Impeachment of the U.S. President

Why in news?

Donald Trump has become the third US President in history to be impeached by the House of Representatives.

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What is the procedure?

- The United States Congress of the federal government of the U.S. is a bicameral legislature.
- It comprises of the two chambers - the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- Impeachment refers to the 435-member House of Representatives approving formal charges against a President.
- The House acts as the accuser, voting on whether to bring specific charges against the President.
- A simple majority vote is needed in the House to impeach, after which the Senate conducts a trial.
- In effect, the House members act as the prosecutors and senators as the jurors.
- A two-thirds majority vote is required in the 100-member Senate to convict and remove a President from office.
- The chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court presides over the trial.

What are the charges made?

- The House voted on two charges:
    1. the President abused his power
    2. the President had obstructed Congress
- The ‘abuse of power’ stemmed from Trump's alleged attempt to pressure Ukraine to announce investigations into his Democratic political rival, Joe Biden.
- The ‘obstruction of Congress’ was due to President’s alleged refusal to co-operate with the impeachment inquiry.
- He also withheld documentary evidence and barred his key aides from giving evidence.

- The vote for the first article of impeachment, abuse of power, was passed 230-197 and the second, for obstruction of Congress, 229-198.
- Both votes fell along party lines with nearly all Democrats voting for the charges and all Republicans against.

What was the allegation on abuse of power?

- Mr Trump had personally blocked nearly $400m in military aid to Ukraine.
- At about the same time, he spoke by phone with Ukraine's new President.
- The aid was allegedly withheld to pressurize Ukraine's President to investigate a leading domestic political rival of Trump, Joe Biden.
- [Joe Biden is the front-runner for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination in the U.S.]
- A U.S. intelligence official filed a whistleblower complaint to the intelligence community's inspector general in this regard.
- The allegation now is that Mr Trump used the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the US 2020 election.
- Mr Trump has denied the charges, saying the aid was not withheld in order to put pressure on Ukraine.

What is the effect of impeachment?

- With impeachment by the House of Representatives, the next step is the trial in the Senate.
- This will ultimately decide whether the President remains in office or not.
- Being impeached places Donald Trump alongside only two other presidents in the nation's history - Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton.

Source: BBC

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