

DINESH GUNAWARDENA SWORN IN AS SRI LANKA PM

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Citizens held the former first family chiefly responsible for the meltdown that left them scrambling for essentials.

The Prime Minister and the all-male Cabinet were sworn in hours after a pre-dawn military raid at Colombo's main anti-government agitation site, in which at least nine persons, including activists, journalists and lawyers, were brutally assaulted by soldiers, despite protesters promising to vacate the area by Friday 2 p.m.

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A Rajapaksa loyalist

Son of iconic Marxist politician Philip Gunawardena, Sri Lanka's newly appointed Premier began his political activism as a leftist and trade unionist but has been in the Rajapaksa camp for some two decades now.

Mr. [Dinesh] Gunawardena has held ministerial portfolios including Education, Foreign Affairs and Labour in different Rajapaksa governments, and was Leader of the House from January 2020.

He is known for his support for the executive presidency, and opposition to greater power-sharing with Tamils. Mr. Gunawardena, 73, was a classmate of Mr. Wickremesinghe at Colombo's Royal College, an elite public school.

Speaking in Parliament after Mr. Wickremesinghe's recent election, he said: "Although the President [Ranil Wickremesinghe] and I have followed different ideologies, we are both committed to our country."

Six-time Prime Minister Mr. Wickremesinghe's unlikely rise to presidency came on the heels of a sensational protest on July 9, which saw several thousand citizens storm the Presidential Secretariat and palace, forcing Mr. Gotabaya to flee the island nation and resign.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, who was the sole MP from his United National Party (UNP), relies on the support of the Rajapaksas' Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna [SLPP or People's Front], which also backed him in Wednesday's parliamentary vote for presidency.

Alleging he is a "Rajapaksa backer", many Sri Lankans widely resent the leader and continue demanding his resignation, but Mr. Wickremesinghe's position appears secure at least for the immediate future, since he now enjoys unbridled executive powers and the support of the largest party in the legislature.

Xi congratulates Ranil

In the first outreach yet from a world leader, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday sent a message of congratulations to President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

It stood out after most Colombo-based diplomatic missions and the United Nations, in their tweets following his election, noted or acknowledged the development, short of congratulating him.

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