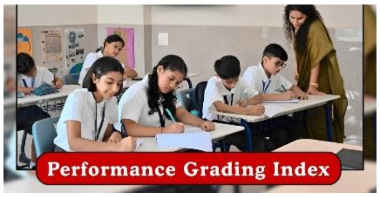
Current Affairs - 08 July 2026

PERFORMANCE GRADING INDEX



- It is an index that **measures the performance of states in school education** undertaken by the Department of School Education &Literacy (DoSEL).
- PGI strives to evaluate the **relative performance of all the State/UTs** and **districts** respectively in a uniform scale to encourage them to perform better.
- The PGI 2.0 is constructed based on **73 indicators from 2 Categories containing 6 Domains**.
- **PGI – States/UTs:**
    - It is devised by the **Department of School Education & Literacy, Union Ministry of Education.**
    - It evaluates the performance of States and Union Territories by categorizing them into different grades or levels.
    - **Total weightage:** The PGI- States/UTs structure comprises of total weightage of **1000 points across 73 indicators.**
    - **It consists of 2 Categories:** Outcome and Governance & Management; comprising six domains:
        - Learning Outcomes and Quality
        - Access
        - Infrastructure & Facilities
        - Equity
        - Governance Processes
        - Teachers Education & Training
    - The framework is fully aligned with data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), **PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024**, PM POSHAN Portal, PRABANDH Portal, and **Vidyanjali Portal.**

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SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE FALLS, TEACHER STRENGTH CROSSES 1 CRORE

- The **Unified District Information System for Education Plus** (UDISE+) is the government of India's official digital database for the education sector.
- Maintained by the Ministry of Education, it collates real-time statistics on:
  - School infrastructure
  - Student enrolment
  - Teacher metrics
  - Facilities and amenities
  - Learning environment

Key Findings from UDISE+ 2025-26

- **Decline in Dropout Rates**
  - The academic year 2025-26 witnessed a notable reduction in dropout rates across preparatory and secondary levels compared to previous years:

Preparatory level: Dropout rate declined from 2.3% in 2024-25 to 1.8% in 2025-26.

Secondary level: Dropout rate declined from 8.2% in 2024-25 to 7.0% in 2025-26.

- **Improvement in Student Retention**
  - Student retention has shown a positive trend at higher levels:

Middle level: Retention increased from 82.8% (2024-25) to 83.7% (2025-26).

Secondary level: Retention increased significantly from 47.2% (2024-25) to 51.9% (2025-26).

- **Concerning Retention Reality**
  - Despite improvements, only about half of Class I students make it to Class XII, highlighting the persistent challenge of student attrition at higher levels of schooling.
- **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)**
  - The GER at the secondary level improved considerably:
    - From 68.5% in 2024-25 to 71.7% in 2025-26.
  - This reflects greater accessibility and continued enrolment at higher levels.

- **Teacher Strength Crosses One Crore**
  - For the first time in any academic year, the total number of school teachers crossed 1.02 crore during 2025-26, an increase of 8.3% compared to 2022-23.
  - Women continue to account for the majority of the workforce at 54.9%.
  - Rising teacher numbers are seen as critical for improving student-teacher ratios and ensuring quality education.
- **Pupil-Teacher Ratios (PTR)**
  - PTRs have continued to improve, comfortably surpassing the NEP target of 30:1:
    - Foundational stage: 10
    - Preparatory: 12
    - Middle: 17
    - Secondary: 21

Significance and Concerns

- **Positive Trends**
  - Falling dropout rates signal improved retention and school responsiveness.
  - Rising teacher strength and improving PTR indicate better educational conditions.
  - Digital access improvements reflect the growing integration of technology in schools.
  - Near-universal basic amenities show progress in school infrastructure.
- **Persisting Challenges**
  - Only half of Class I students reach Class XII, reflecting continued attrition at higher levels.
  - No state has achieved the top three PGI grades, indicating significant room for improvement.
  - Marginal decline in retention at foundational and preparatory levels needs attention.
  - Wide inter-state disparities in performance, especially in aspirational states.
- **Structural Concerns**
  - Playground availability declining raises concerns about physical education.
  - Learning outcomes remain a challenge, especially in aspirational states.
  - Gender parity improvements remain marginal.
  - Regional disparities in teacher availability and school infrastructure persist.

