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What India's new GDP series reveals

INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

Drone Strikes Disrupt AWS Data Centres in West Asia

INTERNATIONAL

UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026

the civil pala times special feature

Battered Iran attacks economic targets

Iran intensified its offensive across West Asia, targeting economic infrastructure and U.S. missions as the conflict escalated into its fourth day. U.S. President Donald Trump stated that joint U.S.-Israel strikes had caused extensive damage to Iran and warned that it was too late for Tehran to seek negotiations. Iran expanded its attacks to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, hitting oil facilities and prompting Qatar's state energy company to suspend LNG production, which drove European energy prices higher. Drones targeted the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, causing limited damage, while the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait was temporarily closed. Meanwhile, Israel continued airstrikes inside Iran and advanced operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, heightening regional tensions.

West Asia conflict: PM Modi speaks to Sultan of Oman, Crown Prince of Kuwait

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephonic conversations with key Gulf leaders amid escalating tensions in West Asia following coordinated US–Israel strikes on Iran and subsequent Iranian retaliation. He spoke with Sultan Haitham bin Tarik of Oman and Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, expressing concern over attacks affecting their countries and discussing the safety and welfare of the Indian diaspora.

The regional crisis intensified after US–Israel operations reportedly killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, prompting Iran to launch drones and missiles targeting Israel, US military bases in the Gulf, and major hubs such as Dubai and Doha. In recent days, Modi also spoke with leaders of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, condemning violations of sovereignty and reaffirming India's solidarity and commitment to regional stability and the protection of its citizens abroad.

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Drone Strikes Disrupt AWS Data Centres in West Asia

A series of drone strikes in West Asia have damaged Amazon Web Services (AWS) data centres in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, causing fires, structural damage, and power outages. These disruptions forced partial shutdowns of computing, storage, and database services, impacting businesses across the region. Amazon advised organisations to back up critical data and consider shifting workloads to other regions while recovery efforts continue. This incident represents one of the first cases of a major global cloud provider being directly targeted during a military conflict.

Strategic Importance of Data Centres

Data centres are increasingly seen as strategic assets rather than neutral infrastructure. They house vast computing power and support critical services ranging from financial systems, e-commerce platforms, and government applications to artificial intelligence tools. A single outage can simultaneously affect thousands of organisations, highlighting their centrality to modern economies.

West Asia as a Digital Hub

West Asia has been positioning itself as a major global hub for cloud computing and artificial intelligence. Technology giants have invested billions in the region to establish data centres and AI infrastructure, amplifying the strategic importance of these facilities in the event of regional conflicts.

