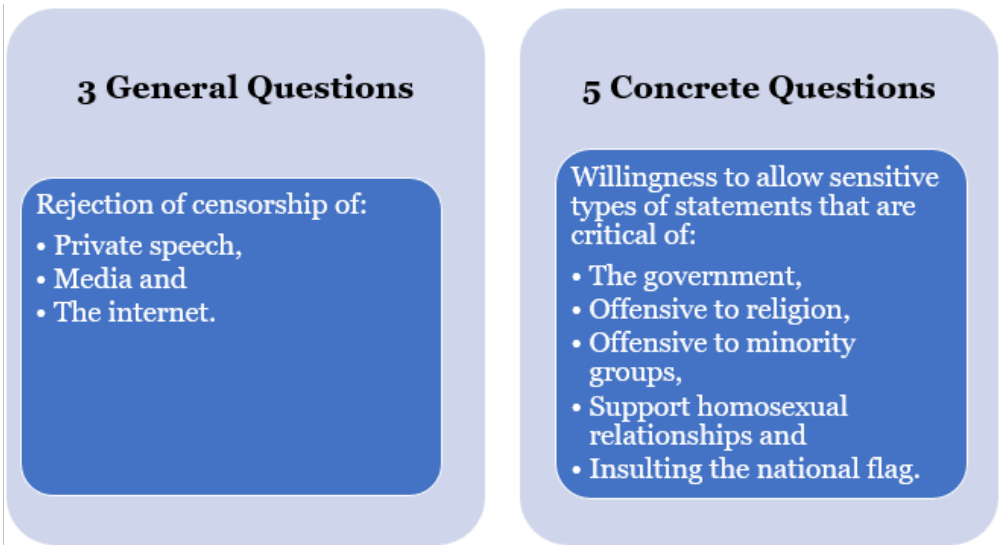
UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 20-03-2025

The Future of Free Speech Index, 2025

Why in news?

The free speech index was recently released by the Future of Free Speech and India was ranked 24th out of the 33 countries.

- **Future of Free Speech Index** – Is a global survey by *The Future of Free Speech*, an independent U.S.-based think tank.
- **Based on 8 questions** – The index is based on answers to 3 general questions and 5 more concrete questions.



> *Free speech is a cornerstone of democracy, a fundamental right that empowers individuals to express their opinions, challenge authority and engage in open debate.*

Key Findings of the Report

- **Decline in free speech** – The survey, conducted in October 2024, also revealed that "more countries have seen declines rather than improvements in free speech support since 2021.
- **India** – Has ranked India *24th out of the 33 countries* surveyed on the question of support for free speech.
- India, with a score of 62.6, was placed 24th, between South Africa and Lebanon.

General Trend	The Exception

• In many places, there's a clear link, where people strongly support free speech, they tend to have it.	• India, Hungary and Venezuela are different. • In these countries: - A lot of people want and value free speech. - But, the actual level of freedom of expression is relatively limited.

> *Freedom of Expression is protected by* ***Article 19*** *of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

- **Democratic nations** – The biggest drops in free speech has occurred in democratic nations like the *United States, Israel and Japan*.
- **Scandinavia** – Dominated the *top rankings*, with Norway ranks highest in support for free speech, followed closely by Denmark and Sweden.
- **Asia** – Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan showed the *biggest improvements*, though they remained at the lower end of the ranking.
- **Authoritarian-leaning nations** — Such as Hungary and Venezuela scored high.

References

1. The Hindu | Free Speech Index
2. The Future of Free Speech Index Report

Prime Minister's Internship Scheme (PMIS)

Why in News?

Finance Minister recently launched a dedicated mobile app for the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme and internship application window for Pilot round II is open.

- **Aim** – To provide internship opportunities to 1 crore youth over the ***next 5 years.***
- **Implemented by** - Ministry of Corporate Affairs and its officers of the Indian Corporate Law Service (I.C.L.S.) Cadre.
    - Regional Directorate- Northwestern is the key agency for implementation at the regional level.
- **Pilot project I -** To provide 1.25 lakh internship opportunities to the youth, launched on October 3, 2024.
- **Announcement -** Union Budget 2024-25.
- The scheme targets individuals ***aged 21 to 24*** who are currently *not enrolled in any full-time academic program* or *employment*, offering them a unique chance to kick-start their careers.
- This is distinctive scheme which provides them with ***12 month paid internships*** in top companies of India.

