Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
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By: TA | AP Brief

Dutch ruling coalition close to collapse



The ruling Dutch three-party minority coalition led by Prime Minister Rob Jetten appeared close to collapse Thursday, less than nine months into its four-year term, as a deal to support a tax plan for next year angered one of the coalition parties.

Jetten's centrist D66 party and the center-right Christian Democrats reached the deal Wednesday with two center-left opposition parties to get the tax package — a crucial part of the annual government budget — through the Dutch parliament.

But fellow coalition member the right-wing People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD, slammed it as a bad deal for the Netherlands and a breach of the coalition agreement the three parties hammered out in weeks of negotiations.

Jetten skipped a European Union leaders' summit in Ireland to attend a debate in parliament about the tax measures.

The parties that agreed the deal say it raises tax on the superrich and cuts taxes for people with low incomes.

After a meeting Wednesday night, VVD leader Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius, who is also the Dutch defense minister, said her party was ambushed "by the fact that our coalition partners struck a deal with an opposition party."

She called it "a poor proposal. Furthermore, it runs counter to the coalition agreement."

She said that if the other coalition partners voted for the deal after the parliamentary debate Thursday, "we will at least need a fundamental reset."

She did not elaborate on what that reset would mean for the future of the coalition.

Risky political experiment

If the government were to fall, it would likely pave the way for fresh elections next year, the fifth general election in less than a decade in the politically splintered Netherlands.

The crisis echoes a similar impasse in neighboring Belgium, where Prime Minister Bart De Wever tendered his resignation to the king following a protracted crisis over the country's budget.

King Philippe last Friday rejected the resignation and asked De Wever's coalition to resume negotiations.

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Jetten was sworn in in February as the Netherlands' youngest and first openly gay prime minister.

He narrowly won an election in late October last year, securing the same number of seats as anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom, but with slightly more votes. The result was decided by a count of postal ballots.

Jetten said when he took office that he wanted to usher in a new era of consensus politics in parliament after years of bickering between parties.

But that has largely failed to materialize, with his coalition unable even to avoid internal divisions over its plans and opposition parties making tough demands in return for supporting legislation.

That culminated in the deal Jette's D66 party and the Christian Democrats struck with the center left parties PRO and Volt, enraging the VVD.