

# beyond the gate

## Palestinian PM Vows Cooperation With Abbas

by Sarah EL Deeb  
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Hamas formally took power Wednesday, March 29, with the Palestinian president swearing in its 24-member Cabinet, including 14 ministers who served time in Israeli prisons.

The ceremony, which came just a day after Israel's nation election, ended a two-month transition period of ambiguity since Hamas' election victory in January.

At a news conference in Gaza after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas swore in Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas and his Cabinet, Haniyeh said his relations with Abbas would be "cooperation and harmony, based on the supreme interest of the people."

Haniyeh said that together, they would confront "Israeli aggression against the people" as well as internal chaos.

With a Hamas government installed, the lines of confrontation with Israel were clearly drawn. Hamas insists it won't soften its violent ideology.

Israel's presumed prime minister-designate, Ehud Olmert, has countered that if Hamas won't bend, he'll set the borders of a Palestinian state by himself and keep large areas of the West Bank.

With Hamas at the helm, the Palestinian Authority also faces a crippling international economic boycott.

"With Hamas taking over now, you can't have business as usual," said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev.

Israel suspended tens of millions of dollars in monthly tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority after the Hamas election victory, and Regev said the Israeli Cabinet would decide on additional sanctions next week.

Abbas, a moderate from the defeated Fatah Party, administered the oath to some of the Cabinet ministers in a brief ceremony at Gaza City's parliament building. With Israel banning the travel of Hamas



leaders between the West Bank and Gaza, the remainder of the ministers held a separate ceremony in the West Bank. The two settings were hooked up by videoconference.

The first to be sworn in was Haniyeh, who walked along a red carpet, then placed his hand on a copy of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, laid out on a low table. Haniyeh pledged to

be "loyal to the homeland and its sacred places." Abbas looked on, his face expressionless.

## India Sex Selection Doctor Is Jailed

BBC News Press Release



A doctor in India and his assistant have been sentenced to two years in jail for revealing the sex of a female fetus and then agreeing to abort it. This is the first time medical professionals have been jailed in such a case. Under Indian laws, ultrasound tests on a

pregnant woman to determine the gender of the fetus are illegal. It has been estimated that 10 million female fetuses may have been terminated in India in the past 20 years. Drs. Anil Sabhani and Kartar Singh were caught in a sting operation in the northern state of

Haryana. Government officials sent in three pregnant women as decoy patients to find out if the clinic would carry out abortions based on sex selection. Audio and video evidence showed the doctor telling one woman that tests had revealed that she was carrying a "female fetus and it would be taken care of". A cultural preference for sons over daughters has skewed India's sex ratio. But convictions are rare due to lax and corrupt officials and the slow judicial system. The government brought in laws 12 years ago to stop the practice of aborting female fetuses.

The president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA), a grouping of doctors, Dr. Vinay Agarwal said the convictions were "historical". "The medical profession is doing all it can though we have to address this as a social evil. People should

be proud to have a girl child," he said.

The northern states of Punjab and Haryana have some of the worst gender ratios in India. There are about 861 women for every 1,000 men in Haryana, according to the census. The national average is 927 women to 1,000 men. The national average has gone down from 972 in 1901 to just 933 in 2001, according to reports.

Earlier this year researchers in India and Canada said in the Lancet journal that prenatal selection and selective abortion was causing the loss of 500,000 girl births a year. If this is true, 10 million female births may have been lost in India over the past two decades. Indian doctors, however, disputed the report saying pre-birth gender checks had waned since a Supreme Court crackdown in 2001.

Leading campaigners say many of India's fertility clinics continue to offer a seemingly legitimate facade for a multi-billion dollar racket and that gender determination is still big business in India. Experts in India say female feticide is mostly linked to socio-economic factors. It is an idea that many say carries over from the time India was a predominantly agrarian society where boys were considered an extra pair of hands on the farm. The girl child has traditionally been considered inferior and a liability - a bride's dowry can cripple a poor family financially.