

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 30 SEPTEMBER 2026

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PRELIMS POINTERS — TODAY IN ONE LINE EACH

1. **Index of Services Production (ISP)** — new monthly index MoSPI is publishing on a trial basis; in July 2026, 17 of 19 service sub-sectors grew and 10 posted double-digit growth.
2. **Neeru Dhanda** — first Indian woman to win Asian Games trap-shooting gold (Aichi-Nagoya 2026); the women's 4x400m relay won India's first athletics gold of these Games.
3. **UNICORN** — Unified Complex Radio Antenna, a Japanese naval mast-radar system; an India-Japan pact to transfer its technology was signed in July 2026.
4. **Kafue National Park** — Zambia's largest national park, a savanna-grassland ecosystem.
5. **Muthanga** — part of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala); site of the 2003 Adivasi land agitation, on which a Sessions Court ruled on 31 July 2026.

HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

☐ Why in News ☐ Target Prelims MCQ ☒ How to Use in UPSC Mains ☐ Mains Practice / Case Study Question

GS PAPER 1: GEOGRAPHY & SOCIETY

Once Ruined, Old Grasslands Never Regrow the Same Way

Why in news: A new study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences finds that ancient grasslands, once destroyed, almost never return to their original state — even a century later.

Key Details:

- **The finding:** Regenerated 'secondary' grasslands have taller plants with greater leaf area and lower dry-matter content; the conservative old-growth flora does not return for at least a century.
- **Why they don't recover:** Destruction alters soil nutrients and pH so the ground no longer suits old-growth grassland species, which are replaced by weedy, often non-native annuals.
- **The evidence base:** Researchers, including one from IISER Pune, compared data on 742 plant species from Indian, Australian and Brazilian savannas and North American prairies.
- **The value at stake:** Old grasslands support pastoral livelihoods and store about one-third of Earth's terrestrial carbon, yet are routinely treated as 'wastelands' for development or afforestation.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **India's pressure point:** India holds about 15% of the world's livestock on just 4% of its land area, but has no programme or policy dedicated to restoring grasslands, per ornithologist Asad Rahmani.
- **What restoration can do:** Restored patches have brought back the Great Indian Bustard in Solapur, the lesser florican in Kutch and the pygmy hog in Assam — but only partially, as old flora cannot fully return.

Old-growth vs. Secondary Grassland – what changes after destruction

OLD-GROWTH GRASSLAND	SECONDARY (REGROWN) GRASSLAND
Evolved over millennia Conservative, slow-growing native perennial grasses & forbs Resource-poor, fire-prone, megafauna-grazed soils Stores a large share of terrestrial carbon underground	Taller plants, higher specific leaf area, lower dry-matter content Weedy, often non-native annuals Altered soil nutrients & pH keep old flora out for 100+ years

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS1 (biomes, distribution of resources) and GS3 (conservation) answers to argue that 'protect first' beats 'restore later' for grasslands — and to critique afforestation drives that plant trees on native grassland.

Mains value-add: The Supreme Court in *M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India* (2021) ordered overhead power lines in Great Indian Bustard habitat in Rajasthan and Gujarat to be placed underground where feasible — cite it as the leading judicial intervention to protect a grassland species.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to grassland ecosystems and species in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Great Indian Bustard is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.
2. The pygmy hog is a species of the tall, wet grasslands of the Himalayan foothills in Assam.
3. The Banni grasslands are located in the Thar desert region of Rajasthan.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: The Great Indian Bustard is Critically Endangered (Statement 1 true), and the pygmy hog lives in the tall, wet grasslands of Assam's Himalayan foothills (Statement 2 true). The Banni grasslands are in Kutch, Gujarat — not Rajasthan, a common confusion because both border the Thar region (Statement 3 false).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** IISER: Indian Institute of Science Education and Research | IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 1

NCERT's new Class 9 social science textbook (*Understanding Society: India and Beyond — Part Two*) drops the earlier chapters on the French and Russian revolutions and gives more space to Indian medieval history and resistance — e.g., the Jat uprising of 1669 in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and the Sikh Gurus' clashes with the Mughal state, including the execution of Guru Arjan Dev and the detention of Guru Hargobind.

