Crackdown on Free Speech

Why in news?

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- Cartoonist G.Bala was arrested for expressing his displeasure with the TN government.
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- This is in line with the emerging trend of stern government crackdown on free speech, which spells trouble for democracy.
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Why is Freedom of Expression important?

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- India is regarded as the world’s largest democracy.
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- Freedom of expression is at the forefront in ensuring a robust democracy and is backed by constitutional guarantees.
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- But many Indian politicians aren’t willing to comply with the basic values that sustain a democratic culture.
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- Developed western democracies are strengthened by their stong free press, which neither spares the royalty nor heads of states.
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- Emulating their tolerance to freedom of expression is needed.
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What is cartoonist Bala’s case?

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- His cartoon was on the suicide of an indebted family that was being harassed by loan-sharks went viral on social media.

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- This was despite their repeated appeals to the district collector seeking protection.
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- Hence, the cartoon parodied indifference of the administration to the plight of the citizens.
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- The complaint was lodged by the district collector on the flimsiest of charges and his arrest and imprisonment was secured.
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- This was in utter disregard for court-mandated guidelines and noticeably, none of those parodied took the judicial route.
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What are other such high profile incidences?

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- **Coersive action -** 2 journalists were sentenced by the Speaker of the Karnatraka Assembly for violation of parliamentary privileges.
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- Rajasthan government passed an ordinance that mandates prior sanctions for reporting accusations against bureaucrats & judges.
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- A court in Gujarat, recently restrained a website from publishing a report on BJP president Amit Shah's son Jay Shah.
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- **Self Censoring -** A television channel chose to drop the telecast of comedian, Shyam Rangila's mimicking of the Prime Minister.
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- Notably, the comic episode that later went viral online doesn't even qualify for a soft criticism.
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- Fears of displeasing a regime (which is vitriolic to even the mildest of critics) had led channels to rigorously self-censor themselves.
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- **Non-Media Entities -** Apart form the media houses, people form other domains are also being besieged by fringe groups.
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- A fringe group threatened actor Deepika Padukone with physical harm in its protest against the film Padmavathi.
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- Writers and civil society activists have also been targeted for their comments

against the rising religious intolerance and violence.
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Source: Business Standard

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