

Editorials – 21st Jul 2026

1. RECLAIMING FOOTPATHS, TAKING CITIES BACK FROM CARS (GS Paper II Polity and Governance)

This editorial 'Reclaiming footpaths, taking cities back from cars' was published in The Hindu on 21st Jul 2026, highlights safe, accessible footpaths as essential to constitutional rights, public health, road safety, and democratic urban governance.

Constitutional and public-health significance

- Broken, obstructed footpaths force pedestrians onto vehicle-dominated roads, exposing failures of urban planning and civic governance.
- In Maniyar Iliyaz v. P. Ayyappan (2026), the Supreme Court recognised walking on demarcated footpaths under Articles 19(1)(d) and 21.
- The Court directed States and Union Territories to frame policies for safe footpaths, making walkability a constitutional and governance imperative.
- WHO's India Physical Activity Profile 2024 found insufficient activity among 49.4% adults, 57.2% women and 74% children aged 11–17.
- Safe walking can reduce metabolic diseases while improving mobility, independence and access to schools, markets, clinics and public transport.

Road safety and inclusive street design

- MoRTH's Road Accidents in India 2024 recorded 1.28 lakh pedestrian and two-wheeler deaths, nearly 67% of road fatalities.
- NCRB 2024 reported over 1.1 lakh deaths among these groups, confirming their status as India's most vulnerable road users.
- Episodic anti-encroachment drives merely shift disorder and unfairly target vendors possessing legal protections and legitimate economic claims.

- Orderly streets require planned footpaths, vending zones, parking spaces and utility corridors, supported by continuous encroachment control and behaviour-changing penalties.
- Footpaths should be continuous, shaded, barrier-free and wheelchair-accessible, with safe crossings, ramps and clear passages near bus stops and public facilities.
- Tree cover, benches, toilets and lighting determine whether women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities can exercise equal mobility and public access.

Policy action and behavioural change

- India needs a national active-mobility mission integrating urban development, transport, health and education around safe walking rather than flyover length.
- Municipal commissioners should publish ward-level maps and annual audits, while prioritising high-footfall areas and protecting school zones through traffic calming.
- Citizens can build walking habits through short post-meal walks, nearby errands, public transport integration and organised car-free routines.
- Employers and doctors can encourage active commuting and walking, but governments must provide usable pavements enabling compliance with such health advice.

Beyond Editorial

Climate value of pedestrian-first planning

- Low-carbon mobility: Paris's 2024–30 Climate Plan prioritises active mobility, showing how walking infrastructure can support city-level decarbonisation strategies.
- Air-quality improvement: Barcelona's first three Superblocks recorded lower traffic volumes and improved air-quality measures after reclaiming streets from motor vehicles.

- Last-mile connectivity: Chennai's Pondy Bazaar Pedestrian Plaza created a 1.4-kilometre walking corridor through T. Nagar's major commercial district.
- Public-space recovery: Paris converted the 10-hectare Rives de Seine riverbank into space for pedestrians and cyclists, replacing car-oriented land use.
- Heat resilience: Paris plans five to eight green pedestrian streets per neighbourhood, combining walkability with vegetation and urban biodiversity.
- Scalable transformation: Chennai's Mega Streets programme proposes redeveloping 61.6 kilometres across six neighbourhoods through pedestrian-oriented street improvements.
- Indian precedent: Pune identified 27 kilometres under its Smart City plan and another 100 kilometres for Complete Streets redevelopment.

2. ANNA HAZARE TO SONAM WANGCHUK, A TALE OF TWO FASTS — AND A DEMOCRACY (GS Paper II Polity and Governance)

This editorial 'Anna Hazare to Sonam Wangchuk, a tale of two fasts — and a democracy' was published in The Indian Express on 21st Jul 2026, highlights changing governmental, political, and societal responses to democratic protest in India.

Two fasts and contrasting political contexts

- Anna Hazare's 2011 fasts secured government negotiations, a joint drafting committee and a parliamentary resolution supporting core Jan Lokpal demands.
- Hazare's anti-corruption campaign gained television coverage, RSS mobilisation and support from socialists, Left leaders and prominent civil-society figures.

- The scam-hit UPA government initially misjudged the agitation but later deployed experienced negotiators, although its response came politically late.
- The BJP emerged as the principal political beneficiary by converting anti-government sentiment generated during the Anna movement into electoral advantage.
- Unlike Hazare's abstract Lokpal demand, Sonam Wangchuk seeks Dharmendra Pradhan's removal and concrete education-system reform.

