



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

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India's Learning Gaps Widen with Age: Key Insights from the 2025 PARAKH RS Survey

Context: The 2025 PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan (RS) has unveiled **alarming gaps in student learning outcomes** across India, especially as children advance through higher grades. Conducted by **PARAKH**—the *Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development*, an autonomous body under **NCERT**—this large-scale national survey is a crucial step towards **education reform and policy overhaul**.



With data gathered from **over 21 lakh students, 74,229 schools, and 781 districts**, the survey evaluates learning levels in **Languages, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Science, and Social Science** for **Grades 3, 6, and 9**. The findings paint a sobering picture of India's educational landscape, especially in subjects that demand conceptual clarity like **Mathematics and Science**.

What is PARAKH RS?

Formerly known as the **National Achievement Survey (NAS)**, **PARAKH RS** is a comprehensive national assessment that measures student competencies to inform evidence-based reforms. It focuses not just on student achievement, but also includes perspectives from **2.7 lakh teachers and school leaders**, who provided valuable contextual insights through detailed questionnaires.

Key Findings: Where Are Indian Students Falling Behind?

Grade 3: Early Warning Signs in Foundational Skills

- **Language:**
 - **67%** could use and guess the meaning of new words.
 - **60%** were able to comprehend short stories independently.
 - Only **61%** could read instructions or basic material such as news.
- **Mathematics:**
 - **68%** could classify objects by more than one property.
 - **55%** could correctly arrange numbers up to 99.
 - Just **54%** understood **multiplication as repeated addition**.
 - Over **50%** struggled with **basic geometry and financial literacy** (e.g., identifying coins, simple transactions).

Grade 6: Conceptual Understanding in Decline

- **Mathematics:**
 - Only **54%** could use place value structure correctly.
 - A worrying **29%** could grasp **common fractions**.
 - Just **38%** could solve **real-life mathematical puzzles**.
- **Environmental Studies:**
 - **44%** could identify elements of their surroundings like plants, seasons, etc.
 - Only **38%** demonstrated inquiry skills like **questioning or predicting patterns in nature**.
 - **56%** understood how local institutions (like panchayats and schools) function.



Grade 9: Deep Learning Gaps in Critical Subjects

- **Mathematics:**
 - Only **31%** understood **number systems**, including integers and fractions.
 - Merely **28%** could apply **percentage calculations**, essential for everyday problem-solving.
- **Science:**
 - Just **37%** could explain **natural phenomena** such as wind or pressure.
 - Around **33%** understood **basic electrical circuits**.
 - **34%** could differentiate between **living and non-living entities**.
- **Social Science:**
 - Only **45%** grasped **constitutional principles** or ideals of the freedom struggle.
 - Just **54%** could extract relevant information from **news articles or editorials**.

State-Wise Performance: A Tale of Contrasts

Top Performing States and UTs:

- **Grade 3:** Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala
- **Grade 6:** Kerala, Punjab, Dadra Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu
- **Grade 9:** Punjab, Kerala, Chandigarh

Low Performing Regions:

- **Grade 3:** Sahebganj (*Jharkhand*), Reasi and Rajouri (*Jammu & Kashmir*)
- **Grades 6 & 9:** Multiple districts in **Meghalaya** (especially North and South Garo Hills)

Implications: Urgent Action Needed on Multiple Fronts

The **widening learning gaps**—especially in **mathematics and science**—pose a serious risk to India's **demographic dividend** and **economic aspirations**. Key takeaways from the report highlight the need to:

- **Strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy** during early years (Grades 1–3).
- **Enhance teacher training**, particularly in regions with persistently poor performance.
- **Adopt formative and adaptive assessments** to identify and address learning gaps early.
- **Update curricula** to focus on **critical thinking, problem-solving, and contextual learning**.
- **Promote multilingualism** and inclusive teaching strategies to reduce learning inequalities.

