Securing Civil Society - Activists' Arrest

What is the issue?

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- The Pune Police raided rights activists and academicians across the country and arrested five top activists, allegedly for Maoist links.
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- The arrests have come as the latest blow inflicted on civil society for arbitrary reasons.
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What are the recent developments?

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- In a democracy, the individual transits from subject to citizen.
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- But the modern democratic state is armed with technologies of surveillance and control.
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- With this, it had come to possess extraordinary power.
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- In effect, rights-bearing citizen of the democratic state has become more vulnerable.
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- A democratic state has started to terrorise, kill and drill fear in the mind of the body politic.
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- The other dominant institution, the market, is largely amoral.
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- It is increasingly becoming indifferent to human suffering.
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- It cares little for citizens exploited by the state and by its own need for resources, labour, and profit.
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How did the civil society evolve?

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- In the aftermath of the Emergency (1975-77), civil liberties movement made a strong appearance.
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- The movement eventually developed into a human rights movement.
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- It took on a significant task of protecting the fundamental right to life and liberty.
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- These two rights lie at the core of other rights which are critical for human beings.
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- It incorporates the right not to be tortured or killed, right not to be arrested and imprisoned without due cause, etc.
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- Civil society is now a more plural sphere with all manners of associations.
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- It ranges from football clubs to reading groups to film fan societies.
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How significant is the civil society?

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- **Society** - Civil liberty and/or human rights activists are lawyers, academics, journalists and public minded citizens of India.
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- It is the human concern for the poor and the vulnerable that works as their driving force.
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- Civil society activists are instrumental in protecting the overall moral conscience of the society.
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- **Rights** - Human rights groups have become the custodian of the Constitution's Fundamental Rights.
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- They have investigated cases of
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i. arbitrary imprisonment
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ii. custodial deaths
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iii. deadly encounters
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iv. coercion of citizens speaking up against the state or dominant groups
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- These organisations have documented the causes and triggers of communal and caste violence.
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- They have protected the rights of vulnerable sections of people, the Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims.
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- **Check** - A vibrant civil society helps citizens access the centres of power and privilege.
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- It stands between the individual, and the omnipresent and omnipotent state.
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- It has the capacity to challenge the brute power of the state.
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- Petitions, protests, dharnas and ultimately judicial activism are instrumental in achieving their goals.
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Why is civil society crucial now?

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- Over 10 years ago, civil society spoke for the right to food, employment, education, information and land.
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- Today, few organisations demand the right not to be lynched and struggle for right to life and liberty.
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- Governments are starting to repress civil societies that are in clash with their ideology.

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- Right wing organisations are seeking to dominate the space between the individual, market and state.
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- With these having serious consequences, the civil society's role is more crucial for democracy now than ever before.
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Source: The Hindu

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