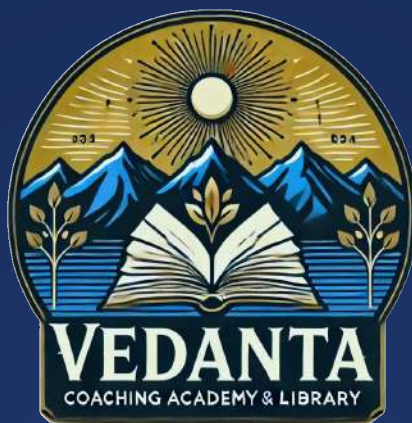




The Hindu Analysis

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FRIDAY · 4 SEPTEMBER 2026

UPSC & STATE PSC · CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION

Air Quality & CAQM

RTE & Teacher Education

India-Belgium Defence

Youth & Elections

SCO / Bishkek

Neonatal Care

Compiled by Sapna Chauhan

VEDANTA COACHING ACADEMY & LIBRARY

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TOPICS

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GS-II ITEMS

1

GS-III ITEM

2+10

MAINS + MCQS

EDITOR'S FOCUS

In today's edition: a statutory-body-plus-technology fix for stubble-fire measurement (CAQM-ISRO), a landmark reading of the right to education that expands its duty-bearers, India's widening defence and trade footprint with Belgium, a searching look at whether India's youth are an electoral bloc, the SCO's 25th year at Bishkek, and a governance blueprint to keep newborns safe. Weightage today is heaviest on **GS-II**, with a strong **GS-III** environment link.

Air quality panel taps ISRO to sharpen tracking of farm fires

WHY IN NEWS

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) is in talks with ISRO and Punjab to build better '**ground-truthing**' protocols for stubble-fire measurement, ahead of the winter pollution season in the Delhi-NCR.

- As part of its preparation to buffer **winter pollution** in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), CAQM said it is in discussion with authorities in Punjab and Haryana to improve **measurement of stubble fires**.
- Chairman Rajesh Varma noted that fire counts from satellite passes "may not be the most accurate picture of the extent of farm fires," prompting talks with **ISRO** and Punjab for better ground-truthing.
- Farm fires in Punjab are a major pollution contributor during some weeks of **October–November**, when monsoon withdrawal stalls the westerly winds that flush out particulate matter from vehicles, industry, agri-waste and firecrackers.
- In this window, paddy stubble left after harvesting is burnt to make way for sowing wheat. Over a whole winter, farm fires add **no more than 15%** of PM pollution — but on certain weeks the share can spike to nearly **44%**.
- An ISRO Space Applications Centre study found peak fire activity shifted from ~1.30 p.m. (2020) to ~5 p.m. (2024) — **after the day-time satellite passes**, allegedly to evade detection and fines.
- Satellite resolution and pollution load depend on straw quantity, moisture, combustion efficiency and per-pollutant emission factors that sensors **cannot directly measure** — hence the push for a field-verification protocol.

VALUE ADDITION — COMMISSION FOR AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT (CAQM)

- A **statutory body** under the CAQM in NCR and Adjoining Areas Act, **2021**; it dissolved the earlier EPCA (set up 1998).
- Chairperson is an official of the rank of **Secretary to GoI** or a Chief Secretary to a State government.
- **Exclusive jurisdiction** over the NCR (parts of Haryana, Punjab, U.P., Rajasthan) on air pollution; supersedes central and State pollution control boards in the region.
- Can issue **binding directions** to State governments and holds **penal powers** — fines up to **₹1 crore** and imprisonment up to **5 years** for contravention.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Stubble burning** peaks Oct–Nov; a **Category-4 (Severe+)** AQI triggers GRAP Stage-IV curbs.
- **GRAP** (Graded Response Action Plan) is the escalating anti-pollution framework for Delhi-NCR.
- **PUSA bio-decomposer** is an in-situ alternative to burning paddy straw.
- ISRO's **Space Applications Centre (SAC)** is at Ahmedabad; fire detection uses MODIS/VIIRS-type sensors.

Air quality panel taps ISRO to improve tracking of Punjab, Haryana farm fires

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

As part of its preparation to buffer winter pollution in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) has said it is in discussion with authorities in Punjab and Haryana to improve measurement of stubble fires.

"While fire counts reported from satellite passes may not be the most accurate picture of the extent of farm fires, we are in talks with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Punjab to have better 'ground truthing' protocols," Rajesh Varma, Chairman, CAQM, said at a press briefing on Thursday.

Farm fires in Punjab are a major contributor to pollution during some weeks of October and November



A farmer burning stubble on the outskirts of Chandigarh. FILE PHOTO

when monsoon withdrawal stalls westerly winds that flush out particulate matter pollution from vehicles, industry, agriculture waste, and firecrackers.

In this period, paddy stubble left over after harvesting is frequently burnt to make way for sowing wheat. Over a whole winter, farm fires contribute no more than 15% of the particulate matter pollu-

tion but on certain weeks, this share can spike to almost 44%, several studies have shown.

Mounting evidence

Mr. Varma's comments come in the context of mounting evidence since 2024 that the Punjab government's claims of having reduced farm fires by 90% since 2021 were exaggerated. This is because

these were counted through tracking fires via two satellites passing over India during the day and allegedly encouraging several farmers, who otherwise face the prospect of fines for being caught setting fire to their fields, to burn stubble in the evenings. An ISRO Space Applications Centre study found a gradual shift in peak fire activity from 1.30 p.m. in 2020 to around 5 p.m. in 2024 to avoid detection by polar-orbiting satellites.