How to use: Useful for medieval-history prelims facts (the 1669 Jat uprising; Guru Arjan Dev under Jahangir); for Mains, cite it as a live example of the debate over curriculum and historical narrative.

GS PAPER 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**Top Court Flags Steep Mark-Ups on Essential Drugs**

Why in news: The Supreme Court has questioned why the Centre does not apply the 16% retailer margin under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 uniformly to essential medicines, calling steep retail mark-ups 'carnage' borne by taxpayers.

Key Details:

- **The Bench's question:** Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta asked why the DPCO's 16% retailer margin on the price to retailer (PTR) is not applied to all essential medicines to curb mark-ups.
- **The illustration:** An essential cancer drug supplied to retailers at about ₹3,000 was sold to consumers at ₹27,000 — a mark-up of nearly ₹24,000 per unit.
- **A regulatory loophole:** A rosuvastatin strip costs about ₹240 as a non-scheduled drug, while its scheduled combination with aspirin — under price control — costs about ₹70.
- **Who gains:** The Solicitor-General said private hospitals, which make patients buy from in-house pharmacies, rather than manufacturers are the main gainers; the matter will be heard next on 12 October 2026.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Public-finance angle:** Where treatment is covered by government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, inflated drug prices are ultimately paid by taxpayers, the Bench noted.
- **Precedent for margin caps:** In February 2019, the NPPA capped trade margins at 30% on 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs — a pilot of 'trade margin rationalisation' outside the ceiling-price system.

The price gap the Court highlighted

Medicine	Lower price	Higher price
Essential cancer drug	₹3,000 (price to retailer)	₹27,000 (price to consumer)
Rosuvastatin (strip)	₹70 — scheduled combination with aspirin	₹240 — non-scheduled stand-alone

How to use in UPSC Mains: A strong current example for GS2 health-governance answers on affordability — out-of-pocket spending, the limits of ceiling prices that cover only scheduled drugs, and the regulation of private hospital pharmacies.

Mains value-add: Article 47 (a Directive Principle) makes improving public health a primary duty of the State — pair it with the Court's remark that the 'loser is the taxpayer' to argue for trade-margin regulation as a constitutional obligation, not just a market fix.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to drug price regulation in India, consider the following statements:

1. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority fixes ceiling prices of scheduled formulations under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013.
2. The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 fixes the maximum retail price of every medicine sold in India, whether scheduled or not.
3. The ceiling price of a scheduled formulation includes a 16% margin for the retailer.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only (b) 2 only (c) 1 and 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: The NPPA fixes ceiling prices of scheduled formulations under DPCO 2013 (Statement 1 true), and the ceiling price is built on the price to retailer plus a 16% retailer margin (Statement 3 true). Non-scheduled drugs are not price-fixed — manufacturers may set their own price and raise it by up to 10% a year — which is exactly the gap the Court flagged (Statement 2 false).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** DPCO: Drugs (Prices Control) Order | PTR: Price to Retailer | NPPA: National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority

SC Quashes NSA Detention: A Confession to Police Cannot Justify Preventive Detention

Why in news: The Supreme Court has quashed a National Security Act detention ordered by the Sambhal District Magistrate, holding that a confession made to a police officer cannot by itself form the basis for preventive detention, and fined the U.P. government ₹10 lakh.

Key Details:

- **The holding:** A Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Sheel Nagu held that a confessional statement made before a police officer cannot, on its own, ground an NSA detention.
- **Punitive, not preventive:** The Court found the nexus between the material relied on and the detaining authority's satisfaction 'conspicuously absent', making the detention 'more punitive than preventive'.
- **Rights at stake:** Relying on a police confession would also run contrary to the constitutional protection against self-incrimination, the Court said.
- **Costs imposed:** The Bench set aside the October 2025 detention order and directed the U.P. government to pay ₹10 lakh as costs to the detenu within a month.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **The case:** The detenu, arrested over the November 2024 violence during a court-ordered mosque survey in Sambhal, was detained under Section 3(2) of the NSA; the Allahabad High Court had rejected his habeas corpus plea in June 2026.

