-Modal Integration:** A key feature of the RRTS is its "seamless integration" with the existing **Kochi Metro** and envisioned metros in **Thiruvananthapuram** and **Kozhikode**. It also plans to link all four international airports in Kerala, creating a unified transit network.
- **Phased Execution (2027–2036):** The project will be executed in four phases. **Phase 1 (Travancore Line)** covers 284 km from Thiruvananthapuram to Thrissur and is targeted for completion by 2033. The entire statewide network is envisioned to be operational within **12 years**.
- **Financial Structure:** Estimated at **₹1,92,780 crore**, the funding model follows the Delhi-Meerut RRTS pattern: **20% State, 20% Centre, and 60% long-term international loans**. This is significantly higher than the ₹63,941 crore estimate for SilverLine, primarily due to the cost of elevated structures and urban integration.
- **The "Sreedharan" Factor:** Veteran technocrat E. Sreedharan (Metroman) has independently proposed a **High-Speed Rail (HSR)** corridor with 22 stops and speeds of 200 kmph, estimated at ₹1 lakh crore. While the state pushes the RRTS, Sreedharan claims the Centre is considering his HSR model, leading to a policy divergence between state and central visions.



### Key Definitions

- **RRTS (Regional Rapid Transit System):** A high-speed, high-frequency, point-to-point regional transit system designed for commuter travel between urban and semi-urban hubs.
- **Viaduct Model:** A bridge-like structure consisting of a series of short spans supported on piers, used to carry a railway or road over an area (instead of a solid wall or embankment).
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** The final leg of a journey from a transportation hub (like an RRTS station) to the commuter's final destination, typically facilitated by metros, buses, or e-autos.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Seventh Schedule (List II, Entry 13):** "Communications" (roads, bridges, etc.) is a State subject, but "**Railways**" (**List I, Entry 22**) is a Union subject. This necessitates mandatory central approval for any rail project.
- **Metro Rail Policy, 2017:** Provides the framework for central assistance, mandatory **Comprehensive Mobility Plans (CMP)**, and third-party assessments for projects like the RRTS.
- **Railways Act, 1989:** The primary legislation governing the construction and operation of railways in India. RRTS projects, however, often seek faster clearances under the **Metro Railways (Construction of Works) Act, 1978**.
- **Article 293:** Governs the "Borrowing by States," relevant as the Kerala government plans to take 60% of the project cost as international loans, which requires central consent.

**Comparison of Kerala Rail Proposals**

Feature	SilverLine (K-Rail)	Kerala RRTS	Sreedharan's HSR
Max Speed	200 kmph	160-180 kmph	200 kmph
Design	Embankment (Ground)	Elevated (Pillars)	Mixed/Elevated
Estimated Cost	₹63,941 Cr (2019)	₹1,92,780 Cr	₹1,00,000 Cr
Intermediate Stops	11	Short Intervals	22
Governance	Ministry of Railways	MoHUA (Metro Policy)	Ministry of Railways

**UPSC Relevance**

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions; issues arising out of their design and implementation; Centre-State relations regarding infrastructure.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, **Railways**, etc.; Investment models; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **Mains Focus:** The challenge of infrastructure vs. ecology in ecologically sensitive zones like the Western Ghats; the fiscal sustainability of large-scale debt-funded state projects.

**Conclusion**

The Kerala RRTS represents a strategic pivot toward a "metro-style" regional system that prioritizes **social acceptance over cost-cutting**. While it addresses the environmental and land acquisition flaws of the SilverLine, its success depends on the Centre's financial commitment and the reconciliation of the state's vision with the Railway Ministry's broader national high-speed rail roadmap.

**13. Form 7 and the Voter Deletion Controversy: Safeguarding the Electoral Roll**

In early 2026, the Election Commission of India (EC) launched a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls, which sparked significant political debate over the mass submission of **Form 7** applications. Allegations of coordinated efforts to delete eligible voters—particularly from marginalized communities—have raised concerns regarding the procedural integrity of India's democratic exercise.

- **Definition and Scope of Form 7:** Form 7 is a statutory application under the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, used specifically for objecting to the inclusion of a name or seeking the deletion of an existing entry from the electoral roll. Valid grounds for deletion include **death, shifting of residence, duplication, or ineligibility** (e.g., non-citizenship).
- **2022 Amendment and Misuse Concerns:** Previously, only voters from the same polling booth could file an objection. A **2022 amendment** expanded this power to any voter within a constituency. Critics argue this has enabled "bulk filing" by organized actors, leading to thousands of fraudulent objections—often using forged signatures or pre-filled forms—targeting specific demographics.
- **The "ASD" Category and Scale of Deletions:** During the current SIR phase, names of approximately **6.5 crore** electors were reportedly removed from draft rolls across 12 States and UTs. These individuals are placed in the **ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead/Duplicate)** category. Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat reported the highest number of such deletions.





## Conclusion

While the EC maintains that SIR is a transparent exercise to ensure "one citizen, one vote," the controversy over Form 7 highlights a systemic vulnerability. Ensuring that digital ease of filing does not translate into "silent disenfranchisement" requires robust physical verification and the strict prosecution of those filing fraudulent claims. Maintaining the sanctity of the electoral roll is not just an administrative task but a prerequisite for a fair and representative democracy.

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