

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

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HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

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

GS PAPER 1: SOCIETY, GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE

Punjab's Groundwater Crisis: When the Green Revolution Runs Dry

Why in news: Punjab's stage of groundwater extraction hit 152% in the 2025-26 Dynamic Groundwater Assessment, with 72% of its 153 blocks now 'over-exploited' — the highest share among all States.

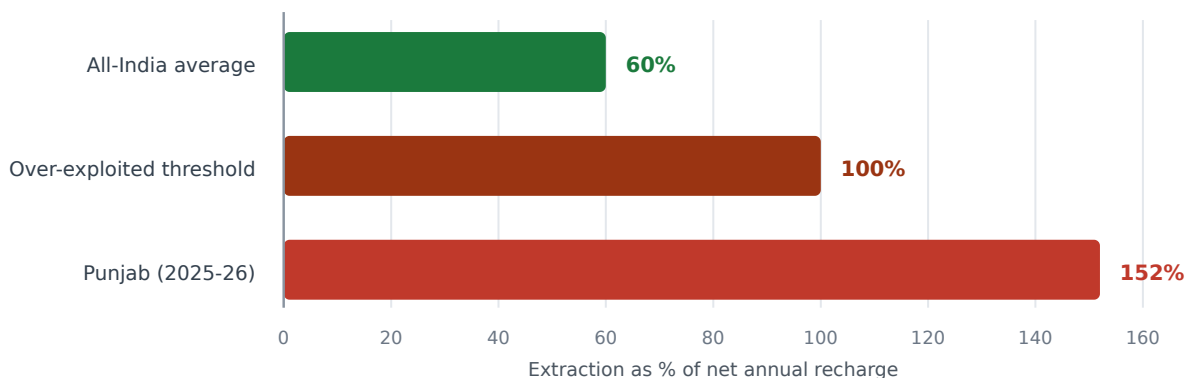
Key Details:

- **Cause:** Assured procurement, subsidised power and MSP for paddy locked farmers into a water-intensive rice-wheat system since the Green Revolution.
- **Water table:** Wells with water below 40m grew by 2 percentage points (2022-25); ~25 billion cubic metres/year is drawn for irrigation alone.
- **Wealth gap:** An EPW study found marginal farmers use water more efficiently, but wealthier farmers access deeper tables and draw higher volumes, widening rural inequality.
- **Policy response:** 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' pays cash for unused power units, but enrolment is low; the Centre's Atal Bhujal Yojana currently covers 7 other States, not Punjab.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **CGWB norm:** A block is 'safe' below 70% extraction, 'semi-critical' at 70-90%, 'critical' at 90-100%, and 'over-exploited' beyond 100% of annual recharge.
- **National contrast:** India's all-India stage of groundwater extraction is 60% — against Punjab's 152%, more than double the over-exploited threshold.
- **Productivity:** A Sangrur-Barnala study found larger farms earn higher returns but show lower groundwater productivity per unit of paddy than smaller farms.

Stage of Groundwater Extraction: Punjab vs. All-India



How to use in UPSC Mains: cite CGWB's Dynamic Groundwater Assessment thresholds and Punjab's 152% figure while answering on Green Revolution externalities; use Atal Bhujal Yojana and 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' as case examples of demand-side groundwater management, and note the MSP-driven cropping-pattern distortion as the root policy failure.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's Dynamic Groundwater Resource Assessment, consider the following statements:

1. A groundwater assessment unit is categorised as 'over-exploited' when its stage of extraction exceeds 100% of the net annual recharge.
 2. The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) conducts this assessment jointly with State/UT governments.
 3. Punjab's overall stage of groundwater extraction in the 2025-26 assessment was lower than the all-India average.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 3 is false — Punjab's 152% extraction rate is nearly two-and-a-half times the all-India average of 60%, not lower than it.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE 2025, GS Paper 3 (Mains, 15 marks): "Examine the factors responsible for depleting groundwater in India. What are the steps taken by the government to mitigate such depletion of groundwater?"

