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Reclaiming Footpaths, Taking Cities Back from Cars

Context

- A city reflects its priorities through the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens.
- In India, pedestrians often face broken, encroached, or non-existent footpaths, forcing them onto busy roads and exposing them to constant danger.
- **Safe and accessible walkways** are not merely civic amenities but essential components of public health, road safety, urban mobility, and human dignity.
- Recognising this, the Supreme Court has affirmed that **the right to walk safely on footpaths is a fundamental right**, marking a significant step toward creating people-centric cities.

The Constitutional Recognition of Walkability

- In **Maniyar Iliyaz @ Shaik Riyaz vs P. Ayyappan (2026)**, the Supreme Court declared that walking on designated footpaths is protected under Article 19(1)(d), guaranteeing freedom of movement, and Article 21, safeguarding the right to life and personal liberty.

- The Court directed States and Union Territories to formulate policies for the provision and maintenance of safe footpaths.
- This **judgment elevates pedestrian infrastructure** from a routine municipal responsibility to a constitutional obligation.
- It establishes that roads are public spaces meant for all citizens, not just motor vehicles, and that governments must ensure safe and accessible mobility.

Walkability as a Public Health Imperative

- India is witnessing an **alarming increase in diabetes, hypertension**, obesity, fatty liver disease, and other lifestyle disorders.
- One of the most effective and affordable ways to address this crisis is by encouraging **regular physical activity, particularly walking**.
- However, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** estimates that nearly half of Indian adults fail to meet the recommended levels of physical activity, with women and adolescents recording even lower participation.
- **Safe footpaths enable people to integrate physical activity** into their daily routines by walking to schools, workplaces, markets, bus stops, parks, and metro stations.
- Walking offers numerous health benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, blood pressure control, insulin sensitivity, weight management, better mental well-being, improved sleep, and enhanced joint function.
- Thus, footpaths function **as preventive healthcare infrastructure** that promotes healthier communities.

The Built Environment Shapes Human Behaviour

- Physical inactivity is not solely the result of personal choices. Urban design strongly influences lifestyle patterns.
- Cities that lack continuous, shaded, barrier-free, and well-maintained footpaths discourage walking and encourage dependence on private vehicles.
- Accessible pedestrian infrastructure benefits every section of society.
- **Children can safely walk to school**, elderly citizens remain independent, women enjoy greater security, persons with disabilities gain mobility, and office-goers are more likely to use public transport.
- Therefore, investing in walkability promotes **both social inclusion and sustainable urban development**.

Pedestrian Safety and Road Fatalities

- Poor pedestrian infrastructure is also a **major road safety concern**.
- Official data consistently show that pedestrians and two-wheeler riders account for the majority of road accident fatalities in India.
- Every missing or encroached footpath forces pedestrians into direct conflict with fast-moving traffic, turning daily commuting into a life-threatening activity.
- **Improving pedestrian infrastructure** through dedicated footpaths, safe crossings, traffic-calming measures, and better lighting can substantially reduce accidents and save thousands of lives each year.

Role of Citizens in Promoting Walkability

- While governments bear primary responsibility, citizens also have an important role in creating a walking culture.
- **Individuals should incorporate regular walking** into their daily routine, choose walking for short-distance travel, combine walking with public transport, and encourage community walking initiatives through families, workplaces, and resident welfare associations.
- **Citizens should also actively demand safe, encroachment-free footpaths** as a constitutional entitlement rather than viewing them as optional civic facilities.

Policy Measures for People-Centric Cities

- Creating walkable cities requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. Key policy priorities include:
 - Integrating continuous, shaded, well-lit, and barrier-free footpaths into every road project.
 - Installing ramps, safe pedestrian crossings, and wheelchair-accessible infrastructure.
 - Preventing parking on footpaths through effective enforcement and meaningful penalties.
 - Prioritising pedestrian infrastructure around schools, hospitals, markets, bus stops, and metro stations.
 - Expanding tree cover, benches, public toilets, and adequate street lighting.
 - Launching a National Active Mobility Mission linking urban development, transport, health, and education.
 - Conducting annual footpath audits and publishing ward-level walkability maps to improve accountability.
 - Encouraging employers to promote active commuting and healthcare professionals to prescribe walking as preventive medicine.