"The resolution of satellite sensors matters and the pollution level depends on straw quantity, moisture, combustion efficiency and per-pollutant emission factors that satellites can't measure. But we have asked the ISRO to give us a basic protocol so we can make a start in getting a better estimate than fire counts," Mr. Varma said.

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2 · GS 3

Syllabus link > GS-II: Statutory bodies, government policies & interventions. GS-III: Environmental pollution, conservation.

02

POLITY · EDUCATION

Quality elementary teachers are vital to nation-building: Supreme Court

GS 2

WHY IN NEWS

Ahead of Teachers' Day (Sept 5), the Supreme Court held that the development and lives of children — and the future of the nation — depend on the **quality of training** given to elementary teachers, and expanded the 'duty-bearers' of the right to education.

- A Division Bench led by **Justice P.S. Narasimha** stressed that though free and compulsory elementary education (ages 6–14) is now an enforceable fundamental right, **teacher education** has not received the attention it deserves.
- The Court observed there is "no human resource or value higher than the development of a student's mind and character," placing elementary teachers at the centre of nation-building.
- It referred to precedent recognising **five duty-bearers** under the RTE Act, 2009: the government, the local authority, the neighbourhood school, the parents/guardians, and the teacher.
- Justice Narasimha added a **sixth and seventh duty-bearer** — Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) under Sec. 2(e) of the NCTE Act, and the **NCTE** itself.
- The Council must ensure TEIs impart teacher education "effectively, efficiently and conduct their affairs with integrity," the Court held.

VALUE ADDITION — RIGHT TO EDUCATION — CONSTITUTIONAL JOURNEY

- Originally in **DPSP**: Article 45 and Article 39(f) envisaged state-funded, accessible education.
- **Unnikrishnan J.P. v. State of A.P. (1993)**: SC held education flows as a fundamental right from **Article 21**.
- **Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999)** recommended inserting Article 21A.
- **86th Amendment, 2002**: inserted **Art. 21A** (free & compulsory education, 6–14), recast **Art. 45** (early-childhood care below 6), added **Art. 51A(k)** (parental duty).
- **RTE Act, 2009**: operationalised Art. 21A; **25% reservation** for disadvantaged groups; norms on PTR, infrastructure, school days, teacher hours. The '**No-Detention Policy**' was diluted by the 2019 Amendment.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Article 21A** — inserted by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002.
- **NCTE** is a statutory body under the NCTE Act, 1993, regulating teacher-education standards.
- RTE mandates a **25% EWS/disadvantaged** quota in private unaided schools at entry level.
- First official document on RTE: **Ramamurti Committee Report (1990)**.

Quality elementary teachers are vital to lives of children, nation-building: top court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday emphasised the importance of educating elementary school teachers, saying the development and lives of children, and even the future of the nation, depend on the quality of training given to these educators.

"Though free and compulsory elementary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years has now attained the status of an enforceable fundamental right, we have not bestowed on teacher education the attention that it deserves... The development of a child, or for that matter, the life of a child is integrally connected to the role of an elementary school teacher," Justice P.S. Narasimha, heading a Division Bench, observed.



The court said there was no value higher than development of students' mind and character.

The top court observed that there was no human resource or value higher than the development of a student's mind and character. "Therefore, the elementary school teachers have the most important role in nation-building and as such, they have to be treated with utmost respect and care," the court said ahead of Teachers' Day celebrations on September 5.

The top court referred to judicial precedents that five duty-bearers safeguard the fundamental right to elementary education recognised in the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. They include the government, the local authority, the neighbourhood school, the parents/guardians, and finally, the teacher.

Justice Narasimha added the sixth and seventh duty-bearers — teacher education institutions (TEIs), as defined under Section 2(e) of the National Council for Teacher Education Act, and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) itself.

"The Council is also to ensure that the TEIs imparting teacher education function effectively, efficiently and conduct their affairs with integrity," Justice Narasimha observed.

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2

Syllabus link ➤ GS-II: Issues relating to development & management of education; government policies; role of judiciary.

India and Belgium ramp up bilateral defence cooperation

WHY IN NEWS

During the visit of Belgian PM Bart De Wever, India and Belgium signed **three government-level defence agreements** and announced a fast trade mechanism; PM Modi called for ending the Ukraine and West Asia conflicts through dialogue.

India and Belgium ramp up bilateral defence cooperation

After meeting his Belgian counterpart, Prime Minister calls for ending conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia through dialogue; three government-level defence agreements signed; two sides also announce the establishment of a fast trade mechanism

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for dialogue and diplomacy to end the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia.

Mr. Modi made the remarks while welcoming Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever here, where the two sides ramped up bilateral defence cooperation by signing three government-level defence agreements.

Belgian sources informed that at least 10 private defence agreements will be sealed during the visit that will include production of Belgian military items such as rockets in India.

"Whether it is Ukraine or West Asia, we support all efforts aimed at an early end to conflicts and the restoration of peace. And



Boosting ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Prime Minister of Belgium Bart De Wever in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

eliminating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is our shared commitment," Mr. Modi said in his remarks after he and Mr. De Wever discussed global and regional issues.

Paid tributes

The two leaders also paid tributes to the more than 9,000 Indian soldiers who perished in the Flanders

Fields during the First World War. A Joint Statement issued at the end of the discussions announced that the two leaders called for "safety and security of maritime routes and maintaining safe and unimpeded maritime shipping" in the context of the conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine.

