Windsor Framework

Why in news?

The UK government reached a landmark deal with the European Union (EU) on post-Brexit trade rules related to governing the Northern Ireland.

What is the background of the issue?

- **History of Ireland** - Ireland is an island that lies to the west of the British mainland and has two separate politically independent territories.
- *Northern Ireland* which is about 1/6th of the total island is a part of the UK and is administered as a relatively autonomous region.
- The rest of the island forms the *'Republic of Ireland'* and is an independent sovereign nation since 1922.
- A hard-fought peace was secured only in 1998 under the *Belfast Agreement,* also called the *Good Friday agreement.*



- **Relationship with the EU -** Both the Republic of Ireland and UK (thereby Northern Ireland) became members of the "European Economic Community (EEC)" in 1973.
- EEC later evolved to become the EU and also to a great extent helped to ease the tensions between the Unionists & Nationalists.
- As Britain left the EU and exited the single market and customs union, the relationship between Republican Ireland and Northern Ireland has become a challenging puzzle to solve.
- After the Brexit, Northern Ireland remained its only constituent that shared a land border with the Republic of Ireland.
- Since the EU and the UK have different product standards, border checks would be necessary before goods could move from Northern Ireland to Ireland.

Great Britain – England + Scotland + Wales

United Kingdom – Great Britain + Northern Ireland

What is the Northern Ireland Protocol?

- **Check posts –** Checks would be conducted between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- Under the protocol, *Northern Ireland remained in the EU single market*, and trade-and-customs inspections of goods coming from Great Britain took place at its ports along the Irish Sea.

What are the issues with the Northern Ireland Protocol?

- **Time & resource wastage –** The checks made trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland cumbersome, with food products losing out on shelf life while they waited for clearance.
- **Taxation –** Some taxation and spending policies of the UK government could not be implemented in Northern Ireland because of EU rules.
- The sale of medicines was caught between different British and EU rules.
- **United UK –** Any kind of border in the Irish Sea bothered those who want a United Kingdom.
- The Democratic Union Party (DUP) has not allowed Stormont, its Parliament, to function since last year, because of its opposition to the Protocol.

What is proposed under the Windsor Framework?

- It will *replace the Northern Ireland Protocol*, which had proved to be among the thorniest of Brexit fall-outs, creating problems both economic and political.
- The framework has two crucial aspects:
    1. **Introduction of a green lane and red lane system** - For goods that will stay in Northern Ireland and those that will go to the EU respectively.
    2. **The Stormont Brake -** Allows Northern Ireland lawmakers and London to veto any EU regulation they believe affects the region adversely.
- **The two lane system–** British goods meant for Northern Ireland will use the *green lane* at the ports, and will be allowed to pass with minimal paperwork and checks.
- Physical checks will be conducted if the goods are deemed suspicious, in place of the routine checks now.

- Goods destined for Ireland or the rest of the EU will have to take the *red lane*, with the attendant customs and other checks.
- **The Stormont Brake** – It means the democratically elected Northern Ireland Assembly can oppose new EU goods rules that would have significant and lasting effects on everyday lives in Northern Ireland.
- For this, they will need the support of 30 members from at least 2 parties and the British government can then veto the law.

What is the outcome of the framework?

- With the Windsor Framework, UK hopes to improve trade and other ties with the EU.
- The deal has allowed Sunak to do away with the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill introduced by his predecessor Boris Johnson.
- The bill involved the UK government reneging on the promise it made to the EU to follow the Protocol.

References

1. Indian Express | Windsor Framework
2. The Hindu | Border troubles
3. BBC | Northern Ireland Brexit deal

