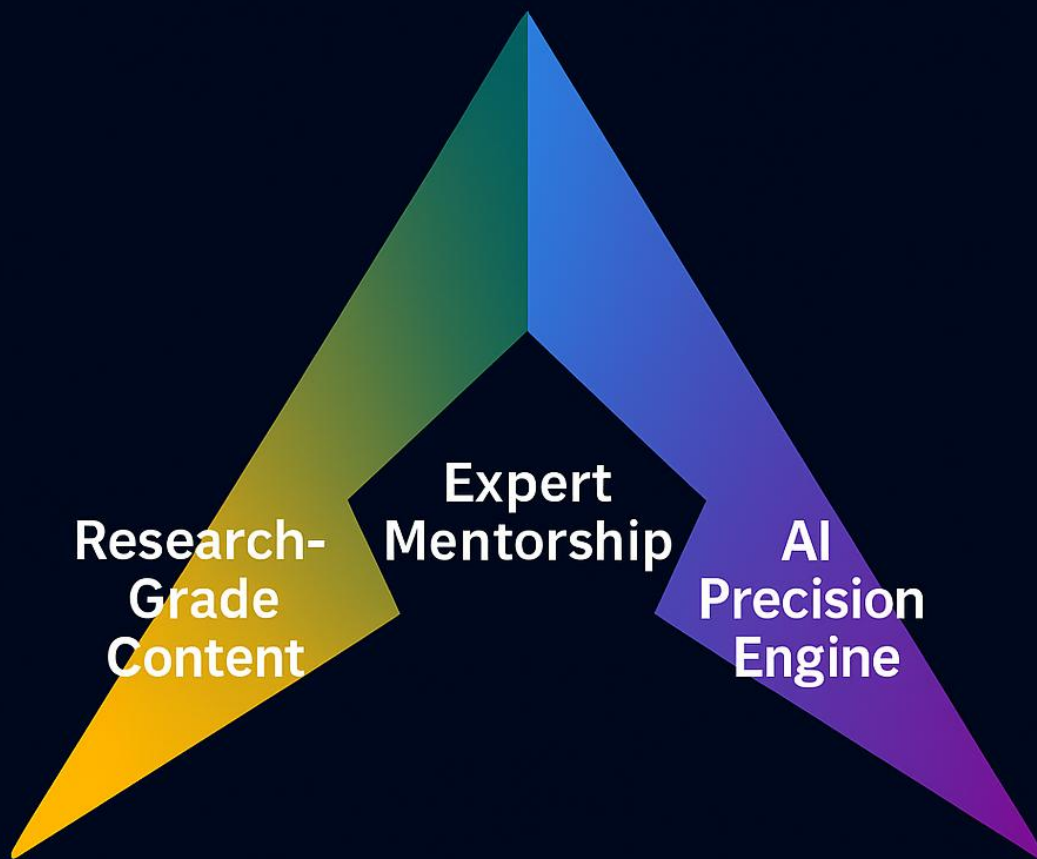


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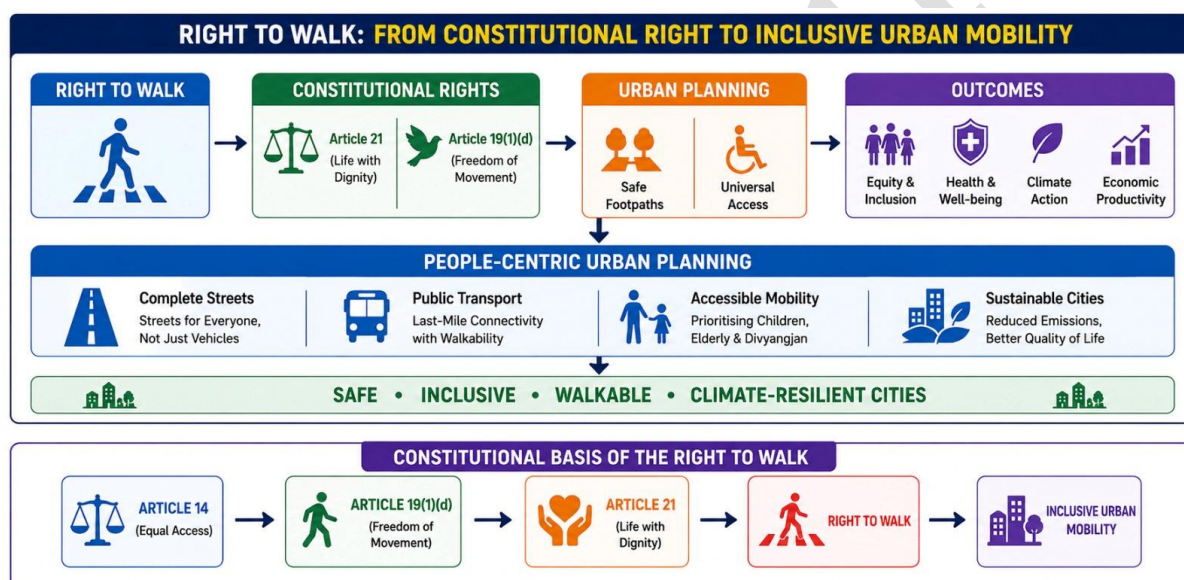
GS Paper II: Polity