Preventive Detention & Article 22

- **What it is:** Detaining a person to stop a possible future act — not to punish a past one — without a trial or conviction by a court.
- **Article 22(1)-(2):** Ordinary arrest safeguards — being told the grounds, the right to a lawyer, production before a magistrate within 24 hours — do not apply to preventive detention.
- **Article 22(4):** Detention beyond three months needs an Advisory Board (of persons qualified to be High Court judges) to report sufficient cause.
- **Article 22(5):** The detenu must be told the grounds of detention as soon as possible and given the earliest opportunity to make a representation.
- **Who legislates:** Parliament and State Legislatures both can; key Central laws include the NSA, 1980 and the COFEPOSA, 1974.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Cite in GS2 answers on personal liberty and preventive detention — the judgment reinforces that preventive detention is an exceptional power needing a live, proximate link to future harm, not a substitute for criminal trial.

Mains value-add: Section 23 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (earlier Section 25 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872) makes a confession to a police officer inadmissible against the accused — the Court refused to let preventive detention become a back door around that rule.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to preventive detention under the Constitution of India, consider the following statements:

1. A person may be preventively detained for up to three months without an Advisory Board reporting sufficient cause for longer detention.
 2. Both Parliament and State Legislatures can make laws on preventive detention.
 3. A person preventively detained has a constitutional right to be represented by a legal practitioner before the Advisory Board.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Article 22(4) allows detention up to three months without an Advisory Board opinion (Statement 1 true). Parliament (Union List Entry 9, Concurrent List Entry 3) and State Legislatures (Concurrent List Entry 3) can both legislate on it (Statement 2 true). Article 22(3)(b) expressly excludes preventive detainees from the right to consult and be defended by a lawyer — a frequent trap (Statement 3 false).

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2023: "Consider the following statements: 1. According to the Constitution of India, the Central Government has a duty to protect States from internal disturbances. 2. The Constitution of India exempts the States from providing legal counsel to a person being held for preventive detention. 3. According to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, confession of the accused before the police cannot be used as evidence. How many of the above statements are correct?" — Answer: (b) Only two.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NSA: National Security Act, 1980

Democracy Without Choice: Unopposed Panchayat Polls in Rural Maharashtra

Why in news: In some Maharashtra villages, gram panchayats have been chosen 'unopposed' for decades, bypassing the ballot — a practice defended as consensus but criticised for silencing dissent and sidelining the marginalised.

Key Details:

- **How long:** Angar in Solapur district has not held a panchayat election in about 60 years; Perid in Kolhapur district (population ~3,000) has not had a contested gram panchayat poll since 1956.
- **The defence:** Supporters say contests divide villages and waste money; model villages such as Hiware Bazar and Ralegan Siddhi have long chosen their panchayats unanimously through the gram sabha.
- **The criticism:** Analyst Ashok Choudsalkar notes the dominant family in most such villages decides the outcome and uses its power to suppress opposition, including pressure on would-be candidates.

- **Who loses out:** A former sarpanch from Yavatmal says women, Dalits and other backward-class members elected to reserved seats are often chosen for compliance and kept silent.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **The wider pattern:** The culture of unopposed elections extends beyond panchayats to local milk societies and cooperatives in parts of rural Maharashtra, according to local leaders.

The 73rd Amendment & Panchayati Raj

- **Constitutional status:** The 73rd Amendment (1992) added Part IX (Articles 243-243O) and the Eleventh Schedule (29 subjects) to the Constitution.
- **Three tiers:** Panchayats at village, intermediate and district levels; States with a population under 20 lakh may skip the intermediate tier.
- **Fixed term:** A five-year term; elections must be held before expiry, or within six months of a dissolution (Article 243E).
- **Reservation:** Seats for SCs and STs in proportion to population, and at least one-third of seats and chairperson posts for women (Article 243D).
- **Gram Sabha:** The body of all registered voters in a village — the foundation of the system, with powers set by State law (Article 243A).

