Arab Spring 2.0 - Protests in Algeria and Sudan

What is the issue?

- The recent protests in Algeria and Sudan have entered a critical phase in which protesters and militaries are at a stand-off.
- With this, there is a possibility that protests could move to other Arab countries as well, resembling the earlier Arab spring.

What was the Arab Spring?

- Arab spring refers to a series of uprisings in the countries of the Arab region in 2011, leading to the ousting of several dictators.
- Protests broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread to other countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria.
- There were hopes that the Arab world was in for massive changes and expectations that the old autocracies would be replaced with new democracies.
- But Tunisia was the only country where the revolutionaries outwitted the counter-revolutionaries.
- They overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s dictatorship, and the country transitioned to a multi-party democracy.
- Except Tunisia, the country-specific stories of the Arab uprising were largely tragic.

What led to the Arab spring?

- The Arab uprising was originally triggered by a combination of factors.
- The rulers had been in power for decades, and there was popular longing for freedom from their repressive regimes.
- Also, the economic model based on patronage was crumbling in those countries.
- The key driving force behind the protests was a pan-Arabist anger against the old system.
- So, though the revolutionaries' targets were their respective national governments, the protests were transnational in nature.
- This is the very reason why the spirit spread quickly from Tunis to Cairo,

Benghazi and Manama.

Is Arab Spring 2.0 in the making?

- The negative impact due to repressions after the Arab Spring did not kill the revolutionary spirit of the Arab youth.
- This is now being showcased in the protests in Sudan and Algeria with similar anti-government demonstrations.
- **Algeria**, whose economy is heavily dependent on the hydrocarbon sector, took a hit after the post-2014 commodity meltdown.
- GDP growth slowed from 4% in 2014 to 1.6% in 2017, and youth unemployment soared to 29%.
- This economic downturn was happening when Mr. Bouteflika was missing from public engagement, after being paralysed by stroke in 2013.
- But when he announced candidacy for this year's presidential election, seeking another five-year term, it infuriated the public.
- In a matter of days, protests spread across the country, which culminated in his resignation on April 2, 2019.
- **Sudan** is also battling a serious economic crisis leading to protests. Click here to know more on Sudan's case.
- Protesters in both countries demanded regime change, like their comrades in Egypt and Tunisia did in 2011.
- So both Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Omar al-Bashir who had ruled Algeria for 20 years and Sudan for 3 decades respectively had to quit.
- This has revived memories of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings earlier, suggesting an Arab Spring 2.0.
- Like in the case of 2010-11, the 2018-19 protests are also transnational.
- They spread from Amman (Jordan) to Khartoum (Sudan) and Algiers (Algeria) in a matter of months.

What are the key driving factors now?

- The pan-Arabist anger against national governments remains the main driving force behind the protests.
- **Old order** - Most Arab economies are now beset with economic woes.
- The rentier system Arab monarchs and dictators built is in a bad shape.
- Arab rulers for years bought loyalty of the masses in return for patronage, which was then granted by the fear factor.
- But this model is no more viable.
- **Oil prices** - Having touched $140 a barrel in 2008, the price of oil collapsed to $30 in 2016.
- This impacted both oil-producing and oil-importing countries.
- Producers, reeling under the price fall, had cut spending; both public

spending and aid for other Arab countries.
- The aid that non-oil-producing Arab economies such as Jordan and Egypt were dependent on started to dry up.
- In May 2018, there were massive protests in Jordan against a proposed tax law and rising fuel prices.
- Demonstrators left the streets only after Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned.
- His successor had to withdraw the legislation and King Abdullah II made an intervention to freeze the price hike.

What keeps the revolutions from succeeding?

- In all these countries, the counter-revolutionary forces are so strong.
- So protesters often stop short of achieving their main goal of putting an end to the old order.
- Revolutionaries manage to get rid of the dictators, but the system they built survives somehow and sometimes in a moral brutal fashion.
- A key counter-revolutionary factor is the guardians of the old system, either the monarchy or the army.
- E.g. After the 2011 protests, in Egypt, the army made a comeback
- It further tightened its grip on the state and society through violence and repression.
- In Jordan, the monarch always acts as a bulwark against revolutionary tendencies.
- The second counter-revolutionary factor is the geopolitical actors.
- E.g. In Libya, the foreign intervention removed Muammar Qaddafi, but the war destroyed the Libyan state and institutions
- It ultimately left the country in the hands of competing militias and is yet to recover from the anarchy triggered by the intervention.
- In Syria too, with foreign intervention, the protests first turned into an armed civil war.
- Soon, the country itself became a theatre of wars for global players.
- In Yemen, protests turned into a sectarian civil conflict, with foreign powers taking different sides.
- In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia made a direct military intervention, on behalf of its rulers, to violently end the protests in Manama’s Pearl Square.

How does the future look?

- Similar counter-revolutionary factors now play at Algeria and Sudan as well.
- In Khartoum, protesters are demanding an immediate handover of power to a civilian government.
- But in both countries, the army let the Presidents fall, but retained its grip on power, despite pressure from protesters.

- They clearly do not seem to be bringing in a regime change.
- Sudan faces the heat of geopolitical intervention as well.
- As soon as the military council directly took power, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Egypt offered support to the military.
- It is to be seen if the mass movements meet their revolutionary goals.

Source: The Hindu

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