The Belgian dignitary expressed support to In-

dia's campaign against cross-border terrorism and condemned the Pahalgam terror attack.

In his remarks at an event organised by the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), the Belgian leader described the current global situation as "turbulent" and called for free trade and end to unilateral imposition of tariffs.

The two governments signed a Letter of Intent of Defence Cooperation, an MoU between Belgian Security and Defence Industry and Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers, and an MoU between the Central Bureau of Investigation and Belgium Federal Police on cooperation in combating transnational organised crime, cybercrime and related matters.

"Our security does not stop at our borders. That is why we need to work more closely with strong partners

such as India – militarily, technologically and industrially," said Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken.

On this occasion, India announced that a Defence Attache will be appointed at the Indian Embassy in Brussels. The visit included defence partnerships between Belgian and Indian defence majors. "Today, India and Europe are speaking the language of trade with renewed conviction, a language of peace, of progress and of prosperity," said Mr. De Wever.

The two sides announced the establishment of a fast trade mechanism that will deal with trade and investment and announced that bilateral trade will be doubled in the next five years. They also announced the establishment of Consular Dialogue between New Delhi and Brussels.

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2

- PM Modi urged **dialogue and diplomacy** to end conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia while welcoming Belgian PM Bart De Wever in New Delhi.
- Belgian sources indicated at least **10 private defence agreements** will be sealed during the visit, including **production of Belgian military items such as rockets** in India.
- Belgium expressed support for India's campaign against **cross-border terrorism** and condemned the **Pahalgam terror attack**.
- Three instruments were signed: a **Letter of Intent on Defence Cooperation**; an MoU between Belgian Security & Defence Industry and the **Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers**; and a **CBI-Belgium Federal Police MoU** on transnational organised crime and cybercrime.
- India announced a **Defence Attaché** at its Brussels Embassy; a **Consular Dialogue** was launched, and a fast trade mechanism set up with a target to **double bilateral trade in five years**.
- Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken: "Our security does not stop at our borders... we need to work more closely with strong partners such as India."

VALUE ADDITION — BELGIUM — QUICK FACTS FOR PRELIMS

- Capital: **Brussels** — also seat of the **EU** and **NATO** headquarters.
- A **federal** constitutional monarchy in Western Europe; borders France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands; coastline on the **North Sea**.
- Founding member of the **EU, NATO, Benelux and the Eurozone**.
- The visit invoked **Flanders Fields** — where 9,000+ Indian soldiers died in the First World War — deepening the historical bond.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM)** is the apex defence-industry body under FICCI.
- A **Defence Attaché** is a military officer posted to an embassy for defence diplomacy.
- India-EU aim to conclude a **Free Trade Agreement**; Belgium is a key EU interlocutor.
- **Antwerp** (Belgium) is a global hub for India's cut-and-polished **diamond** trade.

Syllabus link › GS-II: Bilateral, regional & global groupings; agreements involving India or affecting India's interests.

04 POLITY · SOCIETY Youth power — an electoral force still in the making

GS 2

WHY IN NEWS

Despite India's vast youth population and rising political courtship of Gen Z and Gen A, there is **no discernible 'youth bloc'** in Indian elections yet — an argument that the demographic dividend has not translated into a consolidated electoral identity.

- It is the “season of youth” — parties, ministries, think tanks and media are all engaging the theme; education, examination, skilling and unemployment are all under scrutiny.
- There is a **lag in understanding Gen Z and Gen A** (born after 2010), who increasingly **demand accountability**.
- A **NITI Aayog** report cites **8.7 crore** people aged 15–29 who are **NEET** (Not in Education, Employment or Training) — a vast reservoir of “youthful energy still awaiting an anchor.”
- India has the **world's largest youth population**: 65% of ~1.5 billion are below 35; about **23%** of the electorate is in the 18–29 bracket.
- In recent Assembly polls (Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Puducherry) there was **no clear direction** of youth voting; over 75 years, votes have been mobilised by caste, class and community — but **never by a youth 'bloc'**.
- In the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision the youth are the **Amrit Peedhi** ('generation of the nectar'); forthcoming State elections will test whether that power is finally crystallising.

VALUE ADDITION — DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND — THE POLICY FRAME

- **Demographic dividend:** growth potential from a rising share of working-age (15–64) population; India's window runs to ~2055–56.
- **NEP 2020** reorients schooling toward quality learning; the proposed **National Youth Policy 2026** targets the 15–29 cohort.
- **NEET** ≠ joblessness alone — it includes those in unpaid care, discouraged workers and those between transitions.
- Realising the dividend needs jobs, skilling, health and female labour-force participation to move together.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Gen Z** ≈ born 1997–2012; **Gen Alpha** ≈ born after 2010.
- **Amrit Peedhi** — the youth as framed in the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision.
- Voting age lowered to **18** by the **61st Constitutional Amendment, 1988**.
- The **ECI's SVEEP** programme drives electoral literacy among young and first-time voters.

Youth power, an electoral force still in the making

It is the season of youth in India, without any formal commemorative event to mark it. They are being courted like never before. Political parties across the aisle, Ministries, Departments, think tanks and media organisations of every kind are engaging with the theme of youth. Education and examination systems are being reassessed; skills and coaching processes are under scrutiny; unemployment is being scanned and nuanced.

The whole nation seems occupied with the subject. Political parties are ramping up their conversations on digital platforms, where young people are assured to reside. Leaders are recasting their hitherto successful models of communication to capture the attention and gain the confidence of Generation Z — the 14-to-29-year-olds — while mimicking their candid vocabulary. College and school campuses are crowded by political personalities. The overstretch almost suggests a desperation to connect.