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on the working of Panchayati Raj to show that formal reservation and regular elections do not guarantee substantive participation — elite capture can survive inside constitutional forms.

Mains value-add: Article 243K vests the superintendence, direction and control of panchayat elections in the State Election Commission; in *Kishan Singh Tomar v. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation* (2006), the Supreme Court held that State Election Commissions must ensure elections to local bodies are held on time.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Unopposed elections to gram panchayats are often celebrated as village consensus. Critically examine whether such elections strengthen or weaken grassroots democracy and the empowerment of women and marginalised groups envisaged by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. (150 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2018 (15 marks): "Assess the importance of the Panchayat system in India as a part of local government. Apart from government grants, what sources can the Panchayats look out for financing developmental projects?"

The United Nations' Long Road to Restoring Trust

Why in news: As the 81st UN General Assembly met under the theme 'Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: a UN that delivers for all', surveys show declining public confidence in the UN's ability to deliver.

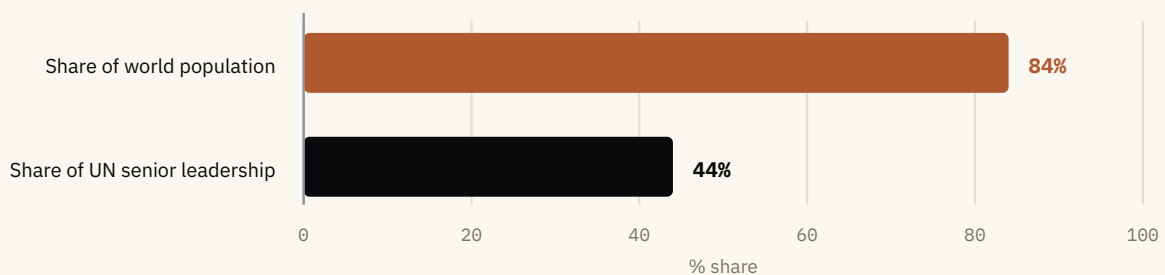
Key Details:

- **The trust deficit:** A UN Foundation poll found 52% of respondents feel the UN struggles to deliver results; a Rockefeller Foundation–Focaldata poll found only 58% think it can lead on global problems.
- **Security Council deadlock:** Persistent UNSC paralysis has eroded the General Assembly's trust, prompting resolution A/76/262 that requires permanent members to explain each veto to the Assembly.
- **Capture by donors:** A 2024 report of the UN's financial oversight body, ACABQ, found that in one agency 8 of 9 technical experts recruited were sponsored by a single government.
- **Voice of the Global South:** Developing nations, with 84% of the world's population, hold only 44% of UN senior leadership posts; only a third of UN leadership in Africa is African.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Delivery on the ground:** The UN delivered humanitarian assistance and protection to 98 million people — about 1.1% of the world's population — in 2025-26.

Global South: share of population vs. UN senior leadership



How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on reforming multilateral institutions — pair the representation gap with India's case for reformed multilateralism and a larger Global South voice.

Mains value-add: Article 108 of the UN Charter: amendments take effect only when ratified by two-thirds of UN members including all five permanent members — the structural reason Security Council reform has stalled for decades.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the United Nations, consider the following statements:

1. Under the 'veto initiative' (General Assembly resolution 76/262), the Assembly convenes a debate whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council.
2. An amendment to the UN Charter requires ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all permanent members of the Security Council.
3. The General Assembly can override a Security Council veto by a two-thirds majority.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1 and 2 only

Answer: (d) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Resolution 76/262 (April 2022) requires the Assembly to meet within ten working days of a veto (Statement 1 true), and Article 108 needs two-thirds ratification including all P5 (Statement 2 true). The Assembly has no power to override a veto — its resolutions are recommendatory (Statement 3 false).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** UNSC: United Nations Security Council | ACABQ: Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions | P5: Five permanent members of the UNSC

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 2

An Indian delegation led by a senior External Affairs Ministry official attended the SCO National Coordinators' meeting in Islamabad — the first official Indian visit to Pakistan since Operation Sindoor. Pakistan will host the SCO summit in August 2027; India also rejected Türkiye's reference to Kashmir at the UNGA as Türkiye seeks deeper SCO engagement.