Government and Opposition response

- Wangchuk's protesters faced tear gas, while the government opened communication only after 23 days amid growing public mobilisation.
- Reported talks involving J.P. Nadda reflected the government's reluctant engagement with a movement questioning its education policies.
- Wangchuk received only sporadic Opposition support, as divided parties lacked a cohesive strategy or clear incentive for his political success.
- Unlike the BJP during Hazare's agitation, no present opposition party occupies the entire political space or directly benefits from anti-government sentiment.
- Youth arriving from across India filled this political vacuum, forcing the government to respond despite wider societal and Opposition inertia.

Democratic silence and youth mobilisation

- Governments often calibrate responses according to a protest's scale and intensity; the Jantar Mantar groundswell ultimately broke official silence.
- Compared with 2011, today's entertainment industry, media and corporate sector remain markedly subdued in confronting the government.

- This withdrawal raises whether political success is judged only through electoral outcomes, weakening broader participation in democratic accountability.
- Wangchuk's mobilisation presents youth-led protest as an alternative democratic path for expressing demands when established political channels remain ineffective.

Beyond Editorial

Constitutional framework for democratic protest

- Fundamental protection: *Kameshwar Prasad v. State of Bihar* (1962) recognised that peaceful demonstrations can fall within constitutional freedoms of expression and assembly.
- Restrictive safeguards: *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020) held that Section 144 cannot suppress legitimate expression without credible threats to public safety.
- Facilitative obligation: *Himat Lal Shah v. Commissioner of Police* (1973) permitted regulation of assemblies but rejected prohibiting them across all public spaces.
- Competing rights: *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018) balanced Jantar Mantar protests against residents' Article 21 rights.
- Proportionate policing: Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012), concerning the 2011 midnight police action, required state restrictions to satisfy necessity and proportionality.
- Spatial limitation: *Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police* (2020) held that the Shaheen Bagh protesters could not indefinitely occupy public roads.
- Regulated accommodation: The Supreme Court's Jantar Mantar judgment preferred designated spaces, prior permission and time restrictions over blanket bans on demonstrations.

3. ANTI-DEFECTION LAW NEEDS DRASTIC CHANGES (GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial 'Anti-defection law needs drastic changes' was published in The Indian Express on 21st Jul 2026, highlights the anti-defection law's failure to prevent political opportunism and proposes returning decision-making authority to the electorate.

Evolution and objectives of the law

- Recent parliamentary defections, attributed variously to inducements or internal party autocracy, expose persistent political opportunism and legislative instability.
- The Fifty-second Constitutional Amendment, 1985 inserted the Tenth Schedule to curb instability caused by frequent legislative defections.
- The Ninety-first Constitutional Amendment, 2003 abolished protection for one-third splits, retaining exemption only for two-thirds mergers.
- Despite progressively stricter provisions, the anti-defection law has failed to contain the political realignments it was designed to prevent.

Institutional weaknesses and unintended consequences

- Disqualification powers rest with presiding officers, whose political affiliations and institutional arrangements create perceptions of partisan decision-making.
- Petitions often remain pending for months or entire legislative tenures, despite the Supreme Court favouring decisions within three months.
- Procedural delays allow defectors to retain office, making formal disqualification proceedings ineffective and weakening legislative accountability.
- The two-thirds exemption incentivises large-scale engineered mergers, replacing individual defections with organised political bargaining and greater inducements.

- Consequently, stricter provisions have transformed the law into a mechanism that can escalate collective defections rather than ensure political stability.

Proposed constitutional reform

- A legislator resigning from the party whose ticket secured election should automatically lose the remaining legislative tenure and vacate the seat.
- The representative may contest again independently or through another party, allowing voters to grant or reject a fresh mandate through re-election.
- This would transfer authority over a defector's continuation from party managers and presiding officers to the electorate, strengthening popular accountability.
- Genuine dissent would remain protected because legislators could disagree within their party or resign and seek renewed public approval without retaining elected office.

Beyond Editorial

Alternative reforms to the Tenth Schedule

- Limited whips: The Dinesh Goswami Committee favoured restricting whips to government-survival votes, unlike Britain where MPs opposed the Brexit deal without losing seats.
- Merger removal: Goa's 2019 switch of 10 among 15 Congress MLAs to the BJP demonstrated how the two-thirds exemption facilitates collective defections.
- Neutral adjudication: Manipur's Speaker delayed deciding a 2017 defection dispute until judicial intervention, supporting adjudication through Election Commission advice.
- Independent tribunal: Keisham Meghachandra Singh (2020) proposed a permanent tribunal after disqualification petitions against a Manipur legislator remained undecided for years.

- **Definitional clarity:** Ravi S. Naik (1994) allowed party abandonment to be inferred from conduct, illustrating why the Halim Committee sought clearer terminology.
- **Office prohibition:** The Y.B. Chavan Committee found that 116 among 210 defecting state legislators received ministerial positions, supporting restrictions on political appointments.
- **Vote neutralisation:** During the 2008 UPA confidence motion, 21 MPs defied party whips, illustrating demands to invalidate defectors' government-changing votes.