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Q68

The staple commodities of export by the English East Indian Company from Bengal in the middle of the 18th century were (a) Raw cotton, oil-seeds and opium (b) Sugar, salt, zinc and lead (c) Copper, silver, gold, spices and tea (d) Cotton, silk, saltpetre and opium Official key: D.

UPSC Civil Services Prelims 2018 · General Studies · 2 marks · History (Ancient, Medieval, Modern)

Ancient, medieval and modern Indian history - Prelims GS Paper I.

Explanation**(a)**

(a) Raw cotton, oil-seeds and **opium**. Cotton and **opium** mattered, but oil-seeds were not the signature mid-18th-century Bengal export bundle of the Company, and silk and **saltpetre** are missing. This option is not the key.

(b)

(b) Sugar, salt, zinc and lead. Salt was a later monopoly story; zinc and lead were not Bengal's staple Company exports in the 1750s. This option is not the key.

(c)

(c) Copper, silver, gold, spices and tea. Precious metals were typically imported into India to pay for goods; tea's big Company story is later and more China-centred. This option is not the key.

(d) Official key

(d) Cotton, silk, **saltpetre** and **opium**. These were the classic Bengal staples the English East India Company shipped in the mid-18th century: **piece-goods** and raw fibre, silk, gunpowder ingredient, and **opium**. This option is the official key.

Summary

Official key is (d) Cotton, silk, **saltpetre** and **opium**. Mid-18th-century Bengal cargoes that defined Company trade were textiles (cotton and silk), **saltpetre** for Europe's wars, and **opium**. Oil-seeds, base metals, or a gold-and-spice list do not match that staple set. Silver more often flowed in to buy those goods. The stored Set A letter is (d).

Related possible facts

These can be asked in a future Prelims paper.

Saltpetre

Potassium nitrate from Bihar-Bengal; ingredient of gunpowder

Opium

Bengal monopoly; re-exported toward China

Piece-goods

Cotton textiles, the older Company staple from Bengal

Plassey 1757

Political turn that tightened Company control over Bengal trade

Bullion inflow

Europe paid in silver for Asian manufactures before the drain inverted flows

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