There have been youth initiatives

Not that the youth have never been cared for. Governments, past and present, have taken up initiatives for youth development. The last 12 years have witnessed a plethora of schemes directed at them, covering employment, entrepreneurship, skill enhancement, education, internships, sports and volunteering. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, while facing flak in certain respects, has managed to focus on quality learning geared towards innovation and the empowerment of young citizens. The proposed National Youth Policy 2026 seeks to prepare those in the 15-29 age group for the new digital age.

But beyond the good schemes, there is a lag in understanding Gen Z and Gen A (those born after 2010), who have begun to demand accountability. A NITI Aayog report speaks of 8.7 crore people in the 15-29 age group who are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). Despite clarifications from the government that NEET does not necessarily mean joblessness, a staggering amount of youthful energy still awaits an anchor. The yawning gap between formal degrees and job prospects remains a daunting problem. In the wake of the recent street protests, the Opposition has built a narrative that the ruling dispensation is hostile to younger generations. The question is: do they have a blueprint for the country's youth, or are they only milking political capital out of the current ferment?



Akshay Rout
Former Director
General, Election
Commission of India,
and a public policy
commentator

Not taking away from the goodwill of political entities towards the nation's future generations, the overwhelming context is the chorus orchestrated by the country's youth in Delhi and other places in recent weeks. While the youth future and its consequences in India bear no comparison with the cataclysmic happenings in parts of the South Asian neighbourhood, a wake-up call has been sounded to those in power and those seeking to get there. The response, however exaggerated, is welcome. Parties and leaders now appear to be grappling with issues concerning the youth, regardless of whether they are motivated by electoral politics.

More an elusive vote

India has the largest youth population in the world, 68% of its nearly 1.5 billion people are below 35 years of age. About 23% of the country's electorate falls in the 18-29 age category. In elections in recent years, including the latest Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and Puducherry, there was no discernible trend of young people voting in any political direction. The outcome in Tamil Nadu showed some hints of youth consolidation, but it was far from being based on any alternative youth agenda. In last year's Bihar election, noticeable efforts by political groups to advance a youth agenda did not generate much appeal. Certain studies, however, suggest that young voters partly influenced the verdicts in the 2014 and 2019 general elections.

In the 75-year electoral history of India, while votes have been garnered under labels such as community, caste, class, farmers, industrial workers and even government employees, there has been no block identification of the youth as yet. There are steady references to the votes of Dalits, minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, as well as the Yadav vote in Uttar Pradesh and the so-called MY vote in Bihar — patterns that have held steady over decades.

To these has now been added, in good measure, the women's vote. A house for shelter, a toilet on the premises, gas in the kitchen and electricity at home can capture the imagination of women across regions, besides cash delivered directly into their wallets. Gratitude is then expressed through the ballot.

For reasons yet to be overcome, caste and community continue to abide as assumed aggregators in the electoral arena. These, along with gender identity, have considerably subsumed youth identity. Critical issues such as

employment and education constitute only a loose overhang.

Youth participation in India's elections has remained low-key compared with other demographic categories, despite an improvement in recent years, and largely due to the mobilisation efforts of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI has recently galvanised its electoral literacy campaigns to orient students in schools and colleges to the electoral system, processes and practices, and to secure their informed participation.

The upcoming Assembly elections in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur and Goa will be the earliest test case to determine whether the noisy voice of the streets gets organised into a political preference, including the amount of youth candidature. A quarter of the Assembly seats in these States, especially in politically muscular Uttar Pradesh, were won roughly by margins of around 5% and could, hence, easily be swung by Gen Z voters. The comparison ends there. The youth of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab do not share a common predicament; neither do the Gen Z in Goa and Manipur, or, for that matter, the youth of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, which go to the polls later in 2027. Electorally speaking, the current political attention on the youth can be interpreted as an attempt to cur possible losses while making a moderate investment.

Old equations do matter

Political parties cannot abandon time-tested voting blocs for an undependable, heterogeneous multitude that may or may not walk out of its Instagram residency. Old social calculations and booth management may still hold good in actual polls, while the youth awakening may remain a story on the side. Political parties and poll campaigners have a professional finger on the pulse of the people; they will carefully watch the emergence of a real Gen Z vote from the cradle, while they adjust their plans and campaigns just that bit for now.

In the text of the Union government's vision of a developed India by 2047, the youth are regarded as the *Amrit Peedhi* (the generation of the nectar). But in realpolitik, the forthcoming State elections may show which side the nectar sweetens or whether it does so at all. Swami Vivekananda spoke of the power of youth, but in an electoral sense, that power may only now be crystallising in India.

The views expressed are personal

India's Gen Z is gaining political attention, but is yet to consolidate into a viable electoral bloc

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2

Syllabus link > GS-II: Government policies for vulnerable/target sections; GS-I: Population & associated issues.

Forging consensus: India must broaden regional multilateral engagement

WHY IN NEWS

PM Modi's attendance at the SCO summit in Bishkek — marking **25 years** of the Eurasian grouping — carried a multi-pronged agenda amid a 'sombre' geopolitical backdrop of tariffs, the U.S.–Iran war and sanctions on Russia.