Conclusion

- The recognition of walking as a fundamental constitutional right marks a transformative shift in India's urban governance.
- However, **judicial recognition alone cannot improve everyday life** unless it is supported by thoughtful planning, adequate funding, effective enforcement, and active citizen participation.
- A truly modern city is measured not by the number of flyovers it builds but by how safely its citizens can walk.
- **Footpaths are not merely strips of concrete**; they represent public health, road safety, accessibility, social equity, environmental sustainability, and constitutional dignity.

Reclaiming Footpaths, Taking Cities Back from Cars FAQs

Q1. Which constitutional rights protect the right to walk safely on footpaths?

Ans. The right to walk safely on footpaths is protected under Article 19(1)(d) and Article 21 of the Constitution.

Q2. Why are safe footpaths important for public health?

Ans. Safe footpaths encourage regular walking, which helps prevent lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

Q3. How do proper footpaths improve road safety?

Ans. Proper footpaths separate pedestrians from traffic and significantly reduce the risk of road accidents and fatalities.

Q4. What should governments do to make cities more walkable?

Ans. Governments should build continuous, barrier-free footpaths, enforce encroachment rules, and provide safe pedestrian crossings.

Q5. Why are walkable cities considered more inclusive?

Ans. Walkable cities ensure safe and accessible mobility for children, women, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Source: **The Hindu**

Canada-India Defence Collaboration for a Secure Future

Context

- The rapidly evolving global security environment has compelled nations to strengthen defence capabilities and forge strategic partnerships.
- The rise of **drones, autonomous systems, space-based weapons**, and geopolitical uncertainties has transformed the nature of warfare.
- Against this backdrop, **Canada** and **India** are emerging as natural partners with complementary strengths in defence, technology, critical minerals, and aerospace.
- Their growing collaboration has the potential to contribute to regional stability, resilient supply chains, and a secure Indo-Pacific.

Changing Global Security Landscape

- The international order is undergoing significant transformation, marked by increasing geopolitical tensions, technological competition, and hybrid warfare.
- Nations are investing heavily in military modernization to address emerging threats.
- Canada has responded by committing to increase its **defence expenditure to 5% of GDP by 2035**, while India continues to modernize its armed forces under the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
- This convergence of strategic priorities creates favourable conditions for deeper bilateral defence cooperation.

Strengthening Bilateral Defence Engagement

- **Institutional Cooperation**
 - Several important mechanisms have been established, including:
 - Appointment of **Defence Advisers** in Ottawa and New Delhi.

- Creation of a formal **Defence Dialogue** to identify shared priorities.
- Enhanced military exchanges between defence institutions.
- These measures institutionalize defence cooperation and facilitate regular strategic consultations.

• **Military Exercises and Professional Exchanges**

- The armed forces of both nations have expanded practical cooperation through:
 - Participation in multinational naval exercises such as **Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC)** and **Talisman Sabre**.
 - Visits by India's **National Defence College** delegation to Canadian military institutions.
 - Increased exchanges among defence personnel to promote interoperability and strategic understanding.
 - Such engagements strengthen military readiness and mutual trust.

• **Defence Industrial Collaboration**

- Defence industrial cooperation represents one of the most promising areas of partnership.
- Canada has introduced a **Defence Investment Agency** and a new **Defence Industrial Strategy** to diversify procurement and reduce dependence on single-source suppliers.
- India, with its growing manufacturing capabilities and defence industrial base, can become an important partner in:
 - **Co-development** of defence platforms.
 - **Subsystem manufacturing**.
 - **Maintenance and sustainment** of military equipment.
 - Joint research in **drone technologies** and advanced aerospace systems.

Strategic Technology Partnership

• **Aerospace Cooperation**

- Canada possesses a mature **full-spectrum aerospace industry**, while India is among the world's largest aviation markets.
- Collaboration can focus on:
 - Aerospace research and development.
 - Aircraft components.
 - Advanced manufacturing.
 - Innovation ecosystems.
 - Combining Canada's research expertise with India's manufacturing scale can create globally competitive capabilities.