Conclusion: A Wake-Up Call for India's School System

The **2025 PARAKH RS survey** is more than just a set of statistics—it's a **call to action**. As India aims to become a **knowledge-driven economy**, it cannot afford a generation grappling with **basic academic competencies**.

Investing in **early childhood education, equitable schooling infrastructure, and teacher capacity-building** must become top national priorities if India is to truly fulfill the vision of **NEP 2020** and empower every child to learn, grow, and succeed.

2 Panna Tiger Reserve: A Jewel of the Vindhya and A Legacy of Wilderness

Context: The Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh recently bid a heartfelt farewell to one of its most iconic inhabitants—Vatsala, believed to be Asia's oldest elephant, who passed away at the remarkable age of over 100 years. Her presence was symbolic of the ancient wilderness and rich biodiversity that Panna has protected for decades.



About Panna Tiger Reserve: A Wilderness Carved by Time

Situated in the northern part of Madhya Pradesh, Panna Tiger Reserve sprawls across 542 sq.km. within the majestic Vindhyan mountain range. It holds the distinction of being the only tiger reserve in the Bundelkhand region, making it ecologically and strategically vital.

Declared a Project Tiger Reserve in 1994, Panna is a crucial component of India's tiger conservation initiative. It falls within the Deccan Peninsula biogeographic zone and the Central Highlands biotic province, contributing immensely to India's ecological diversity.

A Landscape of Ancient Plateaus and River Valleys:

The topography of Panna is defined by its unique 'table-top' plateau formations, carved over centuries by geological processes. The terrain features:

- Two parallel plateaus running from southwest to northeast.
- Deep gorges and forested valleys offering ideal habitats for wildlife.
- The Ken River, a lifeline of the reserve, flowing south to north, enriching the ecosystem as it carves its way through the land.

Adding to its historical value, the reserve is home to rock paintings that date back over 2,000 years, a testament to the ancient human presence and cultural heritage of the region.

Cultural Heritage: Land of Indigenous Tribes

Panna is not just a natural haven—it's also a cultural mosaic. The forests and villages around the reserve are inhabited by indigenous communities such as the Baiga and Gond tribes, known for their rich folk traditions, eco-centric lifestyles, and intricate art forms.

These tribes have coexisted with nature for centuries, playing a vital role in community-based conservation and sustainable forest use.

Flora: A Living Example of Teak's Natural Range

Panna's vegetation is predominantly dry deciduous forest, blending beautifully with grassland patches that support a rich variety of herbivores and carnivores.

- Teak (*Tectona grandis*) forms a major part of the forest cover, especially towards the northern boundary, marking the northernmost limit of its natural range in India.
- In the eastern zones, one finds a mix of Teak-Kardhai (*Anogeissus pendula*) forest.
- The steep, dry plateaus are dominated by *Acacia catechu*, well adapted to arid conditions.

Fauna: Home of the Big Cats and More

Panna supports a thriving population of apex predators and a wide range of carnivores, making it a biodiversity hotspot:

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- **Tigers**, the crown jewels of the reserve, have made a significant comeback after local extinction in 2009, thanks to **successful reintroduction efforts**.
- **Leopards, Sloth Bears, and Striped Hyenas** are commonly sighted in the reserve's varied terrain.
- Other carnivores include the **Indian Jackal, Wolf, Wild Dog (Dhole), Jungle Cat**, and the elusive **Rusty-Spotted Cat**.

In addition to carnivores, the reserve hosts rich populations of **deer, antelopes, reptiles**, and **over 200 species of birds**, making it a paradise for birdwatchers and ecotourists.

Conservation Highlights and Global Recognition:

- **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Status:** In 2020, the **Panna Biosphere Reserve** was included in the **UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme**, enhancing its international ecological value.
- **Tiger Reintroduction Success:** Following the **local extinction of tigers in 2009**, Panna became a **global model** for successful **tiger rewilding**, with a flourishing population today.
- **Ecotourism and Education:** The reserve plays a leading role in **wildlife education, community-based tourism**, and **sustainable livelihood programs** for nearby villages.

