History of Iranian Protests

Why in news?

Series of protests erupted across Iran after government's decision on fuel price hike.

What is government's decision on fuel price?

- As part of efforts to blunt the effects of crippling US sanctions on the country's economy Iran has decided to hike fuel prices.
- According to which it is decided that vehicles for private use would be restricted to 60 litres (16gal) of fuel monthly, while the price of petrol would jump 50 percent to 15,000 Iranian rials ($0.13 at open market rates) per litre.
- Any fuel purchases in excess of allotted rations will incur an additional charge of 30,000 rials ($0.26) per litre.
- Despite the move, petrol remains cheaper in Iran - home to the world's fourth-largest crude oil reserves than almost anywhere else in the world.
- But while a price hike was somewhat expected, many on social media pointed out that average incomes are too low to comfortably absorb the steep hike.

What is the response to the decision?

- The move sparked demonstrations in cities and towns across Iran, with drivers abandoning vehicles on highways and protesters blocking roads.
- Dozens of banks and stores have been set on fire or damaged.

- Tens of thousands of people have taken part in the protests, prompting a pushback from Iranian security forces and authorities to implement a "near total internet shutdown", according to monitoring service NetBlocks.
- Nearly 100 people have been killed in violence surrounding the demonstrations.

What is the brief history of demonstrations in Iran?

- Social unrest in Iran is not a new phenomenon, the present turmoil echoes a long list of social and political strikes, protests and confrontations since the establishment of the Islamic regime in 1979.
- Between 1980 and 1988, thousands of young Iranians, members of the Mojahedin-e Khalgh Organization (MKO) and Marxist groups, were killed by the Islamic regime.
- Unlike the political confrontations and mass killings of the 1980s, the 1990s in Iran were characterised by social and economic protests of students, workers, feminists, teachers and trade unionists.
- The student movement of 1999 laid the foundations for the 'Green Movement' of 2009.
- The Green Movement turned into a mass struggle for civil liberties and the removal of Iran's theocratic regime.

How Iran's response to protests differs from Tunisia?

- Demonstrations in the country are always primarily directed at high costs of living and financial difficulties quickly become politicised and begin to target the religious autocracy.
- The demonstrations were not simply a reaction to unfair election results but were based on years of built-up frustration, dissatisfaction, and anger towards the theocratic rule.
- The democratic transition in Iran has not been able to turn into a successful model of non-violent transition and negotiation because of the practice of absolute violence by the Iranian authorities.
- Unlike Arab Spring Tunisia in 2011, where street revolts succeeded because the armed forces decided not to share the destiny of the dictator, and refused to shoot on the people, protests in Iran have been quite limited in their tactics when confronting the harsh violence of the Islamic state.
- In each of the cases named above, including the recent protests in Iran, civic movements lost their unity and their momentum as soon as they faced a violent crackdown.
- In Tunisia, the removal of Ben Ali and free elections marked the "beginning of politics".
- In Iran, on the contrary, politics will not start with the end of the dictators, but politics itself will bring about that end.
- As such, if Tunisia was a sprint, Iran will be a marathon.

Source: The Hindu