How to use: Cite in GS2 answers on India's use of multilateral platforms to keep minimum engagement with adversaries — attendance at the multilateral level while bilateral ties stay frozen.

The Centre has moved the Supreme Court to stay Calcutta High Court hearings on petitions alleging that Forest Rights Act provisions were violated in obtaining consent for the ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project; separately, activists warned against efforts to revive bauxite mining in Odisha's Niyamgiri hills, where 12 gram sabhas rejected mining after the Supreme Court's 2013 Orissa Mining Corporation v. MoEF ruling left the decision to them.

How to use: Use as paired examples in GS2/GS3 answers on the FRA, 2006 and gram sabha consent — Niyamgiri as the landmark precedent, Great Nicobar as the live test.

GS PAPER 3: SECURITY, ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT

AFSPA Extended in Parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh

Why in news: The Union Home Ministry has extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh for another six months from 1 October 2026.

Key Details:

- **Manipur:** The entire State has been declared 'disturbed', except the jurisdictions of 13 police stations in five Valley districts; the MHA had begun restoring AFSPA after the May 2023 ethnic violence.
- **Nagaland and Arunachal:** AFSPA continues in nine Nagaland districts and 21 police-station areas in five others; in Arunachal, in Tirap, Changlang and Longding and three police-station areas bordering Assam.
- **A contested restoration:** In November 2024, the MHA reimposed AFSPA in six Manipur police-station areas; the then State Cabinet asked the Centre to review and withdraw the notification.
- **Where it has gone:** AFSPA was removed from all of Tripura in 2015 and revoked in Meghalaya in 2018 after 27 years; J&K has a separate Armed Forces (J&K) Special Powers Act, 1990.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Origin:** AFSPA came into force in 1958 to deal with the uprising in the Naga Hills, and was later extended to other insurgency-hit areas, starting with Assam.

How AFSPA, 1958 works – schematic

1

SECTION 3 – 'Disturbed area' declared

by the Central or State Government, by notification

2

SPECIAL POWERS to armed forces

use force (even lethal) against those violating prohibitory orders;
arrest without warrant; enter and search premises

3

LEGAL PROTECTION

prosecution of personnel needs prior sanction of the Central Government

4

PERIODIC REVIEW

e.g., MHA extension for 6 months from 1 Oct 2026 (Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal)

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 internal-security answers to weigh operational necessity in insurgency zones against accountability — the prior-sanction clause is the core of the human-rights critique.

Mains value-add: In Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India (1998), a Constitution Bench upheld AFSPA but required periodic review of 'disturbed area' declarations; the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005) recommended repealing the Act.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, consider the following statements:

- Both the Central Government and a State Government can declare an area 'disturbed' under Section 3 of the Act.
- Prosecution of armed forces personnel for acts done under the Act requires the prior sanction of the State Government concerned.
- The Act currently applies to the whole of Tripura.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 2 and 3 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 1, 2 and 3 (d) 1 only

Answer: (d) 1 only

Explanation: Section 3 lets either the Centre or the State declare a disturbed area (Statement 1 true). Prosecution needs the prior sanction of the Central Government, not the State — a classic trap (Statement 2 false). AFSPA was withdrawn from the whole of Tripura in 2015 (Statement 3 false).

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2015, GS Paper III: "Human right activists constantly highlight the fact that the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) is a draconian act leading to cases of human right abuses by security forces. What sections of AFSPA are opposed by the activists? Critically evaluate the requirement with reference to the view held by the Apex Court."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** AFSPA: Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act | MHA: Ministry of Home Affairs

Why Did the Centre Cut Import Duty on Edible Oils?