RAM TEMPLE TRUST: WHY A CEO IS BEING APPOINTED, AND HOW ITS GOVERNANCE WORKS

- The **Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust** owes its existence to the Supreme Court's November 2019 Ayodhya judgment.
  - The Court had directed the government to formulate a scheme within three months to set up a trust and transfer the disputed land to it.
  - The Central government constituted the Trust on February 5, 2020, and transferred the acquired land to it through a Gazette notification.
- Unlike major temples such as Tirupati, Jagannath, Vaishno Devi, or Kashi Vishwanath, the Ram Temple is **not governed by a dedicated state legislation**.
- Instead, its legal foundation rests on a combination of four things: the Supreme Court's 2019 judgment, the 1993 Ayodhya Acquisition Act, the Central government's scheme and notification, and the Trust's own deed.
- This makes the Ram Temple Trust legally unique — it is **neither a conventional private religious trust nor a statutory temple board** created through legislation.
- Instead, it is a **public religious trust** brought into existence through executive action, in implementation of a judicial mandate.

Who Runs the Trust?

- The Trust has 15 members and functions as the temple's highest decision-making body. It is chaired by Mahant Nritya Gopal Das.
- However, due to his age and health issues, day-to-day leadership had gradually shifted to General Secretary Champat Rai, who became the institution's public face.
- The Trust deed provides for a mix of permanent members, nominated members, and ex-officio representatives. This ensures representation from the religious community, as well as from the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments.
- Temple construction was supervised by a separate committee headed by Nripendra Mishra, former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, as an ex-officio member.

How Is the Ram Temple Different From Other Major Temples?

STRUCTURAL CONTRAST: RAM TEMPLE TRUST VS OTHER MAJOR SHRINES

Temple	Ram Temple	Tirupati	Mata Vaishno Devi	Jagannath Temple	Siddhivinayak Temple	Kashi Vishwanath Temple
Governing legislation	Supreme Court judgment + 1993 Act + Trust Deed	AP Charitable & Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1987	J&K Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1988	Shri Jagannath Temple Act, 1955	Shree Siddhivinayak Ganpati Temple Trust Act, 1980	UP Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983
Legal nature of management	Independent public charitable trust	State government endowments board	Autonomous statutory board	Autonomous statutory managing committee	Government-controlled public trust	Statutory board of trustees
Executive head / Chief administrator	Proposed CEO / General Secretary	Executive Officer (EO): A senior, active IAS Officer posted by the state government to run operations.	Chief Executive Officer (CEO): An active IAS or KAS (Civil Services) Officer deployed by the state administration.	Chief Administrator: A senior bureaucrat (usually IAS or senior OAS) appointed directly by the Odisha Law Dept.	Executive Officer: A state-appointed government officer who acts as the ex-officio Secretary to the Trust.	Chief Executive Officer (CEO): A senior state-vetted bureaucrat/PCS officer appointed under Section 16 of the Act.
Financial audit grid	Private auditing	State audit department	Statutory audit	State Law Dept oversight	State vetted	State monitored
RTI status	Exempt	Fully bound	Fully bound	Fully bound	Fully bound	Not known

- This comparison shows a key structural gap: unlike these other temples, which are run by government-appointed executive officers under statutory frameworks, the Ram Temple has so far been managed directly by its trustees and office-bearers themselves.

Why Appoint a CEO Now?

- Under this new arrangement, the CEO will handle day-to-day administration, allowing the Trust and its members to focus primarily on policy decisions.
- This move brings the Ram Temple's governance model closer to that of other major Indian temples — where professional executive officers or chief administrators handle operations, separate from the trustee body.

Why Does the Trust's Rulebook Remain Largely Unknown?

- Unlike most major Indian temple institutions, much of the Ram Temple Trust's internal rulebook remains outside the public domain.
- While the Centre notified the Trust's creation in February 2020, the detailed government scheme and Trust Deed under which it operates have never been made public.
    - When an RTI applicant sought these documents, the Ministry of Home Affairs told the Central Information Commission (CIC) that they formed part of a "confidential file" due to the sensitivity of the matter.
    - The CIC further ruled that the **Trust does not qualify as a "public authority"** under the RTI Act.

INDIA'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS AFTER THE WEST ASIAN CRISIS'

- India enters 2026–27 with strong economic momentum but faces significant external and domestic challenges.
- The preliminary MoU between the United States and Iran, leading to the reopening of the **Strait of Hormuz,** is expected to stabilise global crude oil supplies and lower prices.
- This provides India with an **opportunity to strengthen economic growth** while addressing structural concerns such as energy dependence, agricultural vulnerability, and geopolitical uncertainty.

2026–27 Growth Prospects and Challenges

- **Strong Economic Performance**
  - India recorded GDP growth of 7.7% in 2025–26, following robust growth in the previous two years.
  - Gross Value Added (GVA) expanded even faster, driven by manufacturing, trade, transport, and financial services.
  - A low **Implicit Price Deflator (IPD)** reflected moderate inflation and balanced economic expansion.
- **Challenges to Growth**
  - Growth in 2026–27 may slow due to higher crude oil prices during the first quarter and the expected **El Niño**-induced rainfall deficiency.
  - Weak monsoon conditions threaten both **kharif** and **rabi** crops, increasing the risk of lower agricultural output and higher food inflation.
  - Potential **fertiliser shortages** may further reduce farm productivity.
- **Policy Priorities**
  - To minimise these risks, India should build adequate fertilizer reserves, review crop-specific trade policies, and strengthen agricultural preparedness.
  - The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** projects real GDP growth of 6%, indicating continued resilience despite global and climatic challenges.

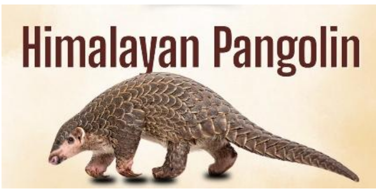
Fiscal Prospects, Petroleum Economy

- **Fiscal Outlook**
  - Higher inflation is expected to increase **nominal GDP** growth to about **12.4%**, resulting in stronger **tax revenues**.
  - The substantial **RBI dividend** strengthens government finances, making it likely that the fiscal deficit target of 4.3% of GDP will be achieved or only marginally exceeded.
- **India's Petroleum Economy**
  - India's dependence on **imported crude oil** has increased to over 90%, while domestic crude production has steadily declined.
  - **Rising demand** for petroleum products reflects rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and economic growth.
- **Long-Term Energy Strategy**
  - India has developed significant **refining capacity**, reducing refining costs and supporting energy security.
  - However, long-term sustainability requires expanding domestic oil exploration, promoting renewable energy, investing in nuclear power, and reducing excessive dependence on imported crude.

The Way Forward

- **Strategic Commodity Reserves**
  - Lower global oil prices provide an opportunity to expand strategic reserves of crude oil, fertilizers, and other essential commodities.
  - Strengthening storage infrastructure will enhance preparedness against future supply disruptions.
- **Diversification of Energy Sources**
  - India should diversify crude import sources and reduce reliance on the **Strait of Hormuz** to improve supply security and minimise geopolitical risks.

HIMALAYAN PANGOLIN



- **Scientific name:** Its scientific name is **Manis aurita**
- It went through a **demographic contraction around the 14th century**, coinciding with the onset of the **Little Ice Age in the Himalayan region.**
- **Features:**
  - It is significantly larger in **body size and skull.**
  - It paradoxically has **markedly smaller ears**. It also has a **shorter and broader nasal bone.**
  - It has enlarged **olfactory bulb and turbinals,** using smell to forage for ants and termites.
- **Distribution:** Its distribution is restricted to the **southern Himalayan foothills**, with confirmed populations in **Nepal, South Tibet, and Northeast India,** including the state **of Assam.**
- **Threats:**
  - It is facing **illegal wildlife trade**.
  - The products from this species have infiltrated regulated **traditional medicine markets.**
  - It is also facing an **internal threat of inbreeding.**

GUWAHATI DECLARATION

- It was adopted by the **BRICS nations** to strengthen cooperation **against illicit drug trafficking** and **related transnational organized crime.**
- The declaration was adopted at the conclusion of the two-day **BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies Meeting** held in **Guwahati, Assam.**
- It was held under **India's 2026 BRICS chairship, themed "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,".**

- The joint declaration calls for greater **cooperation** through **timely exchange of information,** intelligence and best practices, in line with national laws and international obligations.
- The declaration also stresses the need to **strengthen efforts to reduce drug demand, promote healthy lifestyles** and **protect vulnerable groups**, especially children and young people, through evidence-based and people-centred strategies.

WHAT IS BINTANG ADIPURNA?

Prime Minister of India recently conferred with Indonesia's highest honour 'Bintang Adipurna of the Republic of Indonesia' medal for his role in strengthening the ties between both the countries.

- Bintang Adipurna (**First Class of the Star of the Republic of Indonesia**) is **Indonesia's highest civilian honor** conferred by the President of Republic of Indonesia.
- It is awarded to **individuals** who have **rendered exceptional service** to the **unity, continuity, and prosperity of the Republic of Indonesia.**
- **Foreign officials receiving** such an award are recognized by the Republic of Indonesia as **contributors to establishing a relationship** based on friendship and mutual respect between the two nations.
- The insignia has very distinctive characteristics.
    - The decoration consists of a **shining gold star with several rays** that stand for excellence, honour and distinguished service.
    - **In the middle** of it there is the **symbol of Indonesia—the Garuda Pancasila,** which stands for the sovereignty of the nation and the five principles of the state.
    - It is worn along with a ceremonial sash, the colors of which are red and white – the national colors of Indonesia.
    - There is also a star badge that is put on in state ceremonies.
