Yellow Vest (Gilets jaunes) - France

Why in news?

France has been witnessing the increasing riots by yellow vest movement.

What were the reasons for the protest?

- The trigger to the unrest, which began on November 17, was the 'eco-tax'.
- Eco tax is a fuel tax hike imposed with the intention of cutting carbon emission to help transition the country into a low-emission economy.
- However the protests grew against the imposition of this tax as it raised the fuel prices.
- There is a sharp division between centre and periphery in France.
- While urban areas in France have tended to develop better infrastructure and more integrated community structures, the withdrawal of state aid has had the opposite effect in peri-urban and rural areas, and in the highly unequal overseas territories.
- In this respect, it is significant that the catalyst for the protests was rising fuel prices.
- Those most reliant on their cars are those who live farthest from urban areas and do not have access to regular public transport.
- The movement is also motivated by the high cost of living and claims that a disproportionate burden of the government's tax reforms were falling on the working and middle classes.
- They also accommodate those unhappy with President Emmanuel Macron’s economic reforms and demand resignation.
- As the number of protestors increased and turned violent things spiralled out soon taking the police by surprise.

Why Yellow vests?

- The activists are dressed in yellow vests referred to as “gilets jaunes”.
- The yellow vests get their name from the high-visibility jackets all motorists in France are obliged to carry with them.
- They took to the streets to voice their displeasure in this protest.

What is the nature of the movement?

- The gilets jaunes movement is not led by any union or political party.
- It is not a structured ‘movement’.
- It also seems to combine elements of the right and left — and especially elements of the far-right and far-left.
- Most importantly, the protesters’ demands are not clearly articulated.
- For instance some want tax cuts (on fuel), some want tax rises (for the rich), some want more public services.
- Also there are other demand for more generous state benefits, to smash up symbols of capitalism, and a need of stronger President.

What are the common themes of the movement?

- There are two common themes that unite the yellow vest.
- The first is the concentrated focus against the French state i.e almost all of the protesters agree that the state is not doing enough and has neglected their needs.
- They want the French government to lower fuel taxes, reinstate rural post offices, increase their ‘purchasing power’, cut property taxes, and hire more doctors for rural clinics.
- The second common theme is their very wide geographical dispersion.
- It is spread out across metropolitan France and even overseas.

Source: The Hindu

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