1. Right to Walk as a Fundamental Right: Towards Inclusive Urban Mobility

a. Introduction

Urban mobility is a fundamental determinant of economic productivity, social inclusion and quality of life. However, the rapid growth of Indian cities has largely been accompanied by vehicle-centric urban planning, where roads are designed primarily for motorised transport rather than for people. Consequently, pedestrians often face unsafe, discontinuous or encroached footpaths, exposing them to serious risks while exercising the most basic form of mobility.

Recognising this reality, the Supreme Court has held that walking on demarcated footpaths is a fundamental right and has urged the Union and State Governments to establish a comprehensive legal framework for protecting pedestrians and improving walkability across Indian cities. The judgment marks an important shift towards viewing streets as inclusive public spaces rather than merely transport corridors.



b. Background Context

Rapid motorisation over the past few decades has transformed Indian cities, but urban infrastructure has not evolved at the same pace to accommodate pedestrians. In many cities, footpaths are absent, encroached upon, poorly maintained or inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

Although several laws regulate traffic management and road transport, India does not have a dedicated legal framework that comprehensively recognises and protects pedestrian rights. The Supreme Court has therefore emphasised that walking is not merely a matter of convenience but an essential constitutional freedom that enables citizens to participate in economic, social and civic life.

c. Key Issues

High Pedestrian Vulnerability

- India records one of the highest numbers of road fatalities globally.
- Pedestrians constitute a significant proportion of those killed or seriously injured in road accidents.

- The trend reflects persistent shortcomings in road design and urban safety.

Vehicle-Centric Urban Planning

- Urban roads have traditionally prioritised motor vehicles.
- Pedestrians, cyclists and persons with disabilities often receive inadequate planning attention.
- Continuous, safe and universally accessible pedestrian infrastructure remains limited.

Fragmented Institutional Responsibility

- Multiple agencies—including municipal corporations, public works departments, development authorities, utility agencies and traffic police—share responsibility for pedestrian infrastructure.
- The absence of a single coordinating authority results in weak accountability and inconsistent implementation.

Legal Gaps

- The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 primarily regulates motor vehicles, drivers and road transport.
- It does not establish a comprehensive legal framework specifically safeguarding pedestrian rights or mandating pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

These deficiencies demonstrate that improving walkability requires not only better infrastructure but also a fundamental shift in governance and urban planning.

d. Analysis/ Observations

Constitutional Significance of the Right to Walk

- Reinforces the guarantee of life with dignity under Article 21.
- Strengthens the freedom of movement guaranteed under Article 19(1)(d).
- Recognises safe mobility as an essential component of meaningful access to education, healthcare, employment and public services.

Promoting Inclusive Urban Development

- Safe footpaths particularly benefit children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities and economically weaker sections.
- Improves accessibility to public transport and essential services.
- Promotes equitable access to urban opportunities.

Shift Towards People-Centric Urban Planning

- Encourages redesigning streets as public spaces serving all users.
- Balances the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and motor vehicles.
- Supports the concept of Complete Streets and universal accessibility.

Contribution to Sustainable Development

- Encourages walking and public transport usage.
- Reduces traffic congestion and vehicular emissions.
- Improves public health through increased physical activity.
- Contributes to climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable cities.

While the judgment establishes an important constitutional principle, translating it into reality requires addressing several institutional and practical challenges.

e. Key Challenges

Institutional Fragmentation

- Multiple agencies exercise overlapping jurisdiction over roads and footpaths.
- Coordination gaps delay planning, construction and maintenance.

