

The next big commodity is the mineable self

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
General Science

Mains: General Studies - 3
Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

1. Context

- A global market in a new commodity- **the self**- has expanded across **entertainment, journalism, banking, branding, identity politics, and soft power**.
- This resource is **infinitely renewable** as long as humans and the planet exist.
- **Capitalism** has shifted extraction from labour and nature to **human sociality** itself -relationships, emotions, identities, and stories.

2. Core Process:

- The primary target of extraction is **social life itself**—friendships, families, workplaces, digital footprints, and political ties.
- **Advanced profiling** captures both deep affinities and fleeting social interactions, eroding **privacy, intimacy, and trust**.
- **Personal stories function as access codes**, allowing continuous and permission-less commodification of individual selves.

3. Structural Drivers

- The global market aggressively searches for **“local” stories** that combine portability, local flavour, and universal appeal, spanning regions from **Mexico to Nepal**.
- Both **news and fiction** increasingly centre on local manifestations of transborder volatility, such as **drugs, migrants, and mercenaries**.

- **OTT streaming platforms** (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney) now dominate storytelling and prioritise **ordinary, mid-market, and previously unknown characters**.
- In India, Netflix projected **100 million subscribers in 2018**, indicating the scale and reach of this model.
- This **“democratisation of the self”** increases visibility but simultaneously intensifies the commodification of individual lives and stories.

4. Implications

- The individual is reduced to an **unstable data composite** of credit scores, algorithms, and consumer profiles, with no need for a unified self.
- **AI bots** (Siri, ChatGPT and others) simulate human emotion and vulnerability, **blurring human distinctiveness**.
- Extraction is driven by two beliefs: **every self has a story** and **every story deserves an audience**.
- Influencers and digital platforms **monetise self-narratives**, creating a **super-commodity limited only by the urge to mine ourselves**.

A chance for India to polish the Kimberley Process

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. Background

- **India** has taken over as **chair of the Kimberley Process (KP) for 2026**.
- **KP regulates global trade in conflict diamonds** used by rebel groups against governments.
- It began in 2000 and led to the **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)** in 2003.

- KP now has 60 participants (86 countries) and covers about **99.8% of global rough diamond production**.

2. Current Structure and India's Position

- KPCS prevents trade in conflict diamonds and is **enforced individually by each KP participant**.
- Every shipment of rough diamonds must carry a **KP certificate** issued by a participant country.
- **Trade is allowed only between KP-compliant members**, and participants must share timely, accurate production and trade data.
- **Angola, Botswana, Canada, Congo, Namibia, and Russia** together produce over **85% of global rough diamonds** by quantity and value.
- India is not a producer but **imports about 40% of global rough diamonds** by quantity and value.
- As the world's leading cutting and polishing hub (**Surat and Mumbai**), India re-exports polished diamonds to **China, Hong Kong, Israel, UAE, and the US**.
- India's central position in the value chain gives it **strong leverage to shape KP reforms**.

3. Challenges

- The **definition of conflict diamonds is too narrow**, ignoring state violence, human rights abuses, trafficking, environmental harm, and artisanal mining abuses.
- **Political vetoes** weaken decision-making and delay action.
- **Export bans without support** can worsen smuggling and violence, as seen in the **Central African Republic** (ban in 2013, re-entry in 2024).
- There is **no consensus** on addressing state-linked violence.
- **Transparency and enforcement** remain uneven.

4. Way Forward

- Create a **technical working group on violence and human rights** risks beyond rebel groups.
- Promote **digital and tamper-proof KP certificates** using blockchain and shared customs data.
- Set up **regional KP technical hubs in Africa** for training, certification, and forensic support.

- Introduce **independent audits** and ensure public release of detailed KP data.
- Keep civil society participation strong.
- Align KP with **community development** and **Sustainable Development Goals**, so diamond revenues support **livelihoods, health, education, and infrastructure**.

What is the new RRTS project in Kerala?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3

Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Context

- Kerala's **long debate on high-speed rail** has come up again.
- The **State government has now approved a Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)** from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod.
- This is **different from the earlier SilverLine semi-high-speed rail project**, which **faced strong public protests** and did not get much support from the Central government.

2. What is the RRTS Project?

- RRTS (Regional Rapid Transit System) is a **fast, high-frequency rail system meant for regional and urban travel**.
- It is **already operational on the Delhi–Meerut corridor**, showing it works well in Indian conditions.
- The project is estimated at ₹1,92,780 crore, **funded 20% by Kerala, 20% by the Centre, and 60% through long-term international loans**.
- Key features:
 - ➔ **Speed of 160–180 kmph**
 - ➔ **Short station gaps** with quick acceleration and braking
 - ➔ **Integration with metro networks**
 - ➔ **Better last-mile connectivity**,
 - ➔ **Direct links to Kerala's international airports**

3. Environmental and Design Advantages

- Unlike SilverLine's embankment-heavy, ground-level design, the RRTS will largely use elevated structures, with tunnels and embankments only where necessary.
- This approach:
 - ➔ Minimises land acquisition
 - ➔ Prevents disruption of natural water flow
 - ➔ Reduces environmental impact
 - ➔ Addresses public resistance seen in densely populated areas

4. RRTS: Phased Roll-out and Connectivity

- RRTS will **integrate with Kochi Metro and proposed metros** in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode
- **Inter-State extensions planned** to Coimbatore (via Palakkad), Kanyakumari, and Mangaluru
- Total proposed RRTS length: 583 km
- Project divided into **four phases: Travancore, Malabar, Kannur, and Kasaragod lines**
- Through such parallel phased execution, a complete State-wide RRTS network is targeted by 2036

5. Major differences between the three rail projects

Design purpose

- **High-speed rail proposed by E. Sreedharan has few stops**, while RRTS has frequent stops for urban travel.

