

# ISRAEL SWEARS IN UNITY GOVERNMENT

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Israel's Parliament swore in its new unity government on Sunday led by Prime Minister Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz, ending the longest political crisis in the nation's history.

Lawmakers in the 120-person parliament, the Knesset, formally approved the three-year coalition government with 73 voting for and 49 against. One member was absent for the vote.

Addressing the Knesset before the vote, Mr. Netanyahu vowed to push on with controversial plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.

Mr. Netanyahu said his incoming government should apply Israeli sovereignty over West Bank settlements.

"It's time to apply the Israeli law and write another glorious chapter in the history of Zionism," Mr. Netanyahu said on the issue of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Such a move is seen likely to cause international uproar and inflame tensions in the West Bank, home to nearly three million Palestinians and some 400,000 Israelis living in settlements considered illegal under international law.

Netanyahu told the chamber that annexation "won't distance us from peace, it will bring us closer".

Israel's unity government starts work amid the coronavirus pandemic and after a political crisis that saw three inconclusive elections and left the country in political limbo for more than 500 days.

The coalition government was agreed last month between veteran right-wing leader Netanyahu and the centrist Gantz, a former army chief.

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