Forging consensus

India must broaden engagement with regional multilateral groups

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attendance at the annual meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) leaders in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, marking 25 years of the Eurasian grouping, had a multi-pronged agenda. This was an occasion to meet his counterparts, for the first time since the U.S.–Israel war on Iran began more than six months ago, which has inflicted economic costs on the whole grouping. The grouping includes Iran, as well as Pakistan that has emerged a mediator between Iran and the U.S., and the Bishkek declaration that condemned the U.S. and Israel's attacks on Iran and supported Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT, was significant. Many of the SCO members are also in the BRICS grouping who Mr. Modi will host in Delhi on September 12–13 — this includes Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. New Delhi is keen to forge consensus on a joint declaration, which has been difficult due to UAE–Iran tensions and Mr. Modi's discussions with Mr. Pezeshkian included BRICS cooperation. India's ties with the Central Asian Republics have flagged due to other preoccupations, making Mr. Modi's visits to Tashkent and Bishkek, and meetings with regional leaders this time, an important initiative to revive talks on trade, critical minerals, tourism and other areas. As Pakistan takes over the SCO chairmanship, the Bishkek Summit allowed Mr. Modi to set out India's agenda for the coming year. His

of course, critical minerals, tourism and other areas. As Pakistan takes over the SCO chairmanship, the Bishkek Summit allowed Mr. Modi to set out India's agenda for the coming year. His speech at the Summit focused on the importance of dismantling the ecosystem of "terrorist financing, recruitment, radicalisation, and safe havens", calling on the SCO to eschew "double standards" on terrorism. He also pressed for a strong message to countries that "use terrorism as an instrument of policy and provide safe haven and support to terrorists" — a pointed reference to India's oft-repeated concerns about Pakistan. The Bishkek declaration's inclusion of strong language on "all forms" of terrorism, including cross-border, has thus been welcomed by New Delhi. It remains to be seen how far the Pakistan presidency will take these ideas forward.

Compared to the high-octane optics and the Modi–Putin–Xi handshake at the 2025 Tianjin SCO Summit, this year's summit was relatively sombre. The U.S.'s tariffs, its war with Iran and sanctions on Russia have damaged economic security, energy security and connectivity (the Hormuz Strait blockade), and pose major challenges to the grouping. For India, after tensions with Pakistan had peaked last year after the Pahalgam attacks and the four-day conflict, the past year has been sobering, given Pakistan's diplomatic forays with the U.S., and the new security pact with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. In the altered geopolitical framing, India must seek to broaden its engagement with all regional multilateral organisations such as the SCO.

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2

- The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan marked 25 years of the grouping; the meeting let India meet counterparts for the first time since the U.S.–Israel war on Iran.
- The grouping includes **Iran** and **Pakistan**; the **Bishkek declaration** condemned U.S./Israeli attacks on Iran and backed Iran's right to **peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT**.
- Many SCO members also sit in **BRICS**, which India will host in Delhi on **Sept 12–13** — including Putin, Xi Jinping and Iran's Pezeshkian.
- Modi pressed the SCO to dismantle the ecosystem of "terror financing, recruitment, radicalisation and safe havens," warning against **double standards** — a pointed reference to Pakistan; the declaration's language on "all forms" of terrorism, including cross-border, was welcomed by New Delhi.
- Compared with the high-octane **2025 Tianjin** summit, this year's was 'sombre': U.S. tariffs, the Iran war and sanctions on Russia have hit economic and energy security and connectivity (the **Hormuz Strait** blockade).

- In the altered framing — Pakistan’s diplomatic forays with the U.S. and a new security pact with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye — India must broaden engagement with **all** regional multilateral bodies.

VALUE ADDITION — SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION (SCO)

- A **permanent intergovernmental** organisation founded in **2001** (evolving from the ‘Shanghai Five’, 1996); Secretariat in **Beijing**.
- India and Pakistan became full members in **2017**; Iran joined in **2023**; Belarus in **2024**.
- Security arm: **RATS** (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure), based in Tashkent.
- Guided by the ‘**Shanghai Spirit**’: mutual trust, benefit, equality and respect for diversity.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- SCO Secretariat: **Beijing**; RATS HQ: **Tashkent**.
- **Bishkek** is the capital of **Kyrgyzstan**; the 2025 summit was at **Tianjin**, China.
- The **Hormuz Strait** is a chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- India hosts the **BRICS** summit on 12–13 September (as per the article).

Syllabus link › GS-II: Important international institutions & groupings; India & its neighbourhood; bilateral & global groupings.

06

GOVERNANCE · HEALTH

For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home

GS 2

WHY IN NEWS

A fatal fire that killed three newborns at a government hospital in Amravati (Aug 24, 2026) is a symptom, not an isolated event: neonatal deaths in institutions are recurring, and the fix is a **three-part strategy blending facility care with home-based care**.

- Newborns who “used to die at home without medical care” now increasingly die **in hospitals**; clustered newborn deaths in government institutions form a **recurring pattern**, not stray accidents.
- **Reason 1 — Overcrowding**: institutional deliveries rose from **39% (2005-06) to 90% (2023-24)** (NFHS-6); women delivering in institutions rose from 109 lakh (2005) to **194 lakh** (2024-25).
- Sick newborns in public **Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs)** rose from 11.3 lakh (2021-22) to **14.45 lakh** (2023-24) — a **28%** jump in two years; units everywhere are overloaded.
- **Reason 2 — Changing case-mix**: hospitals now receive many high-risk births (premature, low-birth-weight, referred). **Reason 3 — Infrastructure failures. Reason 4 — Infection & staffing gaps.**
- **The Gadchiroli model (SEARCH, The Lancet 1999)**: trained community health workers delivering **home-based neonatal care (HBNC)** cut rural neonatal mortality by **62.2%**.
- **Three-part fix**: (1) decongest units — strengthen HBNC via ASHAs for stable newborns; (2) strengthen SNCUs — staff, equipment, oxygen, power back-ups, infection control; (3) make units intrinsically safe — fire detection/suppression, evacuation drills, independent safety audits.