Speed

- The **high-speed rail and SilverLine were planned for speeds of up to 200 kmph**, whereas RRTS is designed for **160–180 kmph**.
- **Number of stops**
- The high-speed rail had 22 intermediate stops, SilverLine had 11 stops, while **RRTS has more frequent intermediate stations**.

Cost

- RRTS is the **costliest due to metro integration in urban areas**; SilverLine was estimated at ₹63,941 crore, while the high-speed rail was estimated at ₹1 lakh crore.

Alignment

- All three projects broadly follow the same alignment, with **RRTS requiring deviations in urban areas to pass closer to towns**.

What is the current controversy around Form 7?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies. Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. Context

- During the **ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, a large number of applications have been filed using Form 7** to seek deletion of voters' names
- The Congress alleges coordinated misuse of this process to remove eligible voters and give an unfair advantage to the BJP.

2. What is Form 7?

- Form 7 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, is used to **object to the inclusion of a name in the electoral roll on grounds such as death, duplication, ineligibility due to age or citizenship, or misrepresentation**.
- Booth Level Agents (BLAs) can also file objections.
- Earlier, only voters from the same polling booth could file objections, but in 2022, the **Election Commission amended Form 7** to allow any voter in the constituency to object.
- To prevent misuse **the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) must verify claims** if more than five objections are filed by one person.

3. Verification and Appeals Process

Once a Form 7 application is received:

- **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** conduct physical verification.
- In **death cases, neighbour confirmations and death certificates are required**.

- If the voter is absent, three physical visits must be made by the BLO to confirm if the voter has shifted.
- The voter is then issued a notice and given a hearing.
- Appeals against decisions of the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) can be filed before the district magistrate within 15 days of publication of the updated list.

4. Scale of the Ongoing SIR

- Over 50.94 crore enumeration forms have been distributed since launch of SIR Phase II.
- SIR is ongoing across nine States and three Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Kerala, and West Bengal.
- 6.5 crore voters were removed from draft electoral rolls, reducing the voter count from 51 crore to 44.4 crore.
- Deleted voters were classified as ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead/Duplicate).
- Highest deletions occurred in Uttar Pradesh (2.89 crore), followed by Tamil Nadu (97 lakh) and Gujarat (74 lakh).

5. Concerns and Way Forward

- Bulk filing of Form 7 may lead to wrongful deletion of genuine voters.
- False declarations are punishable under Section 32 of Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Marginalised and backward communities may be disproportionately affected.
- Stronger verification and administrative checks are needed to ensure fairness and credibility.

KEYWORDS

DinoTracker

- DinoTracker is an AI tool that identifies dinosaur species from fossil footprints with about 90% accuracy, similar to human experts.
- It was developed by researchers at the University of Edinburgh and Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin.
- The tool uses unsupervised learning on nearly 2,000 unlabeled fossil footprints, reducing human bias.
- It analyses eight physical features, such as toe spread, heel position, and weight distribution.

Hemoglobin A1C (HbA1C) Test

- The HbA1c test measures the percentage of glycated (sugar-coated) haemoglobin in red blood cells.
- It is commonly used to diagnose pre-diabetes and diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2).
- HbA1c is also called the glycated or glycosylated haemoglobin test.
- Unlike fasting and post-meal tests, it remains unaffected by recent meals, ensuring reliability.
- An Hb1A1C below 5.7% is considered normal; between 5.7 and 6.4% may indicate you are pre-diabetic; and 6.5% or higher can indicate diabetes.

Consumer Confidence Survey

- The Reserve Bank of India conducts the Consumer Confidence Survey to assess household economic sentiment.
- It measures views on the economic situation, income, employment, prices, and spending.
- Results are expressed as net responses (optimistic minus pessimistic), with values from +100 to -100.
- Positive values show optimism, while negative values show pessimism.

- The survey captures both **current perceptions** and **one-year-ahead expectations**.
- The **January 2026 survey** shows a **rural-urban divergence** in confidence.
- **Rural consumers are optimistic** about the economy and jobs and report higher non-essential spending.
- **Urban consumers remain cautious** due to concerns over prices and the economic outlook.

- The capital, **Athens**, expanded rapidly after the **mid-20th century**; the **Attica region** houses about **one-third of the population**.
- A historically barren landscape **encouraged migration**, creating a strong Greek diaspora, known as **xeniteia**.
- Greece reflects **multiple civilisational influences**, including **Classical Greek, Byzantine**, and nearly four centuries of Ottoman rule.
- Greece is a **unitary multiparty republic** with a **unicameral legislature** (Hellenic Parliament with 300 members) and a Prime Minister as head of government

Places in News

Greece



The map shows Greece in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. It is bordered by Italy to the west, Albania to the northwest, North Macedonia to the north, Bulgaria to the northeast, and Turkey to the east. The Aegean Sea is to the east, the Ionian Sea to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Major cities like Athens are marked. Surrounding countries like Romania, Serbia, Kosovo, and Egypt are also visible.

- Greece is the **southernmost country of the Balkan Peninsula** and lies at the **junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa**.
- Its **mountainous terrain historically limited internal connectivity**, while the sea enabled maritime expansion and external contacts.
- Greece has over **2,000 islands**, of which about **170 are inhabited**
- Some eastern **Aegean islands lie close to Turkey**.