New Brexit Challenge - May's Brexit Plan Defeat

Why in news?

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British Parliament voted against Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal (plan for Britain's exit from the European Union).

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What is the present scenario?

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- Ms. May is expected to face the motion of no-confidence against her government.
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- But it is unlikely the motion, tabled by Opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party, would be passed.
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- Consequently, the onus of taking the country out of the EU will remain with Ms. May.
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- Ms. May argues that there is no better deal than the one she has negotiated with the other 27 members of the EU.
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- Yet, the difficult task of persuading MPs on the merits of the agreement exists.
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- Ms. May will hope to win the Commons' approval for a Plan B for Brexit.
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- At the minimum, it must do better on the contentious Irish backstop.
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What is the Irish backstop issue?

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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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- The UK and Ireland are currently part of the EU single market and customs union.
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- So products do not need to be inspected for customs and standards.
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- But after Brexit, the two parts of Ireland could be in different customs and regulatory regimes, which could mean products being checked at the border.
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- The UK government does not want this to happen and the EU also does not want any hardening of the border.
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- However, the current Brexit provisions, which include leaving the customs union and the single market, make this very difficult.
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- In this backdrop, the backstop is an arrangement to maintain an open border on the island of Ireland.
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- The arrangement allows the flow of goods between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
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- This is only in the event that the UK leaves the EU without securing an all-encompassing deal.
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What are the challenges ahead?

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- The EU is less likely to ensure that the backstop will not indefinitely lock Britain into a customs union with the EU.
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- But that would necessarily limit London’s freedom to make trade deals with

third states.
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- Logically, Brexit supporters oppose this, whose prime motive is to regain sovereignty.
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- Besides, deep differences persist within the Conservative and Labour parties on the terms of exit they must obtain from Brussels.
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- There is also increasing clamour for a second referendum from remainers in the two parties.
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- These groups view the uncertainty as symptomatic of a flawed Brexit project.
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- They say the citizens should be enabled to make a more informed decision, given the mounting evidence on the economic impact of Brexit.
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- But this view had, nevertheless, to be balanced with the consideration that the majority of MPs have resolved to respect the June 2016 referendum.
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- In any case, a reversal of the 2016 Brexit result is not a guaranteed outcome.
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- Given all these, an extension of the exit date seems the least controversial among many other alternatives for Ms. May for now.
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Source: The Hindu, BBC

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