VALUE ADDITION — INDIA'S NEWBORN-HEALTH ARCHITECTURE

- **SNCU**: district-level facility-based unit for sick and small newborns; **NBSU/NBCC** at lower tiers.
- **HBNC** is delivered by **ASHAs** — the model draws directly on the Gadchiroli/SEARCH experience.
- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** — conditional cash transfer that drove the surge in institutional deliveries.
- Related: **JSSK** (free delivery & newborn care), **Facility-Based Newborn Care** guidelines, and **India Newborn Action Plan (INAP)** targeting single-digit NMR.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **SEARCH** — Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health, Gadchiroli (Maharashtra).
- **NMR** (Neonatal Mortality Rate): deaths within 28 days per 1,000 live births.
- **ASHA** — Accredited Social Health Activist, a frontline community health worker.
- **NFHS-6** is the source cited for the 90% institutional-delivery figure.

For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home

In India, newborns are dying. Earlier, they used to die at home without medical care. Now, they are dying in hospitals. On August 24, 2026, three newborns lost their lives in an accidental fire at the government women's hospital in Amravati, Maharashtra. This was not the first such episode in government newborn care units, and it will not be the last — unless we view it not as an isolated event, but as a trend.

These are episodes of clustered newborn deaths in the government institutions (that were identified by ChatGPT) in the format of Year/Government hospital/Newborn deaths — 2017 BRD Medical College, Gorakhpur 17; 2017 Government hospital, Ahmedabad 18; 2019 JK Lon Hospital, Kota 10; 2020 JK Lon Hospital, Kota 9; 2020 Government hospital, Shahdol 8; 2021 District Hospital, Bhandara One fire 10; 2021 Kamla Nehru Children's Hospital, Bhopal One fire 4; 2021 Government Medical College, Ambikapur 4; 2022 Medical College, Ambikapur 4; 2022 Government Medical College, Nanded 12; 2024 Maharani Lakshmi Bai Medical College, Jhansi One fire 10; 2025 District Women's Hospital, Budaun 4; 2026 District Women's Hospital, Amravati One fire 3.

This is not a comprehensive national registry, but only a partial list. The pattern, however, is recurring and therefore demands a systemic response.

The problems and challenges

What is going wrong? The first reason is overcrowding. India has achieved remarkable success in ensuring that women increasingly deliver in health institutions — from 39% in 2005-06 to 90% in 2023-24 (National Family Health Survey-6). But this success has created a new challenge. The absolute number of women delivering in institutions has risen from 109 lakh in 2005 to 194 lakh in 2024-25 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India). The total number of sick newborns hospitalised in public Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) has also risen rapidly, from 11.3 lakh in 2021-22 to 14.45 lakh in 2023-24 — a 28% increase in two years (Health Management Information System, MoHFW). Hence, newborn-care units everywhere are becoming overloaded.



Abhay Bang
Physician and the founder of Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), a community health research organisation

The second reason is the changing case mix. As institutional deliveries have expanded, government hospitals have become the destination not only for normal deliveries but also for large numbers of high-risk births, including premature, low-birth-weight and sick newborns referred from peripheral facilities.

Infrastructure failures are the third reason. The Gorakhpur episode of August 2017 was attributed by a district-level inquiry to oxygen deprivation following an interruption in oxygen supply. The fires at Bhandara in January 2021, Bhopal in November 2021 and Jhansi in November 2024, as well as the more recent incident in Amravati, demonstrate the risks posed by fire and electrical hazards in neonatal units. Sick newborns need warmers, incubators and ventilators. Overcrowding can increase the electrical load on these units.

Infection and staffing problems would be the fourth reason. Overcrowding, inadequate nurse-to-baby ratios, equipment shortages and poor infection-prevention practices can turn a neonatal unit into a setting where hospital-acquired infections can spread rapidly.

The Gadchiroli model

This diagnosis leads to some obvious solutions. But there is an additional way.

India already has another solution. More than two decades ago, the Gadchiroli field trial conducted by the Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH) demonstrated that trained community health workers (CHWs) could provide effective home-based neonatal care (HBNC), resulting in a 62.2% reduction in neonatal mortality in the rural area (The Lancet, 1999). The trained CHWs identified and managed neonatal infections at home, supported breastfeeding and warmth, and managed low-birth-weight and preterm babies. Subsequent data from Gadchiroli, published in the Journal of Perinatology in 2005, showed that between 1996 and 2003, 97% of low-birth-weight and preterm babies — including those with birth weights above 1,800 g and gestational ages of more than 34 weeks — were managed at home, with a very low case-fatality rate.

The principles of the Gadchiroli model have

already become a part of India's public health system (MoHFW, 2010). Around 8,00,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) have been trained to provide HBNC, using training modules developed from the Gadchiroli experience. Therefore, India does not have to invent a new system. ASHAs, if adequately trained, supervised and supported, can provide many components of newborn care. This could take a considerable load off SNCUs and help reduce overcrowding.

Of course, a baby with severe prematurity, respiratory distress, shock, severe sepsis, serious birth asphyxia or another danger sign needs immediate facility-based treatment. HBNC is not a substitute for neonatal intensive care. But not every newborn who needs care requires a hospital bed.

