



# Colombo's perceptions

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## **Colombo's perceptions-India encounters a range of reactions in Sri Lanka: appreciation, support, suspicion and opposition**

- There are no winners in the political crisis in Sri Lanka.
- President Maithripala Sirisena, whose actions triggered the crisis, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who as Prime Minister lost two confidence votes, and Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Prime Minister who enjoys majority support in Parliament, are locked in a draw.

### **A ringside view**

- A delegation of eminent Indian scholars, former civil servants and a retired navy chief, led by Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary and chairman of the Kalinga Lanka Foundation (KLF), was in Colombo last month.
- The delegation's candid discussions with four leading think tanks and numerous key players on different sides of the political divide provided a ringside view of the situation.
- Cutting across party lines, a clear bipartisan consensus emerged about Sri Lanka's continuing need to nurture a positive engagement with India.
- But given the asymmetries in size and power, Sri Lanka finds itself overwhelmed by India's presence.
- Hence, resisting India's overtures for closer cooperation may be seen as part of Sri Lanka's assertion of its independent identity.
- From the Sri Lankan perspective, cultivating China as a counter to India makes strategic sense.
- On India-China rivalry, pro-Rajapaksa interlocutors sought a balance in Sri Lanka's ties with the two Asian powers.
- A strong, though unrealistic, plea was made suggesting that China-Sri Lanka relations should not be seen from the narrow prism of the complex relations between India and China.
- Some express support for reviving the trilateral maritime cooperation

among India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

- Others believe that India and China must cooperate for the region's benefit.
- The Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement is yet to reach finalisation.
- India encounters a range of reactions in Sri Lanka: appreciation, support, suspicion and opposition. Indian diplomacy plays on a sticky wicket.

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