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LAST WEEK, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson swept an election that left various takeaways, the most important of which is the likelihood of Brexit being put on the fast track. Other takeaways and landmarks include the biggest defeat of the Labour Party since 1935, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's decision not to lead the party in future elections, a sweep of Scotland's seats by the Scottish National Party, and its implications on the possibility of independence.

Johnson's Conservative Party won 365 seats in the 650-member Parliament. The Labour Party won 203, and the Scottish National Party 48.

Why is it being said that the election was about Brexit?

Because that was the narrative that drove the election. It is too simplistic, however, to read the result as a message that most voters in Britain are in favour of Brexit. With Brexit inevitable, it was a question about how the process should unfold. On this, Johnson's Conservative Party had a more clear plan than the Labour Party.

While campaigning, Johnson not only promised to resolve the long-pending issue but also projected the opposition as likely to keep delaying a resolution. Labour's stance, in fact, did appear to be contradictory. Corbyn is personally inclined towards Brexit, but many in the Labour coalition oppose it. The Labour campaign talked about a revised Brexit plan, but proposed to take that through yet another national referendum.

More than Brexit, it was the prospect of closure that appears to have decided the election. The Conservatives broke votes away from the pro-Brexit section of Labour's base.

So, how will Brexit proceed?

So far, no plan offered in Parliament had won majority support. Now, because of the sheer size of the victory, Johnson's plan is more likely to find support, in spite of the many factions created by opinions on Brexit. Besides, the vote can potentially be interpreted as public endorsement for Johnson's plan, although that is not really the case.

With Parliament due to sit next Friday, it is expected to try and pass Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement Bill this month itself. After that, Britain has to negotiate the terms of a treaty, including its time-frame, with the European Union. "Brexit day" is on January 31, but the process of implementation will continue long after that.

How does one read the performance of the Scottish National Party?

First, it would be too much to expect that the SNP's performance will eventually lead to Scottish independence. Nevertheless, the SNP's sweep of Scotland is immensely significant, shutting out both Labour and Conservative parties.

In a referendum in 2014, Scotland had rejected independence. But opinion polls have also shown that the Scottish population is by and large in favour of remaining in the European Union. Will Brexit, therefore, lead to calls for independence? Although the SNP is against Brexit, the vote does not necessarily mean a referendum for Scottish independence. It may simply be that the SNP is more popular with Scottish voters than the Labour or Conservative Party.

Even if Brexit, when it happens, revives pro-independence sentiment (which would help the SNP further), independence is a long road with many procedural hurdles.

What does the result mean for Britain, beyond Brexit?

The size of the victory sets the stage for a Britain of Johnson's ideological vision — nationalism, with tougher laws on immigration. Britain will also have to deal with Brexit's effect on its economy. This includes the long process of new bilateral trade agreements with many other countries.

What does it mean for Labour, and Corbyn in particular?

For the party, it is the smallest share of Parliament since 1935: even its minority during the Margaret Thatcher regime was larger. However, the vote is being seen more as a loss of Corbyn than for the party.

While national ratings show Corbyn as being highly unpopular among voters, he led a party whose stand on various non-Brexit issues are popular. The fact that Corbyn failed to capitalise on this indicates that the elections are his defeat. One possible reason, according to analyses in various news publications, is that voters trusted Johnson more than Corbyn in terms of carrying out their respective promises, even though Labour's policies were more popular with dedicated Labour voters. Corbyn is seen as pro-Brexit while Labour voters are largely against it.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. Consider the following statement in the context of Brexit.

1. The United Kingdom has decided to exit the European Union, this process of exit has come to be known as Brexit.
2. It has replaced the European Communities Act of 1972 after the European Union (Exit) Bill has become law.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) None of these

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 14 Dec., is 1 (b)

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. Boris Johnson's unilateral victory in Britain reflects a clear mandate for Brexit. In such a situation, analyze the challenges before UK now after the elections. **(250 words)**

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.

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