Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and mains focus: about Brexit and its consequences for geopolitics in Europe and the world

News: Britain was speeding towards Brexit on Friday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson won a crushing election victory, ending three years of uncertainty since the country decided to leave the bloc.

Background

Exiting the European Union (EU), a goal Mr. Johnson has pursued relentlessly since he put himself forward as the face of the victorious “Leave” campaign in a 2016 referendum, is Britain’s biggest leap into the unknown since the Second World War..

Meets Queen

Later, he went to Buckingham Palace to ask Queen Elizabeth for permission to form a new government — a formal step required under the U.K.’s constitutional monarchy system.

Results pouring in from the 650 parliamentary constituencies showed that Mr. Johnson’s Conservative Party had trounced its main opponent, winning 365 seats to the Labour Party’s 203. The Scottish National Party won 48, while Liberal Democrats got 11 seats.

A vindication for Mr. Johnson and his simple campaign message “Get Brexit Done”, the result represented the biggest House of Commons majority for the Conservatives since Margaret Thatcher’s 1987 triumph.

Way ahead

Mr. Johnson is now free to lead his country swiftly out of the vast trading bloc, but faces the daunting task of negotiating trade deals around the world, not least with the EU itself, and of keeping a divided kingdom in one piece.

About the Brexit issue

The Brexit issue, which has consumed politics and the public debate since 2016, has eroded traditional party loyalties, dividing the nation along new fault lines. The Brexit effect was most starkly illustrated by the crumbling of Labour’s so called Red Wall, a rampart of working class areas across northern and central England where most people had voted “Leave” in 2016.
Frustrated at the country’s failure to quit the EU and at Labour’s equivocal stance on Brexit, large numbers of voters deserted the party and flocked to the Conservatives.

The Irish backstop

The “Irish backstop” is effectively an insurance policy in UK-EU Brexit negotiations. It’s meant to make sure that the Irish border remains open (as it is today) whatever the outcome of the UK and the EU’s negotiations about their future relationship after Brexit.

The “Irish backstop” would kick in at the end of the transition period if the UK and EU had failed to negotiate a future trade deal that kept the Irish border open as it is today.

Under the backstop the whole of the UK would enter a “single customs territory” with the EU. There are many parts to this but essentially there would be no tariffs on trade in goods between the UK and the EU and some (though not all) trade restrictions would be removed.

However, Northern Ireland alone would remain aligned to some extra EU rules to ensure the Irish border remains open as it is today. These separate regulations for Northern Ireland would mean there would be some checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK.

The Irish backstop has been highly controversial among some MPs, and is one of the main reasons why the withdrawal agreement has so far failed to pass through parliament. The new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, now claims the backstop is “dead”.

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