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CGWB: Central Ground Water Board | EPW: Economic and Political Weekly | MSP: Minimum Support Price

Maharashtra's Women Farmers' Bill Redefines Who Counts as a 'Farmer'

Why in news: Maharashtra's July 2026 Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill grants women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership — the first Indian State law to give this land-delinked definition enforceable legal form.

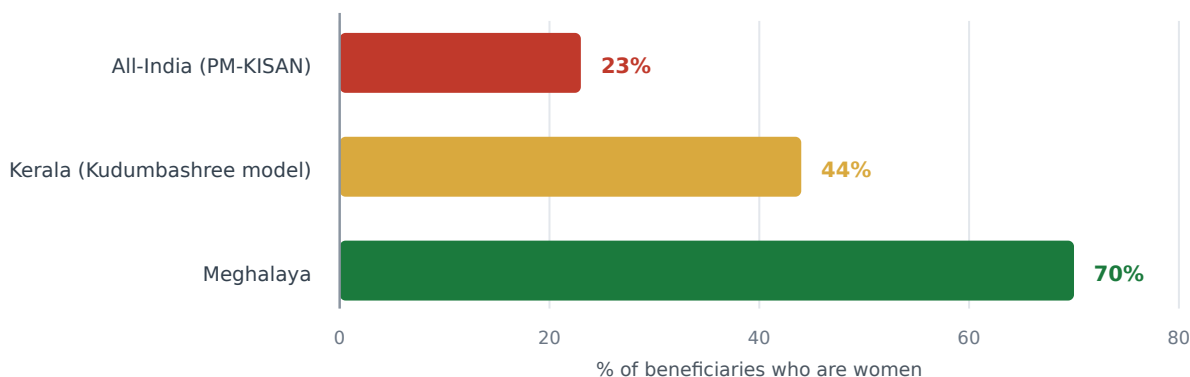
Key Details:

- **What it does:** Creates a 'Woman Farmer Certificate' recognising landless cultivators, livestock rearers, agricultural and plantation labourers, and pastoralists who farm at least one season a year.
- **Long gestation:** Operationalises the National Policy for Farmers, 2007's activity-based definition, 15 years after a similar Bill lapsed in the Rajya Sabha (2011).
- **Scale of the gap:** 2025 PLFS data show ~110 million women vs 127 million men in rural agriculture — near gender parity — yet only 14% of land holdings are in women's names (Agri Census 2015-16).
- **Next step:** Certificates are meant to link women to Agri Stack and Farmer IDs, opening access to PM-KISAN, credit and extension services currently gated by land records.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scheme access gap:** Only 23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries nationally are women; Meghalaya (70%) and Kerala (44%, via Kudumbashree) are outliers with women-friendly land/tenure systems.
- **Unpaid labour:** 41% of female agricultural workers are unpaid family labour, against 20% of male workers (2025).
- **Global marker:** The UN has designated 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer.
- **Complementary scheme:** The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana, under DAY-NRLM since 2011, already mobilises women into farm collectives — Maharashtra's law now supplies the missing land-delinked legal identity.

Share of Women Among Agricultural-Scheme Beneficiaries



How to use in UPSC Mains: use this as a live example while discussing the feminisation of agriculture, the implementation gap in the National Policy for Farmers, 2007, and the design of Agri Stack as a gender-disaggregated digital agriculture architecture.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the recognition of women as farmers in India, consider the following statements:

1. The National Policy for Farmers, 2007 was the first document to define 'farmer' in activity-based, land-delinked terms.
2. Maharashtra's Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, 2026 is the first Indian State legislation to give this definition enforceable legal form.
3. Women constitute a majority of beneficiaries nationally under the PM-KISAN scheme.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 3 is false — women are only about 23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries nationally, far short of a majority.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE 2014, GS Paper 1 (Mains): "Discuss the various economic and socio-cultural forces that are driving the increasing feminization of agriculture in India."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PLFS: Periodic Labour Force Survey | PM-KISAN: Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi | DAY-NRLM: Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission

11th National Ayurveda Day: Ministry of AYUSH Unveils 'Ayush Vision 2030'

Why in news: India observed its 11th National Ayurveda Day on 23 September 2026 from Nagpur under the theme 'Ayurveda for a Healthier Tomorrow', with the Ministry of AYUSH outlining its Ayush Vision 2030 roadmap.