The optimum strategy

India should therefore adopt a three-part strategy. First, decongest neonatal units. Strengthen HBNC by ASHAs so that appropriate, stable newborns can safely receive care at home rather than occupying scarce SNCU beds.

Second, strengthen neonatal care units. Ensure adequate numbers of doctors and nurses, appropriate nurse-to-baby ratios, functioning equipment, reliable oxygen and electricity supplies with backup systems, along with rigorous infection-prevention measures.

Third, make neonatal units intrinsically safe. Fire detection and suppression systems, electrical and oxygen-system safety measures, emergency evacuation drills and independent safety audits should become mandatory.

The success of the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is unquestionable. Institutional delivery can help save mothers and babies. But the next phase of India's newborn-health strategy must recognise that getting mothers into hospitals is only the first step. Every mother will give birth to a baby who needs care. But not every newborn who needs care requires a hospital bed. The future of newborn care should not be hospital versus home; it should be hospital plus home.

That would reduce overcrowding and, most importantly, ensure that each newborn receives the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

Newborn care in India must combine safer, decongested neonatal units with strengthened home-based support

THE HINDU · CLIPPING · GS 2

Syllabus link ➤ GS-II: Issues relating to development & management of health; welfare schemes; role of NGOs/institutions.

CONNECT THE DOTS — CROSS-TOPIC SYNTHESIS

- ⇒ **Cooperative federalism as a thread**: CAQM directing Punjab/Haryana on farm fires, and the SC binding the Centre-State chain of RTE 'duty-bearers', both show governance succeeding only when Union, States and local institutions act in concert.

- ⇒ **Institutions + technology:** CAQM leaning on ISRO for ground-truthing mirrors a wider theme — statutory bodies need scientific tooling (satellite data, HMIS) to convert mandates into measurable outcomes.
- ⇒ **Human capital for Viksit Bharat @2047:** quality teachers (RTE), an anchored youth ('Amrit Peedhi') and safe newborns (hospital-plus-home) are three ends of the same demographic-dividend argument.
- ⇒ **Strategic autonomy:** the India-Belgium defence-and-trade push and India's SCO/BRICS balancing both reflect a diversification strategy amid a 'sombre', tariff-and-conflict-ridden global order.

VEDANTA PRACTICE ZONE

Test Yourself

MAINS — MODEL QUESTIONS

MAINS Q1

“Satellite-based fire counts alone cannot capture the true footprint of stubble burning.” In light of the CAQM-ISRO collaboration, examine the institutional and technological challenges in measuring and managing air pollution in the Delhi-NCR. (250 words)

“उपग्रह-आधारित अग्नि गणना अकेले पराली जलाने के वास्तविक प्रभाव को नहीं दर्शा सकती।” CAQM-ISRO सहयोग के संदर्भ में, दिल्ली-एनसीआर में वायु प्रदूषण के मापन एवं प्रबंधन की संस्थागत तथा तकनीकी चुनौतियों का परीक्षण कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

APPROACH › Intro: CAQM's statutory mandate + winter pollution context. Body: technological limits (satellite pass timing, resolution, moisture/straw variables) → need for ground-truthing; institutional layers (CAQM vs States, GRAP, penal powers); airshed governance & in-situ alternatives (bio-decomposer). Conclude with a cooperative-federal, science-driven roadmap.

MAINS Q2

The Supreme Court has expanded the 'duty-bearers' of the right to education to include teacher-education institutions and the NCTE. Critically analyse how the quality of teacher education shapes the realisation of Article 21A. (250 words)

उच्चतम न्यायालय ने शिक्षा के अधिकार के 'कर्तव्य-वाहकों' का विस्तार कर उसमें शिक्षक-शिक्षा संस्थानों तथा एनसीटीई को सम्मिलित किया है। शिक्षक-शिक्षा की गुणवत्ता अनुच्छेद 21क की सिद्धि को किस प्रकार आकार देती है, इसका आलोचनात्मक विश्लेषण कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

APPROACH › Intro: Art. 21A + RTE as enforceable right. Body: five→seven duty-bearers; NCTE's regulatory role & quality gaps in TEIs; link teacher quality to learning outcomes (ASER/foundational literacy); NEP 2020 reforms (4-yr ITEP). Conclude: accountability chain from NCTE to classroom.

PRELIMS — 10 MCQS

- Q1** With reference to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), consider the following statements:
1. It is a statutory body established under an Act of 2021.
 2. It replaced the Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority.
 3. It can impose imprisonment of up to five years for contravening its directions.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Q2** The 'Amrit Peedhi', referred to in the context of the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision, denotes:
- (a) Farmers producing surplus grain (b) The youth / younger generation
(c) Retired defence personnel (d) Women self-help group members
- Q3** Article 21A of the Constitution of India was inserted by which Constitutional Amendment Act?
- (a) 73rd Amendment (b) 86th Amendment
(c) 93rd Amendment (d) 101st Amendment
- Q4** The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is associated with which organisation, and where is it headquartered?
- (a) ASEAN — Jakarta (b) SCO — Tashkent
(c) BRICS — Shanghai (d) SAARC — Kathmandu
- Q5** Consider the following pairs of capital cities and countries:
1. Bishkek — Kyrgyzstan
 2. Brussels — Belgium
 3. Tashkent — Kazakhstan
- How many pairs are correctly matched?
- (a) Only one (b) Only two
(c) All three (d) None
- Q6** The Gadchiroli field trial by SEARCH, cited for a 62.2% reduction in neonatal mortality, is best associated with:
- (a) Facility-based intensive care (b) Home-based neonatal care (HBNC)
(c) Universal immunisation (d) Telemedicine for newborns
- Q7** With reference to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, consider the following statements:
1. It mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged groups at entry level.
 2. It originally contained a 'No-Detention Policy'.
 3. It lays down norms for pupil-teacher ratios and school infrastructure.
- Which are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Q8** The 'Shanghai Spirit', foundational to the SCO, does NOT include which of the following principles?
- (a) Mutual trust and mutual benefit (b) Equality and consultation
(c) Collective military alliance against non-members (d) Respect for diversity of civilisations