- **Benefits**
  - Monthly Assistance- Rs. 5,000 per month for 12 months.
  - One-time Grant - Rs. 6,000 for incidental expenses.
  - Professional experience (at least six months)
  - Certificate of internship from the top 300 companies
  - Valuable exposure in leading companies
- **Mobile App -** The app will allow candidates to browse opportunities, submit applications, and receive real-time updates on their applications.
- **Features**
  - Intuitive interface with effortless navigation
  - Easy registration through aadhaar face authentication
  - A personalized dashboard; and
  - Real-time alerts to keep candidates abreast of new updates.

Reference

Hindustan Times - Prime Minister's Internship Scheme

National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)

Why in News?

Government has formulated and implementing the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR).

Measures Taken for drug abuse

- **Nodal Ministry** – Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA)	Launched in 272 Districts identified as most vulnerable and recently expanded to all districts of the country through 10000 master volunteers.
Integrated Rehabilitation Centers for Addicts (IRCAs)	To provide treatment for the drug victims, preventive education, awareness generation, motivational counseling, detoxification/de-addiction, after care and re-integration into the social mainstream.
Community based Peer led Intervention (CPLI) Centers	Focuses on vulnerable and at-risk children and adolescents.
Outreach and Drop-in Centers (ODICs)	Provide safe and secure space for treatment, rehabilitation, screening, assessment, counseling, referral, linkage for treatment and rehabilitation services for substance users.
Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATFs)	Established in Government hospitals through All India Institute of Medical science (AIIMS), New Delhi.
District De-addiction Centres (DDACs)	Provides all 3 facilities provided by IRCA, ODIC and CPLI under one roof have been set up so far.

Toll-free Helpline for de-addiction	14446
National Institute of Social Defense (NISD)	Provides for regular awareness generation and sensitization sessions for all stakeholders including students, teachers, parents. Collaborating agencies like State Counsel of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, etc.
Navchetna Modules, teachers training modules	Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE) for sensitizing students (6^{th} – 11^{th} standard), teachers and parents on drug dependence, related coping strategies and life skills.

Reference

PIB | National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction

Measures taken for to tackle the illegal drug trade in border areas

Why in News?

Government made various efforts to tackle the illegal drug trade in border areas.

- **Nodal Ministry -** Ministry of Home Affairs.

Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)	It is a 4-tier mechanism that ensures better coordination between Central & State Drug Law Enforcement Agencies and other stakeholders in the field of controlling drug trafficking and drug abuse in India.
Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF)	**Headed by** - Additional Director General/ Inspector General level Police Officer. **Established in -** Each State/ Union Territory to function as the NCORD Secretariat for the State/ Union Territory and follow-up on compliance of decisions taken in NCORD meetings at different levels.
Joint Coordination Committee (JCC)	Setup under Chairmanship of Director General, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to monitor the investigation of important and significant seizures.
National Investigation Agency (NIA)	Empowered under *Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985* in the year 2020 for investigation of narco-terrorism cases.
Border Guarding Forces (Border Security Force, Assam Rifles and Sashastra Seema Bal)	Empowered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 to carry out search, seizure and arrest for illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs at international border.
Railway Protection Force (RPF)	Empowered under NDPS Act to check drug trafficking along the railway routes.

Narcotics Control Bureau	Coordinates with agencies like, Navy, Coast Guard, Border Security Force, State ANTF, etc. to conduct joint operations to control the drug trafficking.
National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)	High level dedicated group created in 2022 to analyze the drug trafficking through maritime routes, challenges and solutions.

International steps to combat illegal drug trade

- **Director General Level Talks -** Organized with neighboring and other countries to resolve various issues on drug trafficking having international implications.
- **Countries involved -** Myanmar, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Singapore, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, etc.
- India has signed combating illicit trafficking of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) and Chemical Precursors, as well as related offenses.
- India is closely associated with International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) and all its programs viz.
    - PEN (Pre-Export Notification), PICS (Precursors Incident Communication System), and IONICS (International Operations on New Psychoactive Substances Incident Communication System).
- Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) co-ordinates with various international organizations for sharing information and intelligence to combat trans-national drug trafficking.
- NCB India takes part in real-time information sharing with various Drug Liaison Officers of other countries for operational and intelligence information.