Key Details:

- **Three pillars:** The 2026 campaign rests on integrative healthcare, evidence/research/innovation in Ayurveda, and community wellbeing & sustainable living.
- **Recognitions:** The Ministry conferred the National Dhanwantari Ayurveda Awards 2026 and announced new programmes at the National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur.
- **Fixed date:** Ayurveda Day was pegged to 23 September every year by a Gazette notification (23 March 2025), replacing its earlier link to the lunar Dhanteras date.
- **Institutional home:** AYUSH — Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy — has been under a dedicated Ministry since it was carved out of Health in 2014.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Global outreach:** The WHO's only Global Centre for Traditional Medicine worldwide is headquartered in Jamnagar, Gujarat, inaugurated in April 2022.
- **Shift in theme:** The 10th Ayurveda Day (2025) theme was 'Ayurveda for People and Planet'; 2026 pivots to healthcare integration and evidence-building.
- **Technical output:** Safety dossiers on medicinal plants and Standard Treatment Guidelines for skin diseases were flagged among this year's deliverables.

How to use in UPSC Mains: link AYUSH mainstreaming to India's health-diplomacy soft power (WHO GCTM), the integrative-medicine push via Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, and the standing debate on evidence-based validation of traditional-knowledge systems.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Ministry of AYUSH, consider the following statements:

1. AYUSH stands for Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani and Siddha alone.
2. The World Health Organization's only Global Centre for Traditional Medicine is located in India.
3. National Ayurveda Day has been fixed to a constant Gregorian calendar date through a Gazette notification.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is false — AYUSH also includes Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy, six systems in all, not four.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** AYUSH: Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa, Homoeopathy | WHO: World Health Organization | GCTM: Global Centre for Traditional Medicine

GS PAPER 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Supreme Court: National Song Cannot Override the Conscientious Objector

Why in news: The Supreme Court held that an elected government may shape the scope of the National Song but cannot compel citizens to sing it or penalise conscientious objectors, while hearing a challenge to the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026.

Key Details:

- **The Bench:** CJI Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, heard T.M. Krishna's plea against the 2026 amendment and a circular mandating all six stanzas of Vande Mataram at public functions.
- **Petitioner's case:** Stanzas three to six are 'expressly devotional, deity-invoking and non-secular'; compulsion under threat of 3 years' imprisonment offends secularism and religious freedom.
- **Precedent invoked:** The Court cited its 1986 ruling in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala*, where Jehovah's Witness students were held entitled to stand respectfully without singing the National Anthem.
- **Centre's stand:** Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta defended the amendment as within legislative competence; the Union's formal response has now been sought.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Penalty at stake:** Non-compliance under the amended law risks up to 3 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both.
- **Legal status:** Vande Mataram was adopted as the National Song by the Constituent Assembly in January 1950, alongside Jana Gana Mana as National Anthem — unlike the Anthem, it has no mention in Article 51A(a).
- **Rights invoked:** *Bijoe Emmanuel* (1986) rests on Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of expression) and Article 25 (freedom of conscience) protections against compelled speech.

How to use in UPSC Mains: distinguish 'respect' from 'compulsion' while discussing national symbols; balance Articles 19/25 against the Article 51A(a) fundamental duty, and use *Bijoe Emmanuel* as the anchor precedent on compelled speech.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the constitutional position on national symbols in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court has held that a conscientious objector cannot be penalised for not singing the National Anthem if they stand up respectfully.
2. Vande Mataram enjoys the same explicit constitutional mention as the National Anthem under Article 51A.
3. There is no central legislation that legally obliges every citizen to sing the National Anthem.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 2 is false — Article 51A(a) names only the National Flag and National Anthem as fundamental-duty objects of respect; the National Song has no such express constitutional mention.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE Prelims 1996, GS Paper 1 (Q.64): "Consider the following statements: No one can be compelled to sing the National Anthem since I. It will be violative of the Right to freedom of speech and expression. II. It will be violative of the Right to freedom of conscience and practise and propagation of religion. III. There is no legal provision obliging any one to sing the National Anthem. Of these statements..." Options: (a) I and II (b) II and III (c) I, II and III (d) None — Answer: (c) I, II and III are correct.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SC: Supreme Court | CJI: Chief Justice of India

