

END SRI LANKA'S CRISIS

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Mahinda Rajapaksa's decision to resign as Prime Minister, an office to which he was controversially installed by President Maithripala Sirisena, is the first sign that the dragging constitutional crisis in Sri Lanka is heading slowly towards a resolution. He had also played a part in the unfolding of the crisis set off by Mr. Sirisena, who made ill-advised moves by invoking his executive powers repeatedly for political and partisan ends. The two leaders had come together against common rival Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was removed as Prime Minister unceremoniously on October 26 to make way for Mr. Rajapaksa. However, they saw little success either in Parliament or before the courts. Despite Mr. Rajapaksa failing to prove his majority in several motions in the House, he had steadfastly remained in office, seeking fresh elections instead of stepping down. Sri Lanka's politics and economy have been caught in a downward spiral due to a constitutional crisis since Mr. Sirisena appointed Mr. Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. However, Mr. Rajapaksa was unable, or unwilling, to demonstrate the extent of his support in Parliament. At one point the President prorogued Parliament, and later dissolved it. However, the Supreme Court restored the legislature in an interim order. Thereafter, in a series of votes, a majority of the 225-strong House has been voting against Mr. Rajapaksa.

Mr. Rajapaksa's resignation offer has come at a time when several parliamentarians moved the country's Court of Appeal seeking a writ of *quo warranto* for Mr. Rajapaksa's removal. In an interim order, the court restrained him from functioning as Prime Minister. The absence of clarity on whether there was a legitimate government in office placed other countries and multilateral financial institutions in a quandary as to who they should deal with. Mr. Rajapaksa's resignation may pave the way for the installation of a government that enjoys a majority in Parliament. Meanwhile, the President's credibility has taken yet another beating after the Supreme Court ruled categorically that his dissolution of Parliament on November 9 was illegal and void. The court has rejected his claim that he had an unfettered right to dissolve Parliament at any time, notwithstanding provisions in the Constitution that barred such action for the first four and a half years of the legislature's term. The court dismissed his camp's attempt to stretch and twist the meaning of some constitutional provisions in order to justify his bizarre actions. Although Mr. Sirisena has been obstinately sticking to his position that he will not appoint Mr. Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister "even if all 225 members" were with him, there are indications he may be forced to alter his stand. Nothing short of respecting the current composition of Parliament and reinstating Mr. Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister will solve the current imbroglio.

Maharashtra's proposal on reservation for Marathas is bound to invite judicial scrutiny

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