• **Space Cooperation**

- Both countries possess advanced **space capabilities** that can strengthen defence and civilian applications.
- Potential areas include:
 - **Satellite technologies.**
 - **Space robotics.**
 - **Earth observation systems.**
 - Maritime surveillance using Canada's **RADARSAT**
 - These technologies can enhance maritime domain awareness and regional security in the Indo-Pacific.

Critical Minerals: Foundation of Defence Security

- Modern defence technologies depend heavily on secure access to **critical minerals**.
- Canada possesses abundant reserves of **rare earth elements, uranium, cobalt, helium, and tungsten**, making it one of the world's leading suppliers.
- India's expanding manufacturing and clean-energy sectors require reliable access to these strategic resources.
- The **Canada-India Memorandum of Understanding on the Critical Minerals Value Chain** provides a framework for:
 - Diversified supply chains.
 - Secure mineral sourcing.
 - Industrial cooperation.
 - Economic resilience.
 - National security.
 - This partnership reduces dependence on vulnerable global supply chains while supporting defence manufacturing.

Strategic Significance for Both Countries

- Greater defence cooperation offers several mutual benefits:
 - Enhances **Indo-Pacific security**.
 - Strengthens **economic security** alongside national security.
 - Diversifies defence supply chains.
 - Promotes **innovation** and advanced technology development.
 - Supports indigenous defence manufacturing.
 - Encourages resilience against geopolitical disruptions.
 - Expands cooperation in emerging technologies such as **artificial intelligence, autonomous systems**, and **space technologies**.

Challenges

- Despite growing opportunities, certain challenges remain:
 - Historical political disagreements affecting bilateral trust.

- Regulatory and export-control complexities.
- Differences in defence procurement systems.
- Competition from other strategic partners.
- Need for sustained political commitment and institutional coordination.

Way Forward

- To unlock the full potential of the partnership, both countries should:
 - Institutionalise regular **Defence Dialogues**.
 - Expand joint military exercises.
 - Promote **joint research and development**.
 - Increase collaboration in **cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and space security**.
 - Strengthen industrial partnerships through technology transfer and co-production.
 - Operationalize the **Critical Minerals Value Chain** for secure supply chains.
 - Encourage greater collaboration between academia, industry, and defence establishments.

Conclusion

- Canada and India share democratic values, complementary economic strengths, and common strategic interests in maintaining a stable international order.
- Their partnership extends beyond traditional defence cooperation to include **advanced technologies, critical minerals, space, aerospace**, and resilient industrial ecosystems.
- As geopolitical competition intensifies and warfare becomes increasingly technology-driven, a stronger Canada-India defence partnership can contribute significantly to regional stability, economic resilience, and global security while advancing the long-term strategic interests of both nations.

Canada-India Defence Collaboration for a Secure Future FAQs

Q1. Why is Canada-India defence cooperation becoming more important?

Ans. It is becoming important due to changing global security challenges and evolving military technologies.

Q2. Which sectors offer the greatest scope for bilateral cooperation?

Ans. Defence manufacturing, aerospace, space technology, and critical minerals offer the greatest opportunities.

Q3. How do critical minerals strengthen defence cooperation?

Ans. They ensure secure supply chains for advanced defence and strategic technologies.

Q4. What is the purpose of the Canada-India Defence Dialogue?

Ans. It aims to coordinate defence priorities and expand strategic cooperation.

Q5. How can this partnership benefit both countries?

Ans. It can enhance security, promote innovation, strengthen supply chains, and support long-term economic and strategic interests.

Source: **The Hindu**

Reforming India's Anti-Defection Law - Restoring Electoral Accountability

Context

- With Parliament's Monsoon Session witnessing several Members of Parliament (MPs) switching political parties, the debate over the **effectiveness** of India's anti-defection law has resurfaced.
- While political parties trade allegations of inducements and coercion, the deeper issue remains the inability of the existing legal framework to prevent **political opportunism** and protect the **integrity** of the electoral mandate.