Why in news: Ahead of the festival season, the Centre has cut the Basic Customs Duty on major crude and refined edible oils from 24 September 2026 to cool domestic prices; oilseed farmers call it an attack on their livelihood.

Key Details:

- The new rates:** BCD on crude palm and crude soybean oil fell from 10% to 5%; crude sunflower oil now carries no BCD; refined palm oil fell from 32.5% to 27.5%.
- Refiners protected:** The Centre says a 19.25% duty differential between crude and refined oils has been kept, so imports of crude oil for domestic refining stay favoured.
- The global trigger:** The FAO vegetable oil price index averaged 196.9 points in August, its highest since June 2022, driven by higher palm and soy oil prices.
- The pushback:** Farmer leaders argue cheaper imports undercut the push for self-sufficiency in edible oil and fear it foreshadows a trade deal with the U.S., the largest soybean producer.

Data/Facts/Example:

- Industry view:** The Indian Vegetable Oil Producers' Association says lower landed costs of imported oil should cut consumer prices during the high-demand festive months.
- The substitution effect:** Industry expects demand to shift from palm oil, which may turn costlier as Indonesia implements a 'B50' biodiesel blending mandate, towards sunflower and soybean oil.

Basic Customs Duty on edible oils (effective 24 September 2026)

Oil	Earlier BCD	New BCD
Crude palm oil	10%	5%
Crude soybean oil	10%	5%
Crude sunflower oil	10%	Nil
Refined palm oil	32.5%	27.5%
Edible-grade sunflower oil	32.5%	22.5%
Peanut & olive oil	32.5%	27.5%

How to use in UPSC Mains: A ready example for GS3 answers on the consumer-versus-farmer trade-off in agricultural trade policy — tariff cuts cool food inflation but can blunt price signals needed for oilseed self-sufficiency.

Mains value-add: The National Mission on Edible Oils–Oilseeds (2024-25 to 2030-31), approved with an outlay of ₹10,103 crore, aims to cut import dependence by raising domestic oilseed output — cite it to show the policy tension with tariff cuts.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the recent revision of customs duty on edible oils, consider the following statements:

1. The Basic Customs Duty on crude palm oil has been reduced to 5%.
2. Crude sunflower oil no longer attracts any Basic Customs Duty.
3. The duty cut applies only to crude oils; duty on refined oils is unchanged.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: BCD on crude palm oil fell from 10% to 5% (Statement 1 true) and crude sunflower oil now carries none (Statement 2 true). Refined oils were cut too — e.g., refined palm oil from 32.5% to 27.5% — with the crude-refined differential kept at 19.25% (Statement 3 false).

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2018: "Consider the following statements: 1. The quantity of imported edible oils is more than the domestic production of edible oils in the last five years. 2. The Government does not impose any customs duty on all the imported edible oils as a special case. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?" — Answer: (a) 1 only.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** BCD: Basic Customs Duty | FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

Who Is Most Vulnerable to Cyber Frauds?

