Mahinda Rajapaksa as Sri Lanka's PM

Why in News?

Mahinda Rajapaksa has been appointed as the Prime Minister (PM) of Sri Lanka.

What does this appointment mean?

- This appointment consolidates the hold of the Rajapaksa family on power.
- The change was entirely on expected lines, after his younger brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, won decisively in the presidential election.
- Outgoing PM Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose party's candidate lost the election, submitted his resignation.
- This resignation enables the newly-elected President to appoint a new Prime Minister.
- **Country's constitutional scheme** - The President is directly elected, and heads the Cabinet, even while the Prime Minister he appoints ought to be one who commands a majority in Parliament.
- Even though the party of the Rajapaksas does not have the requisite numbers, it is unlikely to be an issue.
- This is so as it is expected to be only a caretaker regime until the next parliamentary elections, due in late 2020.
- **19th Amendment to the Constitution (2015)** - The President may dissolve the House 6 months prior to the end of its term.
- This effectively means it could be dissolved any time after March 2019.
- Mahinda Rajapaksa has emerged as Sri Lanka's most popular leader today.
- Only few will doubt that his acumen and personal charisma were crucial to his brother's victory.

What are the concerns?

- His presence in an official role in the corridors of power will be vital in the way the President runs the country and handles external relations.
- However, the prospect of the country's two most powerful offices being vested in a single family does raise concerns.
- **2015 mandate** – This mandate against Mahinda Rajapaksa was one for reform and change.
- It led to the 19th amendment, which curbed the President's powers.
- This amendment curbed the power to dismiss the Prime Minister and his

Cabinet at will, and the two-term limit on contesting for President.
- The question now is whether the gains it brought about for democracy will last.

What was Mahinda Rajapaksa's reaction?

- Mahinda Rajapaksa's reaction to the election result contained a specific reference to the complications in governance caused by the amendment.
- This also promised a programme of action.
- It would be a retrograde step, if they embark on any move to overturn the gains of the legislation.
- A return to ancien régime was undoubtedly one of the concerns of the minorities when they voted against Gotabaya Rajapaksa.
- [Ancien régime is a political or social system that has been displaced by another.]

What is India's move and what does it mean?

- India's move is to send External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to call on the new President.
- This has signalled an eagerness to preserve its traditional ties with Sri Lanka as well as its interests.
- It is welcome that India has conveyed its expectations that the process of national reconciliation would be taken forward by the new regime.
- It would be taken with a solution for the Tamil population based on equality, justice, peace and dignity at the core of it.

Source: The Hindu

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