Challenges in Brexit Negotiations

What is the issue?

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- British PM Terasa May has successfully got her Brexit plans approved by the parliament after much effort.
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- Currently, she is lobbying hard with other European leaders to push through her proposals despite several challenges.
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What is the border problem in Ireland?

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- “Republic of Ireland” is an independent country that is an EU member, while “Northern Ireland” is an autonomous territory within the UK.
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- Due the sheer volume of trade and the complicated cultural ties between the two Irelands, disrupting the open borders is socially and economically risky.
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- As Brexit is being pushed forward for stronger border controls between UK and the EU, the Irish border question has become very complicated.
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- “U.K., EU and Republic of Ireland” are principally against hard borders between “Republic of Ireland” and “Northern Ireland”.
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- In fact, the soft borders between the two territories is vital for the sustenance of the “1998 - Good Friday Agreement”, which end decades of bloodshed.

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- But a soft or open border between the two Irelands would mean some border control has to be placed between “Northern Ireland and rest of UK”.
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- But the “Northern Ireland” leaders have asserted that they are not ready to accept any solution that would treat them separately from the rest of UK.
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How are the talks proceeding in this context?

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- EU had proposed for “Northern Ireland” to remain in a common regulatory area with similar status as “Republic of Ireland” in the EU.
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- But this was rejected outright by the UK, which came up with a counter proposal for a temporary customs arrangement to avoid hard borders.
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- Under this clause (called Irish Backstop), the entire UK would remain within the EU customs union for a while, even after exiting EU’s single Market.
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- While the EU seemed unenthusiastic initially, its chief negotiator Mr. Michel Barnier recently suggested a positive note in regard.
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What are the other important constrains?

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- UK seeks to retain its proposed temporary arrangement with the UK until a permanent solution is found to the Irish question.
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- But such an arrangement would make it impossible for Britain to establish “Free Trade Agreements” with other countries till its expiry.
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- Further, EU has also largely been grumpy due to UK’s intention of wanting to retain free trade in goods alone while seeking to curb free flow of services, people and capital.
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- Notably, the UK proposal for the EU & UK to collect tariff on each other’s behalf wherever needed has not got a positive response from EU.
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- These multiple constrains might prove really difficult to address.
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Source: The Hindu

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