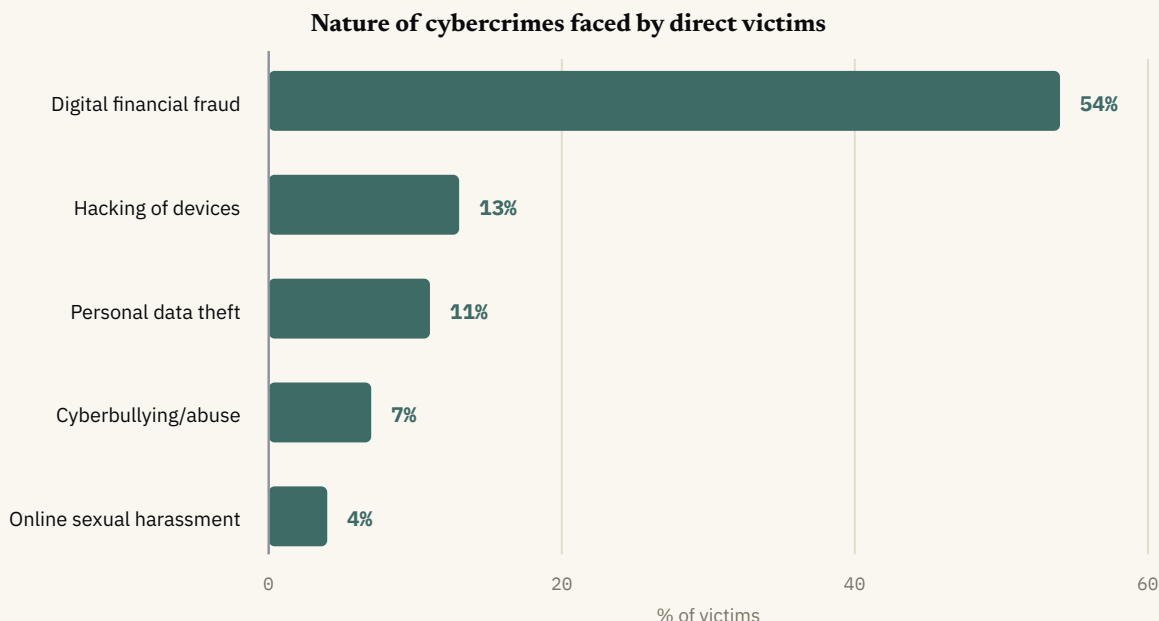
Why in news: As cybercrime cases rose 17.9% nationally to 1,01,928 in 2024 even while overall registered crime fell, a Lokniti-CSDS–Common Cause survey maps who is targeted and who loses money.

Key Details:

- **The NCRB trend:** Cybercrime cases rose from 86,420 in 2023 to 1,01,928 in 2024, even as overall registered crime declined by 6% — and registered cases capture only reported crime.
- **Exposure rises with use:** Among respondents with high online use, 18% fell in the high scam-exposure category; among those not online, only 5% reported high exposure.
- **What happens to victims:** Of the 13% who were direct cybercrime victims in the last two to three years, more than half (54%) experienced financial fraud.
- **The class paradox:** Wealthier and more educated respondents were more likely to be financial-fraud victims — 57% of the rich and 59% of college graduates, against 47% of the poor.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **The survey:** The Status of Policing in India Report 2026 drew on 8,306 citizens across 16 States; about a third regularly received fake delivery calls (33%) or high-return investment scam calls (31%).
- **The losses:** Over eight in ten victims lost money; about 23% lost more than ₹20,000 and roughly 29% lost between ₹5,000 and ₹20,000.



How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 cyber-security answers to argue that fraud is increasingly a tax on digital participation, not just on carelessness — so the answer lies in systemic safeguards, not only individual awareness.

Mains value-add: The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Home Ministry runs the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (cybercrime.gov.in) and the 1930 helpline for reporting financial fraud quickly enough to freeze funds.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Cybercrime in India is rising even as overall registered crime declines. Examine the factors that make users vulnerable to digital financial fraud, and suggest institutional measures to improve prevention and victim redressal. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NCRB: National Crime Records Bureau | CSDS: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 3

The international price of sulphur has risen nearly four-fold, from \$280 a tonne (July 2025) to \$1,050 (July 2026), driven by the Russia-Ukraine war, the West Asia conflict and demand from nickel processing for batteries. India relies on West Asia for about 90% of its sulphur imports, and its import bill rose from \$248 million (2024) to \$638 million (2025); most sulphur is used for fertilisers.

How to use: Cite in GS3 answers on supply-chain vulnerability and fertiliser security — a small commodity with an outsized dependence on one region.

The Commission for Air Quality Management has tightened its revised Graded Response Action Plan for Delhi-NCR: the exemption for non-BS-VI trucks carrying essential goods is withdrawn at Stage 4, and Sonipat joins the high-vehicle-density districts where BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars are barred at Stage 3.

