Replacement of Prime Minister in Sri Lanka

Why in news?

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Mahinda Rajapaksa was appointed as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka recently after the collapse of the governing coalition.

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What is the overview?

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- The government of Sri Lanka is led by the president of the country who is the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces.
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- The presidential system is determined by the Sri Lankan constitution and the current constitution of Sri Lanka is the third constitution since the country got independence in 1948.
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- The Sri Lankan government comprises the president and legislature that are elected on a national level, and the elections are held after every six years.
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- The President of Sri Lanka is elected by the people to serve a term of five years.
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- The elected president who is the head of cabinet is also responsible for appointing cabinet ministers, who are responsible to Parliament.
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- The deputy to the President in Sri Lanka is the prime minister who is also the leader of the ruling party in Parliament.
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- The President is responsible for dissolving the current cabinet and appointing a new one in the event that a parliamentary no confident vote is passed.
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- The president has also the power to suspend, summon, end a legislative session and dissolve Parliament at any time if it has served for one year.
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- The Sri Lanka has a multi-party system where there are two dominant parties which includes the New Demonstrate Front (NDF) and the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).
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What are the present events?

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- Rajapaksha served as the president for a period of ten years in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015.
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- He is a fierce political opponent of the current President Sirisena.
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- Sirisena had defeated Rajapaksha in the Presidential election of 2015.
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- Sirisena's SLFP and Wickremesinghe's UNP had come together to form the Unity Government in August 2015 following the general elections in the country.
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- The ousted Prime Minister, Wickremesinghe also survived a no-confidence motion in the country's Parliament that was brought by the supporters of Rajapaksa before.
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- However, Mr. Sirisena’s fast-deteriorating relationship with Mr. Wickremesinghe was an open secret, and there were indications that he could be negotiating a possible partnership with Mr. Rajapaksa.
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- Hence, Sirisena has recently decided to withdraw his faction from the ruling coalition as a sudden and secret manoeuvre.
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- He replaced Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa which has plunged the country into a political crisis.
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- Mr. Wickremesinghe has termed his replacement “unconstitutional” and maintains that he remains Prime Minister.
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- He has also challenged the Rajapaksa-Sirisena combine to take a floor test in the 225-member House.
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- In return, the president suspends the parliament, which is seen to have exposed his own insecurity about garnering the required strength.
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- All this has come at a time of economic fragility, with a plummeting rupee, soaring unemployment and rising living costs in the country.
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What are the concerns?

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- An extra-parliamentary power struggle, with the usage of illegal means, heightens the risk of political thuggery and unrest.
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- Mr. Sirisena's appointment of Mr. Rajapaksa even before conducting the floor test on the Parliament is a blatant abuse of his executive powers.
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- The President's actions betray an utter disregard for the parliamentary process, guided by narrow political interests.
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- He has put democracy in serious peril in resorting to these emergency measures.
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- He has also let down Sri Lankans, including a sizeable section of the Tamil and Muslim minorities that backed him in the critical 2015 election.
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- Sri Lanka is still recovering from the violence and bloodbath during its nearly three-decade-long civil war and has been grappling with the economic and social challenges in its aftermath.
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- The Unity Government had promised to put the country back on the path of democracy, after a decade of Mr. Rajapaksa's authoritarian rule.
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- But the recent episode shows that Sri Lanka cannot afford to recede from the democratic space that opened up with the coalition.
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- Desire of the president to consolidate power by hook or by crook is extremely unfortunate.
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- Though much damage has been done already, a fair vote must be ensured when Parliament reconvenes to ensure a stable government.
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Source: The Hindu

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