Unrest in Tunisia

What is the issue?

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At a time when Tunisia must be cherishing the 7th anniversary of the “Jasmine Revolution”, the country has crept back to turmoil.

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What is Tunisia’s story?

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- Tunisia is a small country in northern Africa, along the southern Mediterranean coast.
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- The country saw intense civil unrest in 2011, which lead to the ousting of the 23 year old authoritarian regime of president “Zine El Abidine Ben Ali”.
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- The demonstrations were caused by high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, a lack of political freedoms and poor living conditions.
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- This (jasmine revolution) subsequently inspired similar demonstrations around the Arab world, which came to be known as Arab Spring.
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- While many died in the protests and police action, unlike rest of the Arab world, Tunisia managed to make a fairly comfortable transition to democracy.
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- While the country was stable thus far, recent austerity budget cuts and the economic situation have led to some unrest, which could spell danger.
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What has led to the current wave?

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- IMF had set stringent pre-conditions regarding austerity budget cuts, for offering a loan of $2.9 billion, which the government has concurred to.
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- This implies lower petrol subsidies and higher taxes on cars and utilities, for the reducing fiscal deficit from the currently at 6% of GDP, to 4.9% in 1 year.
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- Further, 25% youth unemployment rate, and persisting disparities among regions has also contributed to current unrest.
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- Notably, the crumbling of the Tourism industry due to the poor security scenario has affected the economy significantly.
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- While the government has promised $70 million in aid to support the poorer communities in a bid to quell the protests, it has failed to cut ice.
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- Notably, PM Youssef Chahed has been cautious in criticising only the violence behind the opposition rather than the dissent against the fiscal reforms.
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What can be done?

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- The PM would now have to show demonstrable progress in implementing democratic reforms to restore confidence in the government.
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- Particularly, the 2015 security law and the proposed amnesty for corrupt officials of previous dictatorial regime have been politically controversial.
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- These needs to be addressed by building considerable political consensus and garnering popular public support.
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- Also, as foreign aid is indispensible, the government will have to tactically balance international players with the domestic political compulsions.
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- Significantly, EU would be keenly interested in Tunisian affairs due to the persistent cross-Mediterranean migration.
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Source: The Hindu

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