Protests in Israel

Why in news?

Since July, Israelis are protesting against their Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Why are protests happening?

- Israelis have been protesting against the government's mishandling of the Covid-19 outbreak and its impact on the country's economy.
- These protests come at a time when Netanyahu has been facing charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals.
- The protestors are ramping up calls for the prime minister's ouster.
- The prime minister's corruption trial started this month and hearings in the case will begin in January 2021.

How hard is the Israel's economy hit?

- Protests started essentially because of Covid-19's economic impact that has hit small business owners and the self-employed the hardest.
- The self-employed have complained that government schemes that had been promised to alleviate economic hardship have not reached them.
- Netanyahu had met protesting groups and had promised to hasten payments through these schemes.
- Some protestors have also said that aid measures have not been enough despite the government's revisions.
- Since Israel implemented strict lockdown measures in March, livelihoods of many people have been severely hit.
- However, these measures did initially help control a wider outbreak of infections.
- Although the government began lifting lockdown restrictions in May, the economic impact has persisted for many in the country.
- Unemployment has risen to 21% since the lockdown measures were first implemented in Israel.

What was Netanyahu's response to protests?

- Benjamin Netanyahu publicly warned the protestors to not descend into "anarchy, violence" and attacks against the police.

- He also urged the protestors to maintain health ministry guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
- He accused protestors of defacing and disrespecting state symbols, after a protestor was standing on top of a menorah.

What was the Netanyahu family's response to protests?

- The Netanyahu family has been publicly criticising these protestors.
- The prime minister's son Yair Netanyahu took the front seat in his battle against his father's critics, both political and ordinary Israelis.
- However, he is not holding any official position in the government.
- For weeks, Yair Netanyahu has been sharing social media posts that are anti-protests and has also used Twitter to attack his father's critics.
- He claimed that the journalists were inciting violence against his family.

How is the Netanyahu family protected?

- **Shin Bet**, Israel's internal security service had ramped up its protection of the prime minister and his family following growing protests.
- Due to the size and frequency of the demonstrations, the agency's operations have been altered to reflect the developing situation.
- **Israeli police** had ramped up its presence at these anti-Netanyahu protests because of the growing numbers of demonstrators.
- There have also been reports of police violence against protestors.
- Israel's opposition parties have expressed criticism at the aggression meted out against protestors by police forces.

Source: The Indian Express

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