Inadequate Pedestrian Infrastructure

- Footpaths are frequently encroached upon or poorly designed.
- Poor maintenance often forces pedestrians onto carriageways, increasing accident risk.

Balancing Mobility and Livelihoods

- Street vendors depend on public spaces for their livelihood.
- Unplanned vending may obstruct pedestrian movement, while indiscriminate eviction undermines economic security.

Weak Implementation of Urban Design Standards

- Technical guidelines for pedestrian-friendly streets already exist.
- Adoption remains inconsistent because of financial, administrative and institutional constraints.

These challenges underline the need for comprehensive legal, institutional and planning reforms that place pedestrians at the centre of urban mobility.

f. Way Forward

Enact a Comprehensive Pedestrian Rights Law

- Clearly define pedestrian rights.
- Specify institutional responsibilities for planning, construction, maintenance and enforcement.

Adopt People-Centric Urban Planning

- Integrate the principles of Complete Streets and universal accessibility.
- Develop barrier-free infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and persons with disabilities.

Establish a Nodal Coordinating Authority

- Coordinate municipalities, traffic police, public works departments and utility agencies.
- Improve accountability and integrated urban planning.

Balance Pedestrian Rights and Street Vendors' Livelihoods

- Develop scientifically planned vending zones.
- Strengthen implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.
- Ensure both pedestrian mobility and livelihood protection.

Prioritise High-Footfall Areas

- Develop safe and continuous pedestrian infrastructure around schools, hospitals, markets and public transport hubs.
- Improve lighting, signage, universal accessibility and pedestrian crossings.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's recognition of the right to walk represents an important evolution in India's constitutional and urban governance framework. Realising this right will require more than judicial recognition—it demands pedestrian-centric planning, coordinated institutions, accessible infrastructure and effective legal protection. By placing people rather than vehicles at the centre of urban design, India can move towards safer, healthier, more inclusive and sustainable cities.

GS Paper II: International Relations

2. India–Seychelles Relations: Diaspora, Maritime Security and Development Partnership

a. Introduction

India and Seychelles share a longstanding partnership rooted in historical ties, maritime cooperation and mutual trust. Despite its small geographical size and population, Seychelles occupies a strategically important location in the Western Indian Ocean, making it a key partner in India's vision for a secure, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Seychelles as the Guest of Honour during the country's 50th Independence Day celebrations reaffirmed the depth of bilateral ties. The visit also highlighted India's commitment to strengthening maritime security, promoting sustainable development and deepening engagement with the countries of the Global South.

b. Background Context

India established diplomatic relations with Seychelles in 1976, soon after the latter attained independence. Over the decades, bilateral cooperation has expanded beyond traditional diplomacy to include defence, maritime security, development assistance, capacity building and people-to-people exchanges.

The relationship has gained increasing strategic significance as the Indian Ocean has emerged as a major arena of global geopolitical competition and maritime trade.

These historical foundations have enabled both countries to develop a broad-based partnership spanning security, development and societal linkages.

c. Key Highlights of the Visit

Strengthening Strategic Partnership

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended Seychelles' 50th Independence Day celebrations as the Guest of Honour.
- The visit reaffirmed India's longstanding strategic partnership with Seychelles.

Development Partnership

- India announced a Special Economic Package of US\$175 million to support Seychelles' developmental priorities.
- The package reflects India's role as a reliable development partner.

Diaspora Linkages

- Persons of Indian Origin constitute nearly 5% of Seychelles' population, numbering around 6,000.
- More than 9,000 Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) are engaged mainly in construction, trade and professional services.
- The Indian community serves as an important bridge connecting the two societies.

Vision MAHASAGAR

- Seychelles occupies an important place in India's Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).
- The initiative seeks to promote security, prosperity and sustainable development across the Indian Ocean Region.

These developments reinforce the growing strategic importance of Seychelles in India's maritime and regional outreach.

d. Strategic Significance of Seychelles for India

Gateway to the Western Indian Ocean

- Seychelles is located close to major international Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) connecting Asia, Africa and Europe.
- Its location is critical for safeguarding maritime trade and ensuring uninterrupted global commerce.

Maritime Security Cooperation

- Cooperation addresses piracy, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, narcotics trafficking and other non-traditional security threats.
- Collaboration includes coastal surveillance, maritime domain awareness, hydrographic cooperation and capacity building.
- Strengthens collective security across the Indian Ocean Region.

Blue Economy Partnership

- Promotes sustainable utilisation of marine resources.
- Encourages responsible fisheries, marine conservation and ocean-based economic activities.
- Supports sustainable ocean governance and climate resilience.