Conclusion: Panna—Where Nature, Culture, and Conservation Converge

The **Panna Tiger Reserve** is more than just a protected forest—it's a vibrant **landscape of life**, a cradle of **ancient culture**, and a testament to **India's conservation legacy**. As the country mourns the loss of **Vatsala**, the gentle matriarch of the forest, her memory reminds us of the timeless connection between **nature and humanity**.

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Extended Range Anti-Submarine Rocket (ERASR): Boosting India's Naval Strike Power

Context: India's maritime defense capabilities have taken a significant leap forward with the **successful user trials of the Extended Range Anti-Submarine Rocket (ERASR)** from INS Kavaratti, a frontline **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Corvette** of the Indian Navy. This major breakthrough signals the system's readiness for **operational deployment**, strengthening India's undersea warfare capabilities.



What is ERASR? A Homegrown Shield Against Submarine Threats

The **Extended Range Anti-Submarine Rocket (ERASR)** is an **indigenously designed and developed underwater combat weapon** aimed at neutralizing **hostile submarines**. Specifically created for use with the **Indigenous Rocket Launchers (IRLs)** mounted on Indian naval ships, ERASR enhances India's blue-water naval operations.

This high-performance weapon system was developed by the **Armament Research & Development Establishment (ARDE)**, Pune, a premier lab of the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**. The development was carried out in collaboration with the **High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL)** and the **Naval Science & Technological Laboratory (NSTL)**.

Key Features of ERASR: Power, Precision, and Indigenous Innovation

- **Twin-Rocket Motor Configuration:** ERASR is equipped with a **dual propulsion system**, allowing it to engage submarine threats across a **wide range spectrum** with **high accuracy** and **operational consistency**.
- **Indigenous Electronic Time Fuze:** The system employs a **locally developed Electronic Time Fuze**, enabling precise **time-controlled detonation**, crucial for hitting **fast-moving underwater targets**.
- **Rigorous Testing:** A total of **17 ERASR rockets** were tested under various conditions. Trials successfully validated all key parameters, including:
 - **Range performance**
 - **Electronic Fuze accuracy**
 - **Warhead effectiveness**

Strategic Significance: Reinforcing Underwater Defence

The induction of ERASR is expected to **significantly upgrade India's naval ASW arsenal**, providing ships with a powerful countermeasure against enemy submarines lurking in **littoral waters and strategic sea lanes**.

- **Quick Response Capability:** Unlike torpedoes, anti-submarine rockets like ERASR provide **rapid launch and area coverage**, making them ideal for immediate threats.
- **Complementary to Sonar Systems:** ERASR is highly effective when integrated with **advanced sonar and surveillance systems**, ensuring **quick detection-to-destruction cycle**.

Looking Ahead: Naval Induction on the Horizon

With **successful completion of user trials**, the **Indian Navy is set to induct the ERASR system**, marking another milestone in the country's march toward **complete self-reliance in defense technology**. As global maritime threats evolve, ERASR stands as a symbol of India's **indigenous R&D strength, technological prowess, and strategic foresight**.

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Great Hornbill: A Majestic Bird Gracing Kerala's Coastline

Context: In an unprecedented and awe-inspiring event, the Great Hornbill—locally known as *Malamuzhakki Vezhambal* and the **State Bird of Kerala**—was recently spotted in the **coastal belt of Kakkampara**, near Ezhimala in Kannur. This is a highly **unusual location** for the bird, which typically inhabits **dense forested regions**, making the sighting a cause for excitement among ornithologists and nature enthusiasts alike.



Introducing the Great Hornbill:

Scientific Name: *Buceros bicornis*

Common Names: Great Indian Hornbill, Great Pied Hornbill, Concave-Casqued Hornbill

The **Great Hornbill** is one of the **largest and most striking members** of the hornbill family, known for its vibrant appearance and distinctive features.

