Iran Protests 2026

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1. Background of the Protests

- Iran is witnessing **its largest anti-government protests since 2022**.
- The protests began due to:
    - **Severe economic crisis**: high inflation, rising food prices, unemployment
    - **Subsidy reforms** and cost-of-living pressures
    - **Public anger against clerical rule** and lack of political freedoms
- The unrest comes soon after:
    - A **12-day war with Israel in mid-2025**
    - Continued **U.S. sanctions** and international isolation

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2. Scale of the Unrest

- According to rights groups:
    - **Over 500 people killed**
    - **More than 10,000 detained**
- Protesters include:
    - Urban middle class
    - Youth
    - Workers and traders
- Security forces have responded with:
    - **Internet shutdowns**
    - **Mass arrests**
    - Use of **lethal force**

UPSC angle: State repression, human rights, internet shutdowns as a tool of authoritarian control.

3. Iranian Government’s Response

- **President Masoud Pezeshkian**:
    - Claims willingness to “listen to people”
    - Simultaneously labels protesters as “rioters”
- **Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf**:
    - Warned that **U.S. bases, ships and Israel** would be targeted if the U.S. intervenes
- **Nationwide pro-regime marches** called to show support for the Islamic Republic

□□ Shows **dual strategy**: limited political outreach + strong security crackdown.

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4. Role of the United States

- **President Donald Trump**:
    - Claimed Iran’s leadership has **called to negotiate**
    - Said a **meeting is being set up**, but also warned:

      “We may have to act before a meeting”

- Trump is considering:
    - Military strikes
    - Cyber warfare
    - Additional sanctions
    - Support for internet access via **Starlink (Elon Musk)**

□□ **UPSC GS-II**: Foreign policy, interventionism, regime change debates.

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5. International Reactions

(a) United Nations

- UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres**:
    - Expressed shock

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- Urged **maximum restraint**

(b) Israel

- Israel:
  - On high alert
  - Expressed support for Iranian protesters
  - Signed a **security pact with Germany**, citing Iran as a threat

(c) Global Protests

- Pro-Iran protest demonstrations held in:
  - London
  - Paris
  - Istanbul
  - Los Angeles

□□ Indicates **internationalisation of Iran's internal crisis**.

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6. Role of Iranian Opposition

- **Reza Pahlavi** (son of deposed Shah):
  - Called on security forces to side with people
  - Declared readiness to return to Iran
- Some protests have raised slogans supporting the **pre-1979 monarchy**

□□ **UPSC angle**: Exiled opposition, legitimacy crisis of theocratic regimes.

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7. Impact on India

- Reports of Indian nationals' arrest were **officially denied** by:
  - Iran's Ambassador to India
- Indian medical student associations confirmed:

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- **All Indian students are safe**

GS-II India’s foreign relations: Citizen safety abroad, diplomatic communication.

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8. Key Issues for UPSC Examination

(a) International Relations

- Sovereignty vs humanitarian intervention
- Regime change politics
- U.S.–Iran–Israel triangular tensions

(b) Internal Security & Governance

- Mass protests and authoritarian responses
- Internet shutdowns as governance tools
- Civil-military relations in Iran

(c) Human Rights

- Use of excessive force
- Arbitrary detentions
- Role of international watchdogs

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9. Possible Future Scenarios

1. **Negotiated settlement** between U.S. and Iran
2. **Escalation into military conflict**
3. **Prolonged internal instability**
4. **Fragmentation of regime authority**

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10. UPSC Mains Answer Enrichment (Quotes & Phrases)

- *“The protests represent not just economic anger but a crisis of political legitimacy.”*

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- *“External intervention risks unifying domestic opinion against a foreign adversary.”*
- *“Iran stands at a critical crossroads between reform, repression and rupture.”*

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11. Conclusion

The 2026 Iran protests are not merely domestic disturbances but a **geopolitical flashpoint** with implications for **West Asia, global energy security, human rights norms and great power politics**. For UPSC aspirants, this issue is highly relevant across **GS-II, Essay and International Relations** questions.

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