Reference

PIB | Measures taken for illegal drug trade in border areas

World Sparrow Day 2025

Why in News?

World Sparrow Day is celebrated every year on March 20th.

- **Aim -** To raise awareness and protect Sparrows which are declining at alarming rate.
- **Initiated by -** Nature Forever, a bird conservation organization in 2010.
- **Theme, 2025 - *A Tribute to Nature's Tiny Messengers.***

The house sparrow became Delhi's state bird in 2012.

- **Significance of Sparrows**– They help control insect populations by feeding on various bugs and pests.
- Key players in ***pollination and seed dispersal.***
- Their presence enhances biodiversity, making them crucial for the health of both rural and urban ecosystems.

- **Threats -** ***Unleaded petrol*** has led to toxic compounds and pesticide use in agriculture harm the insects, sparrows depend on for food.
- The increasing presence of crows and cats, along with a lack of green spaces has added to the problem.
- Urbanization has also taken away their natural nesting spaces.

Conservation Efforts
• **Save the Sparrow campaign -** Led by environmental conservationist ***Jagat Kinkhabwala***. • **Initiative by Koodugal Trust in Chennai-** Involved school children in creating sparrow nests. • The children build small wooden houses, providing food and shelter for sparrows. • **Early Bird campaign -** Introduces children to the world of birds, in Mysuru, Karnataka. • The program includes a library, activity kits and trips to villages to observe birds. • These educational efforts are helping children recognize and understand the importance of sparrows and other birds in nature.

Reference

PIB | World Sparrow Day 2025

Linking Voter ID Card with Aadhar

Why in News?

The Election Commission (EC) began linking Aadhaar with Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers.

- **EPIC number** – It is the voter ID card number (10-digit alpha-numeric code) that serves as identification proof for Indian citizens ***over the age of 18.***
- **Issued by -** Election Commission of India.
- The voter ID card also allows Indians ***to cast their vote*** in municipal, state, and national elections.

ERONET is a web-based system for Electoral officials, in 14 languages and 11 scripts, to handle all processes

- **Linking Aadhar with EPIC -** To address the issue of duplicate entries in the electoral rolls.
- **EPIC Duplication issue -** The linking of Aadhar and Voter ID was first tried by the EC in 2015 when it launched the National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program (NERPAP).
- However, the Supreme Court in an interim order, in August 2015, held that the *mandatory use of Aadhaar should only be for welfare schemes and PAN linking*.

    - Thus, the NERPAP exercise was discontinued.
- **EC's recent stance -** Recently, Election Commission said that linking of EPIC with Aadhaar would only be done as per provisions of ***Article 326***, which says voting rights can only be given to citizens.
- Aadhaar card only establishes the identity of a person.
- It further said the linking would also take into effect as per the provisions of Sections 23(4), 23(5) and 23(6) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and in line with the Supreme Court judgments.
- **Section 23(6) of the RP Act, 1950 -** No application for inclusion in electoral rolls shall be deleted for inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar number due to such sufficient cause as may be prescribed.
- This in effect means that linkage would be done *only in cases where Aadhaar has been submitted voluntarily* by the elector.
- The EC has informed the Supreme Court in 2023 that it has already uploaded nearly 66.23 crore Aadhaar cards in the process of finalizing the electoral rolls.
- The poll body also told the Parliament that it has launched the program to collect the Aadhaar numbers of existing and prospective electors on a voluntary basis in all States and union territories.
- While the consent is obtained from the voter for Aadhaar authentication in Form 6B, there is ***no provision*** for withdrawing the consent.

Reference

The Hindu | Linking voter ID card with Aadhaar

One Liners 20-03-2025

Economy

Manganese Ore (India) Limited (MOIL)

During financial year 2023-24, MOIL Ltd. has produced 1.76 million tonne of manganese ore which is 52% of total domestic production of 3.37 million tonne of manganese ore in India.

• It is a *Schedule "A" Miniratna Category-I* Company.

• **Set up in** – 1896 as Central Provinces Manganese Ore Company Limited (CPMO), a British Company incorporated in the UK.

• **Indian incorporation in** – 1962, as Manganese Ore (India) Limited which was renmed as MOIL Limited during the financial year 2010-11.

• **Administrative control by** – Ministry of Steel.

• **Shareholding pattern** – Government of India (53.35%), Government of Maharashtra (5.96%) and Government of Madhya Pradesh (5.38%) and Public (35.31%).