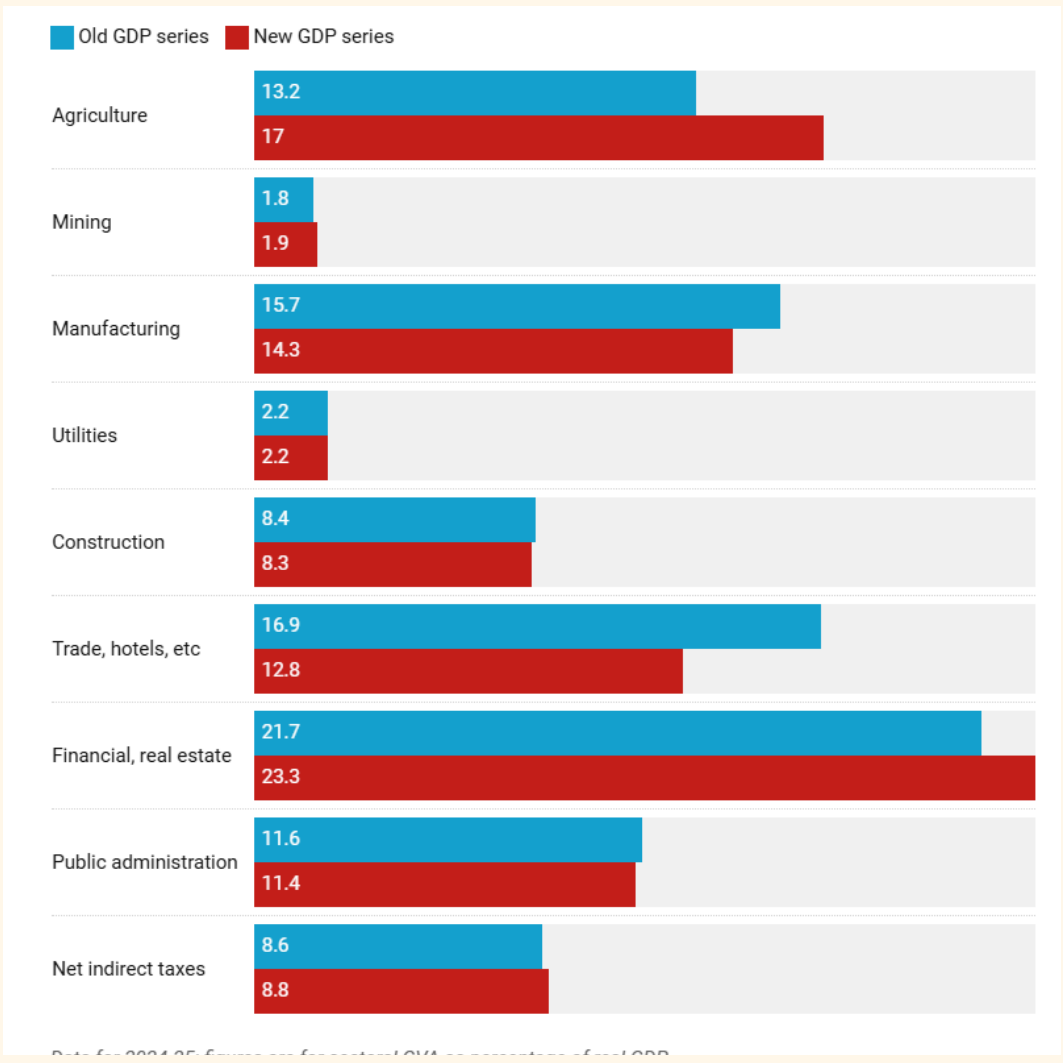
Unlike traditional warfare, which focused on oil fields, ports, and power plants, attacks on cloud facilities can disrupt entire sectors due to the centralisation of computing power. These data centres host services for banking, e-commerce, government operations, and artificial intelligence, meaning a single outage can cascade across multiple industries and regions. Governments and militaries also rely on cloud systems for intelligence, logistics, and communications, further elevating their strategic value. The incidents underscore the vulnerability of key digital infrastructure in geopolitically sensitive regions like West Asia, where countries are rapidly investing in cloud computing and AI facilities. Overall, this episode signals a new era of “digital battlefield” risks, emphasizing the need for resilience, redundancy, and protection of global cloud networks.

Farm sector larger than estimated, informal economy props up manufacturing: What India's new GDP series reveals

India has introduced a new GDP series with 2022–23 as the base year, replacing the earlier 2011–12 base. The revision makes growth rates more stable (7.1–7.6% vs 6.5–9.2% earlier) and slightly reduces the nominal size of the economy by 3–4%. Economists largely view this revision as more accurate and methodologically stronger.

Agriculture: Larger Share Under the New GDP Series

Under the new GDP series (base year 2022–23), agriculture is estimated to be around 5% larger than earlier calculations suggested. As a result, its share in GDP has increased to 18.2% in 2022–23 compared to 16.5% under the previous series, indicating that the sector's contribution to the economy was previously understated. Although agriculture continues its long-term structural decline in share as the economy diversifies, its relative size is now considered higher than earlier believed. This upward revision is mainly due to better capture of high-value cash crops such as fruits and vegetables, which generate greater value addition. Additionally, reduced input costs — particularly the shift from diesel to electricity and solar power under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyaan (PM-KUSUM) scheme — have increased farmers' value added by lowering fuel expenses.



Manufacturing and Informal Economy

The new GDP series highlights manufacturing as a stronger growth engine, with average growth revised upward to 11.2% compared to 8% under the old series. This revision reflects the removal of the flawed single-deflator method and the incorporation of improved data from the informal sector, particularly the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). As a result, manufacturing now appears consistently robust and a key contributor to India's economic expansion.