Election Commission Freezes Trinamool Congress's Name and Symbol

Why in news: The ECI froze the Trinamool Congress's name and 'grass and flowers' symbol on 17 September 2026 after two rival factions — led by Mamata Banerjee and Arup Roy — separately claimed to be the real party.

Key Details:

- **The order:** A 14-page order held the dispute needs 'substantive determination', barred both factions from the existing name/symbol pending resolution, and allotted each an interim name and symbol.
- **Legal basis:** The freeze rests on the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, under which the ECI adjudicates disputes over splits/mergers of recognised parties.
- **Recent parallel:** Opposition parties compared the move to the 2022-23 Shiv Sena split, where the ECI similarly froze the 'bow and arrow' symbol pending its own determination.
- **Political stakes:** TMC won 41% of the vote (2.6 crore votes) in the April 2026 West Bengal Assembly election, making the freeze politically consequential ahead of further polls.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Founding precedent:** The ECI's power to decide such disputes by a 'test of majority' among elected members/office-bearers traces to *Sadiq Ali v. Election Commission of India* (1971), where the SC upheld this quasi-judicial authority.
- **Pattern:** Symbol/name freezes are rare but recurring: at least two major recognised parties (Shiv Sena, TMC) have had their symbols frozen by the ECI in the last four years.

Party-symbol disputes decided or frozen by the ECI

Case	Year	ECI action
Sadiq Ali v. ECI	1971	SC upheld ECI's power to decide party-symbol disputes by a 'test of majority' under the 1968 Order
Shiv Sena split	2022-23	ECI froze the 'bow and arrow' symbol; allotted new names/symbols to both factions
Trinamool Congress split	2026	ECI froze 'grass and flowers'; new interim names/symbols allotted to both claimant groups

How to use in UPSC Mains: discuss the ECI's quasi-judicial powers under Article 324 read with the 1968 Order, the 'party theft' allegation as a check on institutional neutrality, and the comparative pattern across recent symbol disputes.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Election Commission of India (ECI), consider the following statements:

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Election Commission decides disputes relating to splits or mergers of recognised political parties.
3. The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the ECI to freeze a disputed party's name and symbol pending adjudication.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is false — the ECI is a three-member body (the Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners), not five.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE Prelims 2017, GS Paper 1: "Consider the following statements: 1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body. 2. Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections. 3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?" Options: (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 3 only — Answer: (d) 3 only.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ECI: Election Commission of India | SC: Supreme Court

Kerala Orders Probe into CMRL-Exalogic Case, Reviving the FIR-Registration Debate

Why in news: Kerala ordered a police inquiry into the CMRL-Exalogic payoff controversy involving former CM Pinarayi Vijayan's family, reopening the constitutional debate on when a preliminary inquiry is required before an FIR is registered.

Key Details:

- **The allegation:** ED had sent a 25-page report seeking Vijayan's prosecution, alleging a confiscated diary detailed payments to Exalogic Solutions (run by his daughter Veena) during 2017-2021.
- **Government's defence:** Kerala's Home Minister said 'legal prerequisites, not politics' shaped the decision, citing Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022) on the limits of acting on ED-shared information.
- **Family's response:** Vijayan disputes any incriminating entries in the diary; son-in-law Riyas says it recorded only unrealised business plans.
- **Core legal question:** The dispute turns on Lalita Kumari v. State of U.P. (2013): FIR registration is mandatory once a preliminary inquiry confirms a cognisable offence, not automatically in every case.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Lalita Kumari test:** The 2013 Constitution Bench listed specific categories — including corruption and commercial-fraud cases — where a time-bound preliminary inquiry is permitted before FIR registration.
- **PMLA powers:** Vijay Madanlal Choudhary (2022) upheld sweeping ED search, arrest and attachment powers under the PMLA, a ruling now before a larger Bench on review.