Habitat and Distribution:

The species is distributed across the **Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia**. In India, they are commonly found in the **Western Ghats** and along the **Himalayan foothills**.

These birds favor **wet evergreen and deciduous old-growth forests**, generally residing at **elevations of 600 to 2,000 meters** (approximately 2,000 to 6,500 feet). For nesting, they prefer **towering trees** that rise above the forest canopy.

Distinctive Features:

- **Size:** Measures between **95 to 120 cm** in length, with a **wingspan of 151 to 178 cm**. Average weight is around **3 kg**.
- **Coloration:** Strikingly colored with a **black body and wings**, contrasted by a **white neck, abdomen, and tail** that features a **bold black band**.
- A **preen gland** near the tail secretes **tinted oil**, which the bird uses for grooming. This natural oil may give the **bill, casque, and feathers hues of yellow to red**.
- The most **iconic feature** is the **casque**, a large, hollow structure on top of the bill, used by males during **courtship displays** and **territorial combat**.
- **Eyelashes** are also quite prominent, adding to the bird's dramatic appearance.
- **Sexual dimorphism** is subtle: **Males have red irises**, while **females have white**, and the male's bill and casque are slightly larger.

Diet and Behavior:

Although **primarily frugivorous**, feeding mostly on **figs and other fruits**, the Great Hornbill is also an **opportunistic feeder**. It occasionally preys on **small mammals, reptiles, and even birds**, especially during the breeding season when protein intake is crucial.

Conservation Status:

The **IUCN Red List** classifies the Great Hornbill as **Vulnerable**, primarily due to:

- **Habitat loss** from deforestation and land conversion
- **Hunting and poaching**, as the casque and feathers are valued in tribal art and rituals
- **Slow reproductive rate**, with females often nesting only once a year

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**Fascinating Facts:**

- During nesting, the **female seals herself inside a tree cavity**, leaving only a small slit through which the **male feeds her and the chicks** until they are ready to fledge.
- The Great Hornbill is considered a **symbol of fidelity**, as mating pairs often stay together for life.
- Its **loud wingbeats** and **deep calls**, often heard echoing through the forest, have earned it the name *Malamuzhakki Vezhambal*, which roughly translates to "the one who makes the sky drum."

Final Thought:

The recent sighting of this **magnificent bird in an unlikely habitat** serves as a **reminder of nature's resilience**, but also of the urgent need to **protect its remaining strongholds**. The Great Hornbill is not just a bird—it's a **living emblem of India's rich biodiversity**, and preserving it is a responsibility that extends to all of us.



5 FATF Raises Alarm on Digital Terror Financing: Pulwama and Gorakhnath Attacks Under Spotlight

Context: In a stark warning to the global community, the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** has revealed how **digital platforms**—ranging from **online payment gateways** and **social media apps** to **VPNs** and **e-commerce websites**—are being **increasingly exploited** to fund and facilitate terrorism.



The newly released report, titled “**Comprehensive Update on Terrorist Financing Risks**,” closely examines incidents like the **2019 Pulwama attack** and the **2022 Gorakhnath Temple attack**, highlighting their links to **digital financial misuse**.

What is the FATF?

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** is an **intergovernmental watchdog**, created in **1989 at the G7 Summit in Paris**, with a mission to develop and promote **global standards** to combat **money laundering**, **terrorist financing**, and other threats to the **integrity of the global financial system**.

- **Headquarters:** Paris, France (OECD headquarters)
- **Members:** 39 (37 countries + 2 regional bodies: European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council)
- **India** became a **full member in 2010**, boosting its global financial standing.

Key Functions of FATF:

- **Formulating Standards:** Known for its renowned “**40 Recommendations**” to combat money laundering and terror financing
- **Monitoring Compliance:** Evaluates both members and non-members
- **Mutual Evaluations:** Assesses the **effectiveness** of national systems
- **Issuing Warnings:** Maintains **Grey List** and **Black List** of high-risk countries
- **Driving Reforms:** Pushes for **legal and regulatory improvements** worldwide

Digital Tools Now Weaponized for Terror:

The FATF report warns of a **rising global trend** in which terrorists are taking advantage of **technology-driven platforms** to conduct illicit transactions and hide their financial footprints. Among the **key findings**:

- **Online Payment Services** like **PayPal** used for cross-border fund transfers
- **VPNs (Virtual Private Networks)** employed to **mask identities and locations**
- **E-commerce websites** exploited to **purchase materials for bomb-making**
- **Crowdfunding platforms, mobile apps, and messaging services** misused to collect donations

Pulwama Attack (2019): A Wake-Up Call

The deadly **Pulwama terror attack**, in which 40 CRPF personnel lost their lives, was linked to the **misuse of an e-commerce platform**. Terrorists **procured aluminum powder**, a key ingredient in the IED, **through Amazon**.

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The attack was attributed to **Jaish-e-Mohammed**, with the use of **cross-border smuggling routes** to move explosive components, raising concerns over **online commerce regulation** and **international tracking of suspicious shipments**.

Gorakhnath Attack (2022): Digital Camouflage

In the **Gorakhnath Temple attack**, the perpetrator—radicalized by **ISIL propaganda**—utilized **VPNs to conceal his identity**. He used **PayPal to receive and send approximately ₹6.69 lakh (USD 7,736)** internationally, connecting to **ISIL-linked contacts abroad**.

PayPal flagged and **suspended the account** after detecting **unusual activity**, but the case underlined the **urgent need for real-time transaction monitoring** and **AI-based fraud detection systems**.

FATF Exposes Broader Trends in Terror Financing:

Beyond these attacks, the FATF emphasized several disturbing patterns:

1. **State-Sponsored Financing:** While refraining from naming nations, the report points out that some **governments provide direct and indirect support** to terrorist groups—through **logistics, funding, training, and sanctions evasion**.
2. **Commodity-Based Schemes:** Terrorists are turning to **multi-layered financial operations**, such as **oil-to-gold-to-cash conversions**, to **move money across borders** while avoiding scrutiny.
3. **Decentralised Terror Cells:** Modern terror groups are **shifting away from central command structures**, forming **self-financed regional cells** that operate using **criminal proceeds, local investments, and business fronts**.
4. **Trade and Jewellery Storage:** Gold and jewellery are increasingly being used as **compact, low-risk stores of value**, especially by **ISIL or Al-Qaeda affiliates in South Asia**. FATF cited their use as a means of **smuggling funds discreetly**.

Other Channels of Illicit Financing Identified:

FATF uncovered an array of **non-traditional funding sources**, including:

- **Hawala networks, human trafficking, and wildlife smuggling**
- **Drug trafficking and virtual assets (cryptocurrencies)**
- **Misuse of non-profit organisations for covert funding**
- **Extortion, ransom payments, and shell companies/accounts used for laundering**

Pahalgam Attack (2022): Reinforcing FATF's Warning

Following the **April 22 attack in Pahalgam**, the FATF reiterated that such acts are **not possible without financial support** and **secure transfer mechanisms**. A detailed **follow-up analysis** was initiated to track the financial trail behind the incident.

A Call for Stronger Oversight:

The FATF's latest report is a **global alert** urging countries to:

- **Tighten regulations on digital payments and virtual currencies**
- **Enhance intelligence-sharing across jurisdictions**
- **Monitor e-commerce transactions more rigorously**



- Collaborate with tech firms and financial platforms for compliance enforcement

Final Word: Technology Must Not Be a Terror Tool

The increasing **integration of digital technology into terrorism** poses a major threat to **international peace and security**. The FATF's findings serve as a **critical reminder** that while the digital revolution offers convenience and growth, it also brings **vulnerabilities** that need immediate and **collaborative global action**.

Strong **regulatory frameworks**, **tech-enabled surveillance**, and **cross-border cooperation** are the need of the hour to stop the **exploitation of digital platforms by terrorist networks**.



6 Nyangai Island Faces Dramatic Erosion: A Vanishing Jewel off Sierra Leone's Coast

Context: In a troubling sign of **accelerated coastal erosion**, Nyangai Island, a once-thriving landmass off the coast of **Sierra Leone**, has lost nearly **two-thirds of its total area** in under a decade. The island now stretches only about **200 metres in length and 100 metres in width**—roughly 650 by 330 feet—down from a significantly larger size.

This **stunning decline** highlights the urgent impact of **climate change**, rising **sea levels**, and **coastal degradation** in **West Africa**.

**About Nyangai Island:**

Nyangai Island is part of the **Turtle Islands archipelago**, a small group of **low-lying islands** scattered off the southwestern coast of **Sierra Leone**. These islands are exposed to **strong ocean currents**, making them **inherently vulnerable** to erosion. However, the **rate of land loss** witnessed in recent years is both **unprecedented and alarming**.

Once considered a **vital hub** for **trade**, **agriculture**, **fishing**, and **marine transport**, Nyangai also attracted visitors drawn to its **historic ruins**—remnants of the region's **slave trade era**. Today, much of that heritage risks being lost to the sea.

Sierra Leone: A Nation Shaped by Water

Sierra Leone is a **tropical country** situated along the **Atlantic Ocean** in **West Africa**. It shares borders with:

- **Guinea** to the **north and east**
- **Liberia** to the **south**
- The **Atlantic Ocean** to the **west**

The landscape consists of **lightly wooded hills**, **lush forests**, and **coastal mangrove swamps**, many of which serve as **natural barriers against erosion**—though these too are being rapidly degraded.

The country is intersected by major rivers, including:

- **Rokel River**
- **Taia River**
- **Moa River**
- **Sewa River**

These water systems support agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity, but also contribute to **flooding** and **coastal instability** during heavy rains.

Erosion Threatens Culture, Livelihoods, and Tourism

The loss of land on Nyangai Island is more than a geographical issue—it is a **human crisis in the making**. The island was once a center for:

- **Local fishing communities** who depended on the rich marine ecosystem
- **Agricultural activities**, including rice and cassava farming
- **Cultural tourism**, with visitors exploring colonial ruins and oral histories tied to the **Transatlantic Slave Trade**



Today, all of this is at risk. The **shrinking coastline** threatens to **displace islanders**, destroy **livelihoods**, and erase **centuries of heritage**.

Climate Change & Coastal Erosion: A Regional Wake-Up Call

The case of Nyangai is not isolated. Across **West Africa**, rising sea levels and **unregulated coastal development** are accelerating erosion. According to various environmental studies:

- **More than 50% of West Africa's coastline** is under threat from erosion.
- Low-lying islands like those in the Turtle Islands cluster may become **uninhabitable within decades** without urgent intervention.
- **Mangrove degradation** has further removed natural coastal buffers, leaving these areas highly exposed to storm surges.

The Way Forward: Conservation and Resilience

The fate of Nyangai Island calls for:

- **Coastal protection strategies**, including **mangrove restoration**
- **Community-led adaptation projects** to preserve island livelihoods
- **Increased scientific monitoring** to track land loss and inform policy
- **International cooperation and climate funding** to support vulnerable island nations

Final Thought: A Race Against Time

Nyangai Island is more than just land—it is a **living piece of Sierra Leone's history**, a symbol of resilience, and a **natural treasure**. But its rapid erosion is a **warning sign** of what lies ahead for many coastal communities in Africa and beyond.

The island's **vanishing shoreline** is a powerful reminder that the **fight against climate change** must start at the front lines—where **land meets water**, and where lives, cultures, and ecosystems are literally being **washed away**.

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