Background - Evolution of the Anti-Defection Law

- The anti-defection framework was introduced through the **52nd** Constitutional Amendment Act, **1985**, which inserted the **Tenth Schedule** into the Constitution.
- **Objectives:**
 - Prevent political defections motivated by personal gain.
 - Ensure stability of elected governments.
 - Preserve the mandate given by voters to political parties.
- **Key constitutional developments:**
 - **52nd Amendment (1985):** Introduced disqualification for legislators voluntarily giving up party membership or violating the party whip.
 - **91st Constitutional Amendment (2003):**
 - Abolished the exemption for splits involving one-third of legislators.
 - Retained exemption only for mergers supported by at least **two-thirds** of the legislature party.
 - Aimed to strengthen anti-defection safeguards.

Why the Law Has Failed

- **Delayed disqualification decisions:**
 - The authority to decide disqualification petitions lies with the Speaker (Lok Sabha and State Assemblies), and Chairman (Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils).
 - Speakers are often members of political parties, raising concerns about institutional **neutrality**.
 - Decisions are frequently delayed for months or even the entire tenure of a legislature, rendering the law ineffective.
- **Judicial concerns:**
 - In *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (**1992**), the Supreme Court validated the Tenth Schedule's constitutional status but ruled that the Speaker's disqualification decisions are subject to **judicial**

review.

- The SC has also repeatedly held that disqualification petitions should ordinarily be decided within **three months** [Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur (2020)].
- Despite judicial observations, procedural delays continue, allowing defecting legislators to retain office.

• Encouragement of mass defections:

- Ironically, stricter provisions have altered rather than eliminated political opportunism.
- Political parties now engineer large-scale defections to meet the two-thirds merger threshold.
- This has increased political bargaining, encouraged **organised defections**, and undermined the original objective of the law.
- Thus, instead of preventing defections, the law has incentivised collective defections.

A Fundamental Restructuring of the Anti-Defection Framework

- **Automatic vacation of seat:** A legislator's membership should automatically cease on the date he or she resigns from the political party on whose ticket the election was won.
- **Fresh electoral mandate:**
 - The defecting legislator should be free to contest as an independent, or join another political party and seek re-election.
 - The ultimate decision should rest with the electorate, not with party leadership or presiding officers.
- **Rationale:** This approach –
 - Restores the sanctity of the voters' mandate, eliminates incentives for opportunistic defections.
 - Reduces dependence on politically influenced decisions by presiding officers.
 - Strengthens democratic accountability.

Concerns and Counterarguments

- **Possible criticism:** Critics argue that automatic disqualification may suppress genuine dissent, encourage excessive party discipline, and discourage legislators from independently expressing their views.
- **Counter argument:**
 - The proposal does not restrict dissent. Legislators would remain free to disagree with party policies, resign from the party, and contest elections again on a different political platform.
 - The reform merely prevents legislators from retaining an elected office obtained on one party's mandate after abandoning that party.
- **Key governance issues:** Political ethics, electoral accountability, legislative stability, institutional impartiality, constitutional reforms, and internal democracy within political parties.

Conclusion

- Nearly four decades after its enactment, India's anti-defection law has **fallen short** of its objective of curbing political opportunism.

- Delayed adjudication, concerns over the neutrality of presiding officers, and the rise of engineered mass defections have exposed its **structural weaknesses**.
- A constitutional reform that links party resignation with automatic vacation of the legislative seat would transfer the final authority to the electorate, reinforce democratic accountability, and better uphold the mandate entrusted by voters.
- Such a reform could strike a more **effective balance** between political freedom and constitutional morality.

Reforming India's Anti-Defection Law FAQs

Q1. What is the primary objective of the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution?

Ans. It seeks to curb political defections, ensure government stability, and uphold the electoral mandate.

Q2. How did the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 strengthen the anti-defection law?

Ans. It abolished the one-third split exemption and retained protection only for mergers.

Q3. Why has the anti-defection law failed to effectively prevent political defections?

Ans. Delayed decisions by presiding officers and the rise of engineered two-thirds defections have undermined its effectiveness.

Q4. What constitutional reform is suggested to make the anti-defection law more effective?

Ans. Automatically vacating the seat of any legislator who resigns from the party on whose ticket they were elected.

Q5. How would the proposed reform strengthen democratic accountability?

Ans. It would shift the authority to validate a legislator's political realignment from presiding officers to the electorate.

Source: IE

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