How to use in UPSC Mains: weigh speedy access to criminal justice against safeguards against politically motivated FIRs; note 'Police' is a State List subject even as a Union agency (ED) supplies the underlying intelligence.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court in Lalita Kumari v. State of U.P. (2013) held that FIR registration is mandatory in every case involving a cognisable offence, without exception.
2. A preliminary inquiry before FIR registration is permitted only in specific categories of cases, such as those involving commercial or corruption offences.
3. 'Police' and 'Public Order' are List II (State List) subjects under the Seventh Schedule.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is false — the Court carved out categories where a preliminary inquiry is permitted first, so registration is not mandatory 'without exception' in every case.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ED: Enforcement Directorate | PMLA: Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 | FIR: First Information Report | CMRL: Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited

India-U.S. Trade Deal Held Hostage to Section 301 Probes Against India's Rivals

Why in news: A full India-U.S. trade deal remains unlikely until Washington launches and concludes fresh Section 301 investigations against India's competitor exporters such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

Key Details:

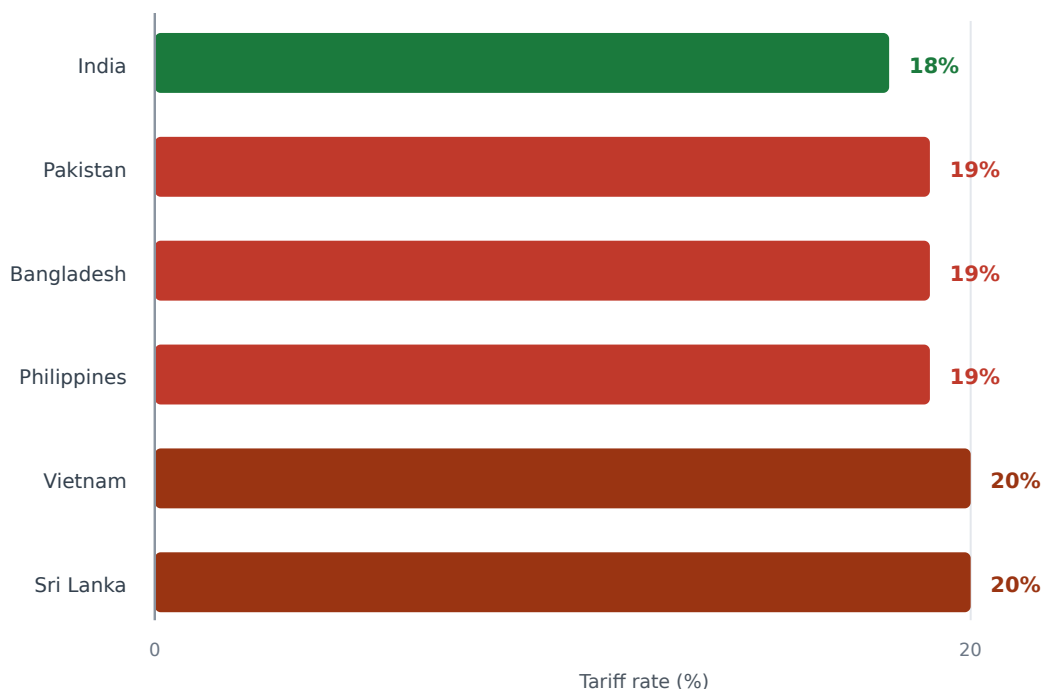
- **The mismatch:** India was investigated for 'excess capacity' under Section 301 in March 2026, but rival exporters were not — leaving India at a comparative tariff disadvantage until that gap closes.

- **Interim tariffs:** Under the February 2026 India-U.S. Interim Agreement, India's general tariff rate is 18% — lower than Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines (19% each) and Vietnam and Sri Lanka (20% each).
- **Legal backdrop:** The tariff structure followed a February 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Trump's 'reciprocal' tariffs were unlawful under the IEEPA.
- **New complication:** The Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act allows tariffs up to 100% on the top five importers of Russian oil — a category that includes India, the world's second-largest buyer of Russian crude.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Architecture gap:** India operates on an MFN tariff basis while the U.S. applies country-specific 'executive tariffs' — an architecture mismatch negotiators must bridge for any durable pact.
- **MFN principle:** Under WTO/GATT Article I, the MFN principle requires a member to extend the same favourable tariff treatment to all WTO members equally — the very multilateral discipline the U.S.'s Section 301/IEEPA tariffs sit outside.

Tariff Rates Facing India vs. Competitor Exporters to the U.S.



How to use in UPSC Mains: link to the WTO's MFN principle, U.S. trade-law instruments (Section 301, IEEPA), India's trade-diversification strategy, and the energy-security implications of secondary sanctions on Russian oil buyers.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India-U.S. trade relations, consider the following statements:

1. India's general tariff rate under the February 2026 Interim Agreement is lower than that faced by Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.
2. The Most Favoured Nation principle under the WTO requires a member country to extend equally favourable trade terms to all WTO members.
3. A Section 301 investigation under U.S. trade law can lead to unilateral tariff action against a trading partner found to have engaged in unfair trade practices.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation: All three statements are correct and describe the current India-U.S. tariff architecture and its multilateral backdrop accurately.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MFN: Most Favoured Nation | IEEPA: International Emergency Economic Powers Act | WTO: World Trade Organization | GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GS PAPER 3: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & SCIENCE

Canal-Top Solar: India's Land-Free Route to Clean Energy

Why in news: India's vast, under-explored canal network is emerging as a land-free frontier for solar power, with canal-top photovoltaic (CTPV) systems gaining fresh policy momentum after the Centre's newly approved PM Surya Sarovar Yojana.

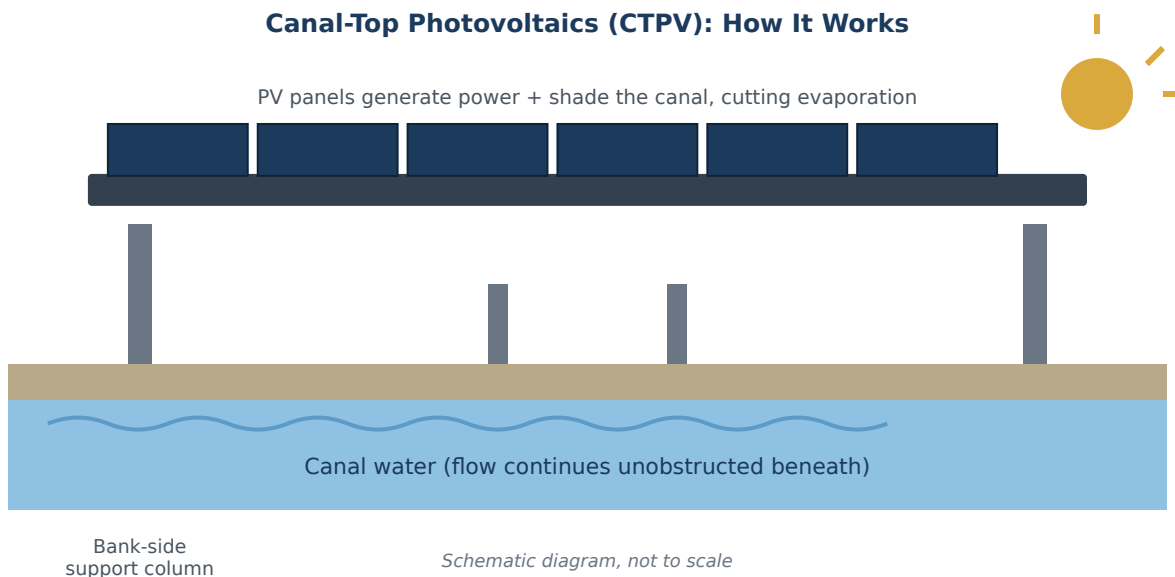
Key Details:

- **How it differs:** CTPV mounts panels on elevated structures spanning or lining canal banks, unlike floating solar, which sits on rafts over reservoirs; both avoid using scarce farmland.
- **Policy push:** PM-SSY targets 5,000 MW of floating solar on reservoirs and inland water bodies; CTPV itself still runs on a smaller 2014 MNRE pilot scheme.
- **Demonstrated gains:** Punjab's 20 MW of CTPV is estimated to have saved nearly 100 acres of land; a 1 MW project on Gujarat's Narmada Canal (2012) saves ~9 million litres of water a year from evaporation.
- **Bottleneck:** High system cost — elevated steel structures must span live canals without disrupting flow — is why deployment has stayed under 50 MW nationally more than a decade after the first pilot.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Technical potential:** A 2024 assessment (co-authored by CSTEP) estimates India's CTPV and canal-bank potential at ~131 GW, with Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab ranking highest.
- **National target:** India's COP26 Panchamrit pledge targets 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030 — CTPV's 131 GW potential, even partly realised, would be a meaningful land-neutral contributor.

Canal-Top Photovoltaics (CTPV): How It Works



How to use in UPSC Mains: connect to the National Solar Mission, land-use conflicts in renewable-energy siting, and the water-energy nexus via evaporation savings on irrigation canals.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to canal-top and floating solar photovoltaic systems in India, consider the following statements:

1. Canal-top photovoltaic (CTPV) systems are mounted on floating platforms, similar to floating solar systems.
2. The PM Surya Sarovar Yojana targets floating solar capacity on reservoirs and other inland water bodies.
3. Reduced water evaporation is a co-benefit claimed for both canal-top and floating solar installations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is false — CTPV uses elevated fixed structures spanning the canal, not floating platforms; floating solar is the raft-based alternative.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE Prelims 2022: "Consider the following statements: 1. Gujarat has the largest solar park in India. 2. Kerala has a fully solar powered International Airport. 3. Goa has the largest floating solar photovoltaic project in India. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?" Answer: Statement 2 only is correct.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CTPV: Canal-Top Photovoltaics | MNRE: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy | PM-SSY: PM Surya Sarovar Yojana | CSTEP: Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy | MW: Megawatt | GW: Gigawatt

‘Squatting’ on Mining Leases Threatens India’s Critical-Minerals Push

Why in news: Union Mines Secretary Keshav Chandra flagged ‘squatting’ — miners holding acquired blocks without starting operations — as a growing concern even as India accelerates critical-minerals reforms and explores lithium in Mali.

Key Details:

- **The problem:** Squatting occurs when miners fail to commence operations within the stipulated time-frame after a lease is signed, reflecting speculative holding rather than genuine mining intent.
- **2023 reform:** The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 removed six minerals — including lithium — from the atomic-minerals list, opening them to private/commercial auction for the first time.
- **Outward push:** India is separately exploring lithium extraction in Mali with Russia’s state atomic-energy corporation, a plan earlier stalled by Mali’s political instability.
- **Processing scheme:** A ‘very substantial’ domestic lithium-and-nickel processing scheme is in the pipeline to localise India’s battery ecosystem, the Secretary said.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Auction power:** The 2023 amendment also empowered the Centre to exclusively auction mining leases and composite licences for identified critical minerals.
- **Global partnership:** India has since joined the U.S.-led Minerals Security Partnership, a grouping of countries coordinating critical-mineral supply chains.

How to use in UPSC Mains: connect to the National Mineral Policy, 2019, India’s critical-minerals security strategy, the 2023 MMDR amendments, and outward mineral diplomacy in Africa.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's mining and critical-minerals policy, consider the following statements:

1. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 removed lithium from the list of minerals reserved exclusively for public-sector exploitation as an atomic mineral.
2. India has joined the Minerals Security Partnership.
3. India is fully self-sufficient in all identified critical minerals and does not need to import any of them.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 3 is false — India remains import-dependent for several critical minerals such as lithium and cobalt despite the 2023 reforms.

Related PYQ: UPSC CSE Prelims 2025: "Consider the following statements: I. India has joined the Minerals Security Partnership as a member. II. India is a resource-rich country in all the 30 critical minerals that it has identified. III. The Parliament in 2023 amended the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, empowering the Central Government to exclusively auction mining lease and composite licenses for certain critical minerals. Which of the statements given above are correct?"
Answer: I and III only.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MMDR: Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) | FIMI: Federation of Indian Mineral Industries | AGM: Annual General Meeting

Supreme Court Calls Cancer-Drug Overpricing a 'Broad Daylight Dacoity'

Why in news: The Supreme Court termed the overpricing of essential cancer medicines a 'broad daylight dacoity', flagging a drug sold to retailers at ₹2,700 but priced at an MRP of ₹27,000 — a tenfold mark-up.

Key Details:

- **The Bench:** Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta were hearing petitions seeking stricter price control over essential drugs, questioning regulatory silence on such margins.
- **Regulatory architecture:** Cancer-drug prices are governed by the DPCO, 2013 under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, enforced by the NPPA.
- **Court's remark:** The Bench asked why authorities responsible for price oversight had stayed silent despite the scale of the mark-up, calling the gap effectively 'extortion'.
- **Existing tool:** NPPA's 2019 Trade Margin Rationalisation policy already caps the margin on 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs at 30% over the first-stockist price — the kind of ceiling the Court is now pressing to be enforced or extended.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scale of mark-up:** An MRP of ₹27,000 against a ₹2,700 supply price to retailers implies roughly a 900% mark-up on that one drug alone.
- **Coverage gap:** DPCO, 2013 caps prices only for medicines on the National List of Essential Medicines via a ceiling-price formula; drugs outside the NLEM largely escape direct price control.

How to use in UPSC Mains: examine the essential-medicines price-regulation architecture (DPCO, NPPA, NLEM), the right to health under Article 21, and the case for extending price control beyond scheduled formulations.

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 for all drugs sold in the country, whether or not they are on the National List of Essential Medicines.
2. The Drugs (Prices Control) Order derives its authority from the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
3. Trade-margin caps have been used as a regulatory tool to control the retail price of certain non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is false — NPPA fixes ceiling prices only for drugs scheduled under the NLEM; non-scheduled drugs are regulated indirectly, if at all, through instruments like trade-margin caps.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NPPA: National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority | DPCO: Drugs (Prices Control) Order | NLEM: National List of Essential Medicines | MRP: Maximum Retail Price

GS PAPER 4: ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

Purnima Devi Barman's Hargila Army: Compassion as Public-Spirited Action

Why in news: Conservationist Purnima Devi Barman was named businessline's Changemaker of the Year 2026 for turning Assam's once-reviled greater adjutant stork into a symbol of women-led conservation through her all-women 'Hargila Army'.

Key Details:

- **The model:** The Hargila Army now counts over 20,000 women who protect nesting colonies, weave hargila motifs into local textiles, and run rescue-and-rehabilitation efforts for injured birds.
- **Measurable outcome:** Kamrup district's breeding colony grew from 28 nests in 2007 to roughly 200 today — the world's largest breeding population of the endangered stork.
- **Method, not just intent:** Barman worked through, not against, local culture — folding the 'unlucky' bird into community festivals and rituals rather than treating villagers as adversaries.
- **Who benefited:** Rural women once indifferent or hostile to the stork became its primary economic and emotional stakeholders, through livelihoods tied directly to its survival.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Recognition:** Honours include the Whitley Award (2017), the Nari Shakti Puraskar (2017) and UNEP's Champions of the Earth award (2022, Entrepreneurial Vision category).
- **Conservation stakes:** The greater adjutant stork's global population is estimated at only 800-1,200 individuals, found mainly in Assam, Bihar and Cambodia.

This is a textbook illustration of empathy and compassion towards the weaker sections — one of UPSC's own named foundational values for civil service — extended here to an economically marginal rural women's workforce, achieved through emotional intelligence and community persuasion rather than regulatory compulsion.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss, with the help of a suitable example, how empathy and emotional intelligence, rather than regulatory compulsion, can convert a community's indifference or hostility into active stewardship of a shared public good. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme