Brexit on fast-track

Why in News?

With the passage of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit deal in British Parliament, it is now almost certain that the country would exit the European Union (EU) on or before January 31, 2020.

What is the story behind?

- Mr. Johnson became Prime Minister after his predecessor Theresa May's repeated attempts to get lawmakers' support for her Brexit deal failed.
- Mr. Johnson first reached a new agreement with the EU and then called fresh elections.
- The passage of the Bill in the House of Commons was a mere formality as,
    1. His party had a resounding win in the parliamentary election and
    2. Surge in the number of Brexiteers among Conservative lawmakers.
- The deal got the support of 358 lawmakers against 234.

What does this agreement deal with?

- The agreement deals with issues such as citizens' rights, the settlement amount the U.K. has agreed to pay the EU, etc.
- It has an arrangement to avoid physical barriers between the Northern Ireland (part of the U.K.,) and the Republic of Ireland (EU member).
- Mr. Johnson's deal seeks to erect a customs border between Great Britain and the island of Ireland.

What is next?

- The accord will be put on vote in the House of Commons once more, and then the upper chamber, the House of Lords, will vote on it.
- The formalities in the U.K. are expected to be over by early January and the deal will then go to the EU Parliament.
- Once the EU lawmakers ratify it (which is expected on January 29), the U.K. will formally exit the union.

What does this formal exit mean?

- A formal exit doesn't mean that the tedious Brexit process is over.

- Even after January 31, the U.K. will continue to remain in the EU single market and customs union, at least for 11 months.
- This means that trade will continue as usual.

What are the challenges?

- Mr. Johnson's biggest challenge is **to reach another agreement** with the EU on the country's **future relationship with the bloc**.
- He has ruled out extending talks beyond the December 31, 2020 deadline, which means a no-deal exit can still not be ruled out.
- Furthermore, Mr. Johnson faces **legislative and political challenges** ahead even if the current deal goes through the EU hurdle.
- His government has to pass a series of new legislation replacing the existing EU laws.
- He should also be **mindful of the impact** his deal may have on the **peace in Northern Ireland**.
- The plan to erect a customs border between Great Britain and the island of Ireland has irked the unionists and strengthened the nationalists in Northern Ireland.
- The uncertainty over Brexit is now over. But the **uncertainty on how Brexit** will happen still remains.
- Mr. Johnson may like to wrap up Brexit at a breakneck speed, but he should be mindful of these speed-breakers.
- If not, the **economic and political costs** of Brexit could be huge.

Source: The Hindu

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