The Anti-Hijab Protests in Iran

Why in news?

The death of a young Iranian-Kurdish woman while in the custody of the morality police has triggered nationwide protests in the Islamic Republic, bringing the clerical regime under public pressure.

What is the issue?

- Mahsa Amini had been detained by morality police for allegedly wearing the hijab (headscarf) in an improper way.
- The authorities attributed her death three days later to a heart attack while being trained on hijab rules.
- But her parents and activists say she was beaten to death.
- The incident triggered widespread anger in a country where state suppression of women's rights and resistance has always been a big political issue.
- Several cities, including Tehran and Mashhad saw demonstrators chanting slogans against the clerical establishment and women publicly burning hijabs.

How about the regime in Iran?

- The Shia clergy have built a system of clerical dictatorship with limited democratic practices.
- The state-sponsored conservatism and social repression produces constant tensions between the rulers and the ruled.
- President Ebrahim Raisi's regime has made it clear that it would use force to quell the protests, with the Revolutionary Guard Corps terming the protesters "traitors".

What are Iran's hijab laws?

- It was made compulsory for women to wear the hijab in Iran, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- Morality police are tasked with ensuring women conform to the authorities' interpretation of proper clothing.
- In 2014, Iranian women began sharing photos and videos of themselves publicly flouting the hijab laws as part of an online protest campaign called "**My Stealthy Freedom**".
- It has since inspired other movements, including "**White Wednesdays**" and "**Girls of Revolution Street**".

What about hijab laws in other Islamic nations?

- **Afghanistan**- Since the Taliban's takeover, women in Afghanistan are required to

wear a burqa and remain under veil in public.
- **Saudi Arabia**- Women in Saudi Arabia are supposed to wear abayas - a loose-fitting dress that is worn alongside a hijab or a burqa.
- **Indonesia & Pakistan**- Despite being Muslim majority countries, there is no law that mandates wearing hijab.

How is the issue seen with respect to Karnataka hijab protests?

- **Differences**- In India, women who want to wear their hijabs are fighting against a system that is forcing them to take the hijabs off.
- In Iran, women are battling against a regime that is forcing them to wear the hijab.
- The protest in Karnataka is against the legalisation of anti-Muslim prejudice and the patriarchal attitudes.
- The protest in Iran is against a patriarchal setup and against how religion is used as a pretext to enforce injustices.
- It is ironic to compare both since Iran is an Islamic republic and India a secular one with different sociopolitical realities.
- **Similarity**- The similarity between the agitations is that they are both fighting against the control over the autonomy.
- Both Iran's anti-hijab & India's pro-hijab protest are said to be in regards with the **freedom of choice**.

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/ageing-regime-the-hindu-editorial-on-irans-hijab-protests/article65927060.ece
2. https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/iran-anti-hijab-protests-karnataka-hijab-protests-about-choice-womens-rights#read-more
3. https://www.timesnownews.com/india/explained-anti-hijab-protests-in-iran-and-hijab-laws-in-islamic-nations-article-94380876
4. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62967381

Quick facts

Morality Police

- The morality police known formally as "Gasht-e Ershad" (Guidance Patrols) in Iran enforce a dress code in the country that requires women wear to wear hijabs in public.
- The morality police also bans tight trousers, ripped jeans, brightly coloured outfits and clothes exposing knees.
- Officers have the power to Stop women and assess whether
    - They are showing too much hair
    - Their trousers and overcoats are too short or close-fitting
    - They are wearing too much make-up
- Punishments for violating the rules include a fine, prison or flogging (beaten severely

with a whip or a stick).