How to use: Use as a current example in GS3 answers on urban air pollution governance — GRAP is a graded, trigger-based emergency response, not a long-term fix.

PIB: CSIR-CRRI and CSIR-IIP's pyrolysis-based bio-bitumen technology converts crop residue such as rice straw into a binder that can replace up to 30% of conventional bitumen. India imports 50-58% of its roughly 88 lakh tonnes of annual bitumen consumption.

How to use: A two-in-one GS3 example: an alternative to stubble burning and import substitution in road building.

GS PAPER 4: ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND APTITUDE

Bribes and Connections: The Informal Route to Justice for Cybercrime Victims

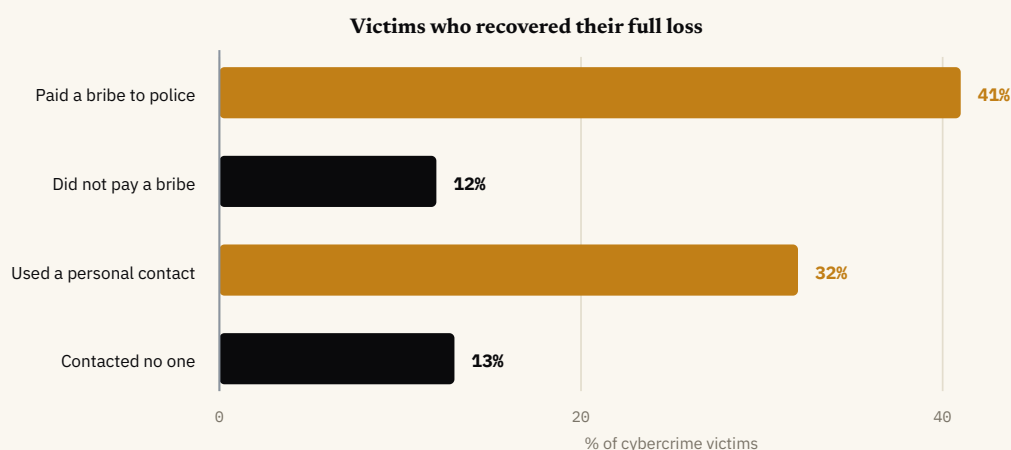
Why in news: The Status of Policing in India Report 2026 finds that many cybercrime victims get police action and recover money only by paying bribes or using personal connections — and the poor, women and rural victims pay most often.

Key Details:

- **Who pays:** Among victims who complained, 27% paid a bribe to the police — 51% of poor victims against 12% of the rich, and 35% of women against 22% of men.
- **Bribes 'work':** 41% of victims who paid a bribe recovered their full loss, against only 12% of those who did not; 68% of non-payers recovered nothing.
- **Connections work too:** 32% of victims who used a personal contact to press the police recovered the full amount, against 13% of those who contacted no one.
- **Many never complain:** Only 49% of victims complained to the police; 39% did not complain at all.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **The ethical core:** Recovering what one lost comes to depend on money or influence — turning a public service into a private favour and undermining equality before the law.



How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS4 answers on probity in governance and the quality of service delivery — a clear case where petty corruption hurts the poor most and erodes public trust in institutions.

Mains value-add: The 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission's 12th Report, 'Citizen Centric Administration' (2009), recommended the Sevottam model — service standards, grievance redress and capability building — to make public-service delivery accountable to citizens.

MAINS CASE STUDY EXERCISE

Q. You are the newly posted Superintendent of Police of a district. A survey shows that cybercrime victims who pay a bribe or use a personal contact are three times more likely to recover their money than those who do not, and that poor and rural victims are the most likely to pay. Some officers argue that 'informal facilitation' at least gets results. (a) Identify the ethical issues involved. (b) What steps would you take to ensure fair and time-bound redressal for every victim? (250 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2014, GS Paper IV (10 marks): "It is often said that poverty leads to corruption. However, there is no dearth of instances where affluent and powerful people indulge in corruption in a big way. What are the basic causes of corruption among people? Support your answer with examples."