

Thousands of people take part in anti-government protests in cities across Iran

Thousands of people have taken part in anti-government demonstrations in cities across Iran, with protesters calling for money to be spent on Iranians rather than the conflicts in other countries.

Political protests are rare in Iran and these demonstrations, which started as protests over high prices, have turned into the largest wave of demonstrations since nationwide pro-reform unrest in 2009.

There is anger against Iran's strict clerical rule and concern about the Islamic Republic's costly involvement in regional conflicts such as those in Syria and Iraq.

About 300 demonstrators gathered in Kermanshah, in the country's west, after what local media described a "call by the anti-revolution".

Demonstrators shouted anti-government slogans such as "never mind Palestine, think about us", "death or freedom", and "political prisoners should be freed".

They damaged some public property before police dispersed them.

The protests in Kermanshah on Friday took place a day after hundreds rallied in Mashhad, a city in the country's north-east.

Videos posted from the Mashhad protest on social media showed demonstrators yelling: "The people are begging, the clerics act like God".

The head of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad, Hasan Heidari, told semi-official news agency Fars that 52 protesters were arrested in over their "illegal" gathering on Thursday.

The protests also spread to Tehran, Iran's capital city.

An official said a few protesters had been arrested in Tehran, and footage posted on social media showed a heavy police presence in the capital.

Such mass protests without police permission are unusual in Iran and those taking part face arrest.

The US State Department criticised those arrests in a statement.

“The United States strongly condemns the arrest of peaceful protesters. We urge all nations to publicly support the Iranian people and their demands for basic rights and an end to corruption,” the statement said.

US President Donald Trump said Iran had squandered the country’s wealth “to fund terrorism abroad”.

Fars said there were also protests in the cities of Sari and Rasht in north Iran, and Qom, a city south of the capital Tehran.

But state television aired live footage from across the country of counter protesters rallying to support the Government, waving flags and carrying banners bearing the image of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-30/thousands-protest-in-cities-across-iran/9293942>

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