



CURRENT AFFAIRS



Argasia Education PVT. Ltd. (GST NO.-09AAPCAI478E1ZH)
Address: Basement C59 Noida, opposite to Priyagold Building gate, Sector 02,
Pocket I, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 201301, CONTACT NO:-8448440231

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NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

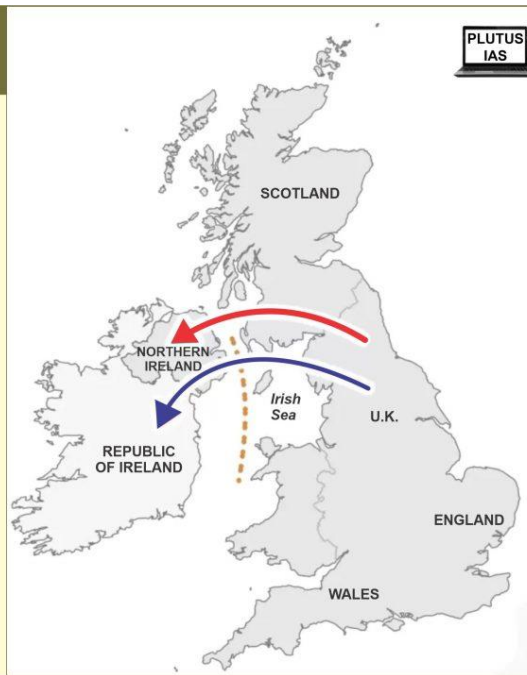
After two years of deadlock, Northern Ireland now has a functioning administration led by Michelle O'Neill of Sinn Féin and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly of the Alliance Party.

THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL

- After the United Kingdom left the European Union, **Northern Ireland remained the sole constituent, having a land border with another EU member, the Republic of Ireland.** The United Kingdom is made up of Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales), as well as Northern Ireland.
- Because the EU and the UK have **distinct product standards**, border inspections would be required before products could be transported from Northern Ireland to Ireland. However, a free border between the two was critical to the 1998 Good Friday deal.
- Keeping this in mind, the **Northern Ireland Protocol was negotiated in 2020 between the United Kingdom and the EU.** The protocol is a trade deal negotiated in 2020 by the United Kingdom and the European Union.
- Under this agreement, both the **United Kingdom and the European Union agreed that products would be inspected between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.** This agreement effectively established a de facto border across the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.
- Northern Ireland continues to obey many of the EU's laws, allowing vehicles to move across the border without being inspected. The protocol was signed as part of the Brexit departure deal, which has now been confirmed under international law.
- However, **this protocol infuriated unionists**, who saw it as undermining Northern Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom. As a result, the Unionists refused to allow a government to form after Northern Ireland's May 2022 elections, and Stormont was unable to function.

The UK's new plan

- The goods are split into two different lanes.
- Goods destined only for Northern Ireland go into the **Red Lane** and are not checked
- Goods destined for Ireland and the EU go into the **Blue Lane** and checks are carried out



EFFORTS MADE TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

The framework comprises **two essential components**:

1. The implementation of a system with **designated green and red lanes for goods remaining in Northern Ireland and those bound for the EU, respectively.**
 2. Additionally, it introduces the **'Stormont Brake,'** empowering Northern Ireland legislators and the UK government to reject any EU regulations perceived as detrimental to the region.
- **British goods designated for Northern Ireland will utilise the green lane at ports,** streamlining the process with minimal paperwork and checks. Conversely, goods intended for Ireland or other EU destinations must use the **red lane,** subject to customary customs procedures and inspections.
 - The newly introduced Stormont Brake enables the elected Northern Ireland Assembly to challenge proposed EU regulations affecting the region significantly and persistently. To enact this opposition, the Assembly requires the support of 30 members from at least two political parties, after which the British government holds the authority to veto the legislation.

A NEW PLAN TITLED 'SAFEGUARDING THE UNION' BY THE UK

A recent agreement has been achieved following the **rejection of the Windsor Framework by Unionists** who deemed the proposed measures insufficient. The UK government has now unveiled a new arrangement outlined in a document titled **'Safeguarding the Union.'**

The **key provisions of this agreement** are as follows:

1. The **green lane** is now referred to as the UK Internal Market channel, where checks and customs paperwork have been further reduced to encompass only “risk and intelligence-based checks” related to “criminality, smuggling, and disease.”
2. The “**Internal Market Guarantee**” provision stipulates that a minimum of 80% of goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will utilise this channel.
3. The UK government is committed to providing a **financial assistance package of £3.3 billion** to support the fiscal needs of Northern Ireland.

GOVERNANCE SYSTEM OF IRELAND

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Northern Ireland, **established in May 1921** through the partitioning of Ireland, encompasses the six northeastern counties of the island. **In 1922**, the remaining part of Ireland gained independence from British rule, becoming the present-day Republic of Ireland, with Dublin as its capital. Despite this, Northern Ireland maintained its affiliation with the United Kingdom, leading to tensions between those loyal to the Crown and those advocating for integration with the Republic. **Presently, individuals aligned with the British Union are known as unionists, while those supporting a unified and independent Ireland are referred to as nationalists.**

BELFAST AGREEMENT OR THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT:

By the late **1960s**, a **violent conflict had erupted in Northern Ireland** between those favouring continued UK affiliation and those aspiring to join Ireland. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed, bringing an end to the hostilities and establishing a distinctive governance system for Northern Ireland.

DISTINCTIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM OF IRELAND:

Stormont, located in the Parliament buildings in Belfast, **serves as the seat of power where both unionists and nationalists** actively participate in a shared governance arrangement. Cooperation between both factions is essential for the effective functioning of the government. The political group securing the majority of votes in elections assumes the role of First Minister, while the opposing side takes the position of Deputy First Minister, holding equal authority in this unique system.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. Consider the following pairs: (UPSC Prelims-2020)

International agreement/ set-up Subject

1. Alma-Ata Declaration – Healthcare of the people
2. Hague Convention – Biological and Chemical Weapons
3. Talanoa Dialogue – Global Climate Change
4. Under2 Coalition – Child Rights

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 4 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2,3 and 4 only

ANSWER: C

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community, a precursor to the European Union
2. The European Commission is the EU's executive branch responsible for implementing decisions and managing policies
3. The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007, aimed to enhance the EU's democratic governance

How many of the statements above are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

ANSWER: C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q1. How has the European Union influenced immigration policies and the free movement of people within its borders?

Himanshu Mishra