Development Partnership

- India supports Seychelles through grants, Lines of Credit, infrastructure projects and technical assistance.
- Capacity-building programmes strengthen local institutions and human resource development.
- Demonstrates India's development-centric approach towards the Global South.

Diaspora as a Strategic Asset

- The Indian diaspora strengthens cultural and historical ties.
- Promotes business, tourism, investment and educational exchanges.
- Enhances long-term resilience of bilateral relations.

Geopolitical Importance

- Growing strategic competition has increased the importance of island nations in the Indian Ocean.
- Strong engagement with Seychelles supports India's objective of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- Enhances India's maritime presence while contributing to regional stability and balance.

Beyond strategic considerations, bilateral cooperation today encompasses several sectors that directly contribute to sustainable development and regional resilience.

e. Major Areas of Cooperation

Maritime Security and Defence

- Joint naval exercises.
- Coastal surveillance systems.
- Hydrographic cooperation.
- Defence training and capacity building.

Development Cooperation

- Grants and concessional Lines of Credit.
- Infrastructure development projects.
- Community development initiatives.

Capacity Building

- Scholarships for higher education.
- Professional and technical training programmes.
- Institutional cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Healthcare Cooperation

- Medical assistance and pharmaceutical support.
- Telemedicine initiatives.
- Opportunities in medical tourism.

Cultural and People-to-People Relations

- Educational collaboration.
- Cultural exchanges.
- Active engagement with the Indian diaspora.

Sustaining this multidimensional partnership requires expanding cooperation into emerging areas while responding to evolving geopolitical and environmental challenges.

f. Way Forward

Deepen Cooperation under Vision MAHASAGAR

- Align bilateral initiatives with the objective of a secure, prosperous and inclusive Indian Ocean Region.
- Strengthen regional cooperation among island nations.

Expand Blue Economy Partnership

- Promote sustainable fisheries.
- Enhance marine conservation.
- Develop climate-resilient coastal infrastructure.
- Strengthen disaster risk management.

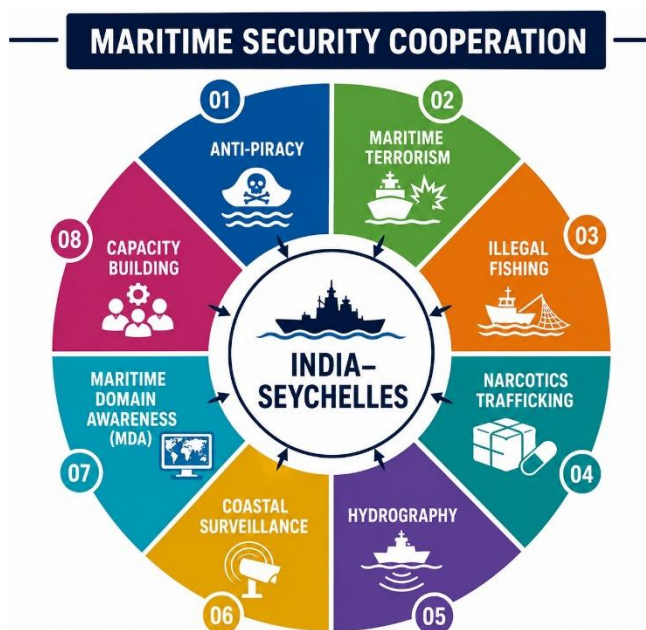
Enhance Maritime Security

- Improve maritime domain awareness.
- Expand coastal surveillance.
- Increase information sharing.
- Intensify joint efforts against transnational maritime threats.

Strengthen Economic Cooperation

- Promote trade and investment.
- Expand tourism and digital connectivity.
- Encourage skill development and educational partnerships.

Leverage the Indian Diaspora



- Promote entrepreneurship and investment.
- Strengthen cultural diplomacy.
- Enhance business and innovation linkages.

Conclusion

India–Seychelles relations exemplify India's approach of combining strategic cooperation with developmental partnership. Anchored in maritime security, capacity building, diaspora linkages and sustainable development, the partnership has evolved into a key pillar of India's engagement in the Western Indian Ocean. As geopolitical competition and maritime challenges intensify, strengthening cooperation with Seychelles will remain essential for advancing India's vision of a secure, inclusive and prosperous Indian Ocean Region under SAGAR and Vision MAHASAGAR.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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