The new series also provides a clearer picture of the informal economy. Earlier GDP estimates relied heavily on formal-sector proxies, but the updated methodology uses direct data from PLFS and ASUSE. This shows that the informal component of manufacturing is stronger than previously thought, while certain service sectors, such as trade, transport, and related services, may be smaller than earlier estimates suggested. Economists have largely welcomed the revision, describing it as comprehensive, realistic, and statistically sound. While the new series does not drastically alter India's overall growth story, it reshapes our understanding of sectoral contributions, especially highlighting agriculture and manufacturing, and provides a more credible estimate of the informal economy.

Complex social world of macaques, through the eyes of Punch

Punch, a baby Japanese macaque at Ichikawa Zoo in Japan, faced rejection from its mother right after birth. To provide comfort, the zoo gave Punch a stuffed orangutan, which quickly became its constant companion. Clips of Punch clinging to the toy while other monkeys either ignored or acted aggressively toward it went viral online. Recently, the baby monkey has shown progress, even playing with other young monkeys without relying on its stuffed friend, marking a step toward social integration.

Why the Mother Abandoned Punch

Abandonment is not uncommon among Japanese macaques, especially in captivity. Experts say stress and inexperience often drive such behavior. In Punch's case, being born during a heat wave left its mother under strain, contributing to her rejection. Historical experiments, like those conducted by Harry Harlow in the 1950s and 60s, similarly showed that monkeys raised under stressful conditions often struggled with mothering.

Life Without a Parent

Unlike herd animals, Japanese macaques live in socially complex, hierarchical groups. Losing a mother makes integration into this social web more difficult. Punch, as a new and abandoned individual, had to navigate not only the group's social rules but also potential competition for resources. The stress and cohesion of the group play a key role in determining how well a newcomer can be accepted.

Understanding Macaque Hierarchy

Macaques live in matrilineal societies, where daughters inherit their mother's rank and, interestingly, the youngest sister ranks above the older ones. Male rank, on the other hand, depends more on dominance and the ability to form alliances. This hierarchical structure dictates social interactions, access to food, and general behavior within the group.

Aggression and Social Challenges

Aggression from higher-ranked monkeys toward lower-ranked members is normal. This behavior is not bullying in a human sense but a way to reinforce rank and ensure the social order. For Punch, such encounters were part of learning his place in the group and navigating the complexities of macaque society.

Today, Punch is gradually integrating into the group, interacting naturally with other young macaques without relying on the stuffed orangutan. His journey shows not just resilience but also how social structures shape behavior. Much like humans, Japanese macaques navigate hierarchies, learn social rules, and find their place in a community. Punch's experience mirrors how early challenges—whether parental absence or social barriers—require patience, adaptation, and gradual acceptance. It reminds us that belonging and recognition are built over time, and that empathy, support, and understanding within a community—whether human or primate—play a vital role in helping individuals thrive.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

BIMSTEC is a regional organisation established on 6 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration in Thailand.

- **It was initially formed as BIST-EC (Bangladesh–India–Sri Lanka–Thailand Economic Cooperation) to promote economic collaboration among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.**
- **Myanmar joined in December 1997, after which the grouping became BIMST-EC.**
- **With the inclusion of Nepal and Bhutan in 2004, it was renamed BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) during the First Summit held in Bangkok on 31 July 2004.**
- **The organisation currently comprises seven member states: *Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.***

BIMSTEC Bangkok Summit 2025 – Major Outcomes

1. Bangkok Vision 2030

- **First long-term strategic roadmap adopted by BIMSTEC.**
- **Envisions a "prosperous, resilient, and open" Bay of Bengal region by 2030.**
- **Prioritises economic integration and early conclusion of the long-pending BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA).**
- **Seeks to improve low intra-regional trade (around 6%) by addressing tariff barriers, weak value chains, and poor connectivity.**
- **Calls for strengthening the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka to enhance institutional efficiency.**

2. Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation

- **Establishes a framework to streamline shipping and port connectivity across the Bay of Bengal.**
- **Aims to reduce logistical barriers and trade costs among member states.**
- **Complements land connectivity initiatives such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway.**
- **Reflects BIMSTEC's shift toward practical, connectivity-driven regional cooperation.**

BIMSTEC Charter

The adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter at the 2022 Colombo Summit marked a turning point by formally defining the organisation's objectives, structure, and institutional framework, thereby strengthening and streamlining regional cooperation.

