Chris Hipkins sworn in as New Zealand's 41st prime minister

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New Zealand's new Prime Minister Chris Hipkins smiles as he is sworn in by Governor General Dame Cindy Kiro during a ceremony at The Government House in Wellington on January 25, 2023. - AFP Pic

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: Chris Hipkins was sworn in Wednesday as New Zealand's 41st prime minister, following the unexpected resignation last week of Jacinda Ardern.

Hipkins, 44, has promised a back-to-basics approach focusing on the economy and what he described as the "pandemic of inflation."

He will have less than nine months before contesting a tough general election, with opinion polls indicating his Labour Party is trailing its conservative opposition.

New Zealand Governor-General Cindy Kiro officiated the brief swearing in ceremony in front of friends and colleagues after earlier accepting Ardern's resignation.

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"This is the biggest privilege and responsibility of my life," Hipkins said at the ceremony. "I'm energized and excited by the challenges that lie ahead."

Carmel Sepuloni was also sworn in as deputy prime minister, the first time a person with Pacific Island heritage has taken on the role. She congratulated Hipkins and thanked him for the trust he'd placed in her.

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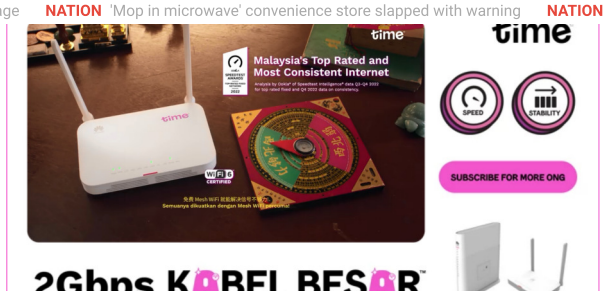


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After the ceremony, Hipkins said as an aside to reporters: "It feels pretty real now."



Hipkins got the unanimous support of lawmakers from his party after he was the only candidate to enter the contest to replace Ardern, who shocked the nation of 5 million people last Thursday when she announced she was resigning. - AP Pic

Hipkins is known to many by the nickname "Chippy," which fits with his upbeat demeanor and skills as an amateur handyman.

He served as education and police minister under Ardern. He rose to public prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he took on a kind of crisis management role. But he and other liberals have long been in the shadow of Ardern, who became a global icon of the left and exemplified a new style of leadership.

Ardern on Tuesday made her final public appearance as prime minister, saying the thing she would miss most was the people because they had been the "joy of the job."

New Zealand's head-of-state is Britain's King Charles III, and Kiro is his representative in New Zealand, although these days the nation's relationship with the monarchy is largely symbolic. -- AP

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