National Cooperative Database (NCD)

• **Launched in** – *2024*.
• **Developed by** – Ministry of Cooperation, with the support of States / UTs.
• **Data collection to & updating by** – Nodal officers appointed by all the States/ UTs for this purpose.
• **Data coverage** – Location, membership, economic activities, and linkages of cooperatives.
• **Open access at** – URL: https://cooperatives.gov.in.
• **Usage** – A single-point access information on over 8.25 lakh cooperatives across the country.
• **Significance** – It aids in identifying gaps in the geographical spread of cooperatives, including both covered and uncovered gram panchayats.

Grameen Credit Score

• **Announced in** – The Union Budget 2025-26.
• It is a framework to be developed by public-sector banks.
• **Need** – The current credit scoring mechanism used by Credit Information Companies (CICs), by design, generic to all individual borrowers with no specific consideration for the rural sector.
• **Objectives** – To enable mechanisms for credit assessment of SHG borrowers, and the rural population.
• To improve access to formal credit for Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and for the rural population, including farmers and marginalised communities.

Seaweed Production in India

Recent data – It was 72,385 tonnes (wet weight) in 2023, as reported by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI).
• **Cultivated species** – Kappaphycus alvarezii and Gracilaria edulis.
• **Application** – They are widely used for carrageenan, agar production and utilized in food, biofertilizers, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, animal feed, and biofuels.
• **Government initiatives** – Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) to improve production and establishment of a *Multipurpose Seaweed Park in Tamil Nadu*.
• Mandapam Regional Centre of ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has been designated as a *Centre of Excellence for seaweed development*.
• The Lakshadweep Islands has been designated as a S*eaweed Cluster*.

Agriculture

National Institute of Plant Health Management (NIPHM)

• It is an institute of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
• **Location** – Hyderabad
• **Autonomous organization** – Under Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
• **Role** – It promotes *sustainable and organic farming practices.*
• It organizes capacity building programs for officers and farmers of different states like training & demonstration of bioinputs under *Soil and Root Health Management scheme*.
• **Activities** – Initiatives for improvement of Plant Protection Technology, Plant quarantine and Biosecurity.
- Management of Maize Fall Army Worm.
- Survey and field evaluation of Sterile Insect Technique for the management of Oriental fruit fly.

Science

Starship Spacecraft

Recently, 8th testing of Starship spacecraft was launched from its launch pad in US.
• It is *SpaceX's next generation* spacecraft.
• **Future mission** – It will leave f*or Mars at the end of 2026* with Tesla humanoid robot Optimus onboard.
• Its modified version is to be used *for NASA's Artemis program as a lunar lander*, which aims to return astronauts to the Moon this decade.

Kyasanur Forest Disease

Woman dies of Kyasanur Forest Disease in Chikkamagaluru.
• It is a *viral infection.*
• It is also known as *monkey fever*, as monkeys also get infected.
• **Causal agent** – Single stranded RNA virus named, Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV).
• **Transmission** – It spreads through *infected ticks*.
• **Human infection** – Humans, who visit forest areas to graze cattle or to collect firewood, are vulnerable to the infection.
• **Treatment** – No specific treatment available but it can be prevented using vaccine and tick bite avoidance.

S N Bose Building for Nuclear Research

• It is named in honour of the eminent Indian physicist Dr. Satyendra Nath Bose.
• **Located at** – *Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership* (GCNEP) at Sushma Swaraj Bhavan in New Delhi.
• **Aim** – To serve as an advanced *hub for research and training* in nuclear science and technology.
• **Facilities** – It houses state-of-the-art laboratories catering to GCNEP's specialised schools, enhancing its capabilities in nuclear security, reactor technology, radiation safety, nuclear material characterisation, and radioisotope applications.

Index

Farmers Distress Index

Systemic assessment of Farmers' Distress Index (FDI) is not available for the whole country.
• **Farmers' Distress Index** – The index will anticipate farmers distress and prevent its spread from a few farmers to the village or block.
• **Developed by** - Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA).
• **Coverage** – It covers multiple causes of distress ranging from climate variability to price volatility and the low risk-bearing ability of farmers etc.
• **Aim** – To develop an *early warning system for farm distress* and provide policy support about the severity of farmer distress based on 7 key parameters.
• **Importance** – It targets to recommend a *location-specific distress management* package.

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