Prelims model questions

Q. The BIMSTEC Charter, adopted in 2022, primarily aimed to:
(a) Establish a military alliance among member states
(b) Define the organisation's objectives and institutional structure
(c) Create a common currency for the Bay of Bengal region
(d) Replace SAARC as a regional bloc
Answer: (b)

Q. The BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 focuses on which of the following?
1. **Promoting economic integration among member states**
2. **Increasing intra-regional trade**
3. **Strengthening the BIMSTEC Secretariat**

Select the correct answer using the code below:
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3
Answer: (d)

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the cultural history of medieval India, consider the following statements: (2016)

1. Siddhas (sittars) of the Tamil region were monotheistic and condemned idolatry.

2. Lingayats of the Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

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2) Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Saint Nimbarka was a contemporary of Akbar.

2. Saint Kabir was greatly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN

81 DAYS TO GO

HERITAGE

Rangwali Holi: The Festival of Colours and Collective Joy

Rangwali Holi, also known as Dhulandi, is the main day of Holi celebrations and is widely recognised for its vibrant display of colours. Observed on the day following Holika Dahan, it marks the joyous culmination of the Holi festival. On this occasion, people gather in open spaces, homes, and community grounds to apply dry gulaal and splash coloured water on one another, transforming streets and neighbourhoods into scenes of festivity. The playful use of colours symbolises equality, as social distinctions of age, status, and background momentarily dissolve in shared celebration.

Beyond its visual splendour, Rangwali Holi carries deep cultural and spiritual meaning. It is closely associated with the divine love of Radha and Krishna. Their playful exchange of colours is believed to represent affection, devotion, and the joy of companionship. This narrative has shaped the celebratory character of the festival, especially in regions linked to Krishna traditions. Rangwali Holi also marks the arrival of spring and the end of winter, symbolising renewal, abundance, and new beginnings. The festival encourages harmony, inclusiveness, and social bonding, making it not merely a celebration of colours but a reaffirmation of community spirit and shared cultural identity.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option c

Statement 1: Siddhas (sittars) of the Tamil region were monotheistic and condemned idolatry. This is Correct. Siddhas (also known as Sittars) were saints or mystics of Tamil Nadu, particularly associated with the Bhakti movement in the Tamil region during the medieval period. They were monotheistic, emphasizing devotion to a single god, and they rejected the worship of idols, which was prevalent in the traditional Hindu practices of the time. The Siddhas were influenced by the Shaiva sect, but their focus was on the inner experience and the worship of an abstract or formless divine, often in the form of Lord Shiva. Thus, they condemned the practice of idolatry and supported a direct connection between the individual soul and the divine.

Statement 2: Lingayats of the Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.: Correct. The Lingayats (also known as Veerashaivas) were a religious community in the Kannada region, and they followed the teachings of Basava in the 12th century, who was a prominent social and religious reformer. One of the core principles of the Lingayat faith was a rejection of the caste system, which they saw as discriminatory and inconsistent with spiritual equality. They promoted the idea of equality among all people, regardless of their caste. The Lingayats also rejected the doctrine of rebirth and instead believed in immediate salvation through devotion to Lord Shiva. They emphasized the importance of personal devotion and morality, rather than ritualistic practices tied to the cycles of birth and rebirth.

2) Answer is option d

Statement 1 Saint Nimbarka was a contemporary of Akbar.: Incorrect. Saint Nimbarka was the founder of the Nimbarka sect (a branch of Vaishnavism), and he lived in the 14th century. Akbar, on the other hand, ruled from 1556 to 1605. Nimbarka's time was well before Akbar's reign. Therefore, Nimbarka was not a contemporary of Akbar.

Statement 2: Saint Kabir was greatly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.: Incorrect. Saint Kabir was a 15th-century mystic poet and saint who is known for his Bhakti and Sufi influences. He is famous for his poetry criticizing both the Hindu and Muslim rituals, advocating for a personal connection with God. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, on the other hand, was a 17th-century Islamic scholar and a key figure in the Naqshbandi Sufi order. He lived after Kabir's time and was not an influence on Kabir. In fact, Kabir's ideas were more in line with Sufism, but he was not directly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

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