Q9 The Strait of Hormuz, mentioned as a connectivity chokepoint, connects the Persian Gulf with:

- (a) The Red Sea (b) The Gulf of Oman
(c) The Caspian Sea (d) The Arabian Sea directly via Bab-el-Mandeb

Q10 Consider the following statements regarding stubble/farm-fire pollution in Delhi-NCR:

1. Over a whole winter, farm fires contribute no more than about 15% of PM pollution.
2. On certain weeks this share can spike to nearly 44%.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 · (d) CAQM is statutory (Act of 2021), it dissolved the EPCA, and it can impose fines up to ₹1 crore and imprisonment up to 5 years. All three are correct.

Q2 · (b) 'Amrit Peedhi' ('generation of the nectar') refers to the youth in the government's vision of a developed India by 2047.

Q3 · (b) The 86th Amendment Act, 2002 inserted Art. 21A (free & compulsory education 6–14), recast Art. 45 and added Art. 51A(k).

Q4 · (b) RATS is the security arm of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Q5 · (b) Bishkek–Kyrgyzstan and Brussels–Belgium are correct. Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan, not Kazakhstan. Hence two pairs are correct.

Q6 · (b) SEARCH's Gadchiroli trial (The Lancet, 1999) showed trained community health workers providing home-based neonatal care cut rural neonatal mortality by 62.2%.

Q7 · (d) All three are correct. The No-Detention clause was diluted by the RTE (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Q8 · (c) The Shanghai Spirit emphasises mutual trust, benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diversity and pursuit of common development – it is not a collective military alliance.

Q9 · (b) The Strait of Hormuz links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman (and onward to the Arabian Sea) – a critical global oil-transit chokepoint.

Q10 · (c) Both are correct as per the studies cited: a whole-winter average of ≤15%, spiking to ~44% in peak weeks.

QUICK REVISION RECAP

- ◆ **CAQM-ISRO:** statutory CAQM (Act 2021) seeks ISRO ground-truthing to fix satellite-based stubble-fire counts before winter; penal powers up to ₹1 cr / 5 yrs.
- ◆ **RTE / SC:** teacher-education quality is central to Art. 21A; duty-bearers expanded from five to seven (adding TEIs & NCTE).
- ◆ **India-Belgium:** three govt defence agreements, ~10 private deals (incl. rockets), Defence Attaché in Brussels, trade to double in 5 years.
- ◆ **Youth:** world's largest youth cohort (65% under 35), 8.7 cr NEET; still no consolidated 'youth bloc' – the 'Amrit Peedhi'.
- ◆ **SCO / Bishkek:** 25 years of SCO; Bishkek declaration on terrorism 'all forms'; India hosts BRICS Sept 12–13; sombre amid tariffs & Iran war.
- ◆ **Newborns:** hospital-plus-home strategy – decongest SNCUs via ASHA-led HBNC (Gadchiroli 62.2% cut), strengthen units, make them fire-safe.

PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS

- △ CAQM dissolved the **EPCA** (1998) — it did not replace the Central Pollution Control Board.
- △ Article 21A covers ages **6–14**; **early-childhood care (below 6)** sits in Art. 45 (a DPSP), not in 21A.
- △ **Iran** joined the SCO in 2023 and **Belarus** in 2024; India & Pakistan joined in **2017** — don't confuse the years.
- △ Belgium hosts **EU & NATO** HQ at Brussels; the SCO Secretariat is at **Beijing**, RATS at **Tashkent**.
- △ The RTE '**No-Detention Policy**' was **diluted (2019)**, not part of the original design intent — a common date trap.
- △ HBNC is delivered by **ASHAs**; **SNCU** is facility-based — the newborn strategy needs *both*, not one over the other.

ANSWER-ENRICHMENT TOOLKIT — QUOTE-READY PHRASES, DATA & SOURCES

DATA POINTS TO CITE

- Farm fires: usually <15% of Delhi-NCR PM load, but spike to ~44% on peak weeks.
- CAQM penalties: fines up to ₹1 crore & up to 5 years' imprisonment (Act, 2021).
- NEET youth: ~8.7 crore; demographic window to ~2055–56.
- SEARCH HBNC (Lancet, 1999): up to 62% cut in neonatal mortality in Gadchiroli.

PHRASES FOR INTROS/CONCLUSIONS

- “Ground-truthing statutory mandates with scientific tooling.”
- “From head-count to human capital — the Amrit Peedhi as dividend, not liability.”
- “Strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships in a sombre global order.”
- “A hospital-plus-home continuum, not a facility-versus-community binary.”

REPORTS / BODIES TO NAME-DROP

- Bhure Lal / EPCA → CAQM (Act, 2021); ISRO's Space Applications Centre.
- NCTE; NEP 2020 four-year ITEP; Article 21A (86th Amendment, 2002).
- SCO: RATS (Tashkent), Secretariat (Beijing); Bishkek Declaration.
- NFHS-6; NRHM/NHM; ASHA & SNCU under the newborn-health architecture.

— End of Edition · 4 September 2026 —