

# India happy as ousted Sri Lanka PM Wickremesinghe reinstalled

Ranil's reappointment comes 2 months after he was sacked, ending 51-day crisis that paralysed island nation

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NEW DELHI

India on Sunday welcomed the reappointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe as Sri Lanka's prime minister, almost two months after he was sacked by President Maithripala Sirisena, ending a 51-day crisis that had paralysed the island nation.

New Delhi, however, was keeping a wary eye on the uneasy truce between the president and the prime minister that comes after weeks of bitter sniping between the two, a person familiar with the development said.

The 69-year-old Wickremesinghe was on Sunday sworn in by Sirisena, who had sacked him on 26 October and appointed former president, the China leaning Mahinda Rajapaksa in his place. The move had triggered a power struggle that brought the country's government to a standstill. Wickremesinghe had refused to step aside since being sacked on 26 October.

"As a close neighbour and true friend, India welcomes the resolution of the political situation in Sri Lanka," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said in a statement. "This is a reflection of the maturity demonstrated by all political forces, and also of the resilience of Sri Lankan democracy and its institutions. India remains committed to taking forward its people-oriented develop-



## What it means for India

Wickremesinghe-Sirisena feud meant end of an alliance India had forged between Lanka's opposition in 2015

In 2015, the China-leaning Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated in the national elections

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ment projects in Sri Lanka. We are confident that India-Sri Lanka relations will continue to move on an upward trajectory," Kumar added.

For India, the open war between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe meant the end of an alliance it had stitched up between Sri Lanka's opposition in 2015 which had defeated the China-leaning Rajapaksa in national polls. India was also unhappy with

the slow pace of rehabilitation of Tamils, displaced by the civil war after the end of the conflict in May 2009 under Rajapaksa's watch.

**India said it's a reflection of the maturity shown by political forces and also of the resilience of its democracy**

After appointing Rajapaksa in his place, Sirisena had vowed to never reappoint Wickremesinghe—who he publicly slammed in speeches in subsequent weeks. The acrimony between the two was on display on Sunday when Sirisena

barred reporters from attending the swearing-in ceremony—leaving it to Wickremesinghe's legislators to announce the appointment, news reports from Colombo said.

"We thank the citizens of the country who fought the illegal seizure of power and ensured that democracy was restored," Wickremesinghe's United National Party said in a Twitter post.

"Today marks a victory not for myself or for the UNP. It is a victory for Sri Lanka's democratic institutions and the sovereignty of

our citizens. I thank everyone who stood firm in defending the constitution and ensuring the triumph of democracy," Wickremesinghe's own post said.

One of the reasons being attributed to Sirisena's change of stance in reappointing Wickremesinghe is the inability of Rajapaksa to take the reins of government. He failed many attempts to muster a majority in Parliament. The former president was also defeated many times on the floor of the legislature before he stepped down on Saturday.

In a Twitter post, Rajapaksa's son Namal said: "Politics aside I would like to congratulate @RW\_UNP being appointed as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. I hope at least now he will work towards ensuring the sovereignty of this country and more so address issues of our people more than Western interests."

Sirisena too suffered a setback when Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ruled that he acted outside the constitution when he sacked Parliament in early November, days after appointing Rajapaksa. The court also confirmed on 14 December that Rajapaksa and his cabinet could not exercise the powers of the office they held.

A spokesman for Wickremesinghe was cited as saying on Sunday that the prime minister was expected to form a cabinet in the coming days, with priority focus of the government being on the 2019 budget.