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AFGHANISTAN'S SHAKY NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT APPROACHES ITS SECOND ANNIVERSARY

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KABUL □ Afghanistans national unity government, which will complete two troubled years in power Thursday, has set aside its internal differences and prepared an upbeat report of its achievements and goals to present to international donors in Brussels next week, hoping to secure their renewed commitment to long-term support.

By highlighting their efforts to combat public corruption and waste, and outlining a five-year plan to develop agriculture, private investment and regional ties, President Ashraf Ghani and his aides hope to prove that Kabul deserves the trust of a skeptical world community that has paid Afghanistans bills for the past 14 years.

Abdullah Abdullah, Ghanis governing partner and chief executive, has embraced the initiative and dropped the sharp public criticism he leveled last month at Ghani, calling him unfit to lead. This week, Abdullah said that the government will remain legitimate after the two-year power-sharing agreement expires Thursday, and that it will continue for Ghanis full five-year presidential term.

The CEO is fully on board. He has been at every single meeting and discussion in the planning for Brussels, said Nader Nadery, a senior spokesman for the Ghani administration. Nadery ticked off a long list of reforms achieved in the past two years, including curbing customs fraud and collecting a record amount of taxes. We are frank and self-critical about where we have not made progress, but in many areas we have made a lot, he said.

But critics say that the long-running dispute between Ghani and Abdullah has only been put on hold, and that a flurry of pre-Brussels good-news gestures □ including last weeks announcement of a peace deal with fugitive militia leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar □ cannot mask the failures that have led to deep public disillusionment after two years of aggressive insurgent attacks, rampant unemployment and entrenched public corruption.

They also say that despite Abdullahs conciliatory new stance and recent moves by Ghani to implement long-delayed electoral reforms, the joint government has lost its legitimacy by not holding elections and a constitutional assembly to determine Abdullahs future status.

Under the governing agreement brokered by the Obama administration after a fraud-plagued presidential contest between Ghani and Abdullah in 2014, those events were to have been completed by Thursday.

The national unity government did not manage to meet any of the peoples expectations or fulfill its key slogans over the past two years. It is attending the Brussels conference with no major achievement except the progress on peace talks with Hekmatyar, said Ahmad Zia Rafat, a professor of law and politics at Kabul University.

The Ghani government worked for months to reach an agreement with Hekmatyar, a longtime Islamic militia leader who has been fighting the government for 20 years, in hopes that it would persuade some Taliban leaders to lay down their arms, too. Many Afghans consider the deal an unsavory but a necessary first step toward taming the insurgency that has been ravaging Afghanistan for more than a decade.

It is far from clear, however, whether Hekmatyar will be granted immunity from international terrorist bans imposed by the United States and the United Nations, and what the political fallout would be if the controversial figure did return to Afghanistan as a free man.

Some critics fear that Ghani and his aides, in their haste to proffer a concrete security accomplishment to international donors, agreed to an overly vague and generous deal that could backfire.

The government is rushing everything to show some results in Brussels and before the international community, but when you rush too much you can make mistakes that end up harming the entire process, said Haroun Mir, an analyst in Kabul.

Even if the 70 governments and 30 international agencies meeting in Brussels next week are impressed enough to extend a vote of confidence and a generous hand to the Ghani government, analysts said, it will still face the same domestic political pressures that have delayed so many

reforms and dashed so much of the hope that was generated when a modern, technocratic team took power two years ago.

Instead, the second anniversary will pass with no clear resolution as to the governments future makeup and constitutional status, and powerful opponents continuing to cause trouble, adding to a sense of instability and turmoil rather than the kind of determined push for economic development and peace that Ghani and his aides seek to present to the world.

People are confused and in a state of limbo, said Khalil Roman, an academic in Kabul, but he added that like the Afghan public, facing a choice between voracious insurgency and disappointing leaders, the international community is trapped in Afghanistan and has no alternative but to support the government, because otherwise it will not survive.

Kaynak/Source: