

## **Najib to fight graft if re-elected**

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**By Bloomberg**

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak pledged to fight corruption, boost public services and seek a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council if his coalition retains power in elections due in a matter of weeks.

Najib promised more specialist graft courts and greater public disclosure of government contracts if BN is allowed to extend its 55 years of unbroken rule, according to a manifesto he unveiled at his first election rally since dissolving Parliament on April 3.

Among the pledges are improved health care and transportation, including a high-speed rail link between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

"My sincere apologies to all Malaysians if we have done anything wrong," the caretaker prime minister said in his speech, which had been broadcasted live on national television.

"At the end of the day, we are ordinary humans. If we are given a strong mandate, I can assure you that we will do better in the next five years."

In the lead-up to the polls, Najib has boosted government spending, distributed a second round of cash handouts to the poor, and raised salaries of civil servants, police and the military.

He also delayed implementing a goods and services tax (GST) and froze plans to wind back state subsidies on essential items.

There would be more handouts for the poor, and car costs and broadband fees would be lowered, the manifesto read. The Election Commission (EC) is scheduled to meet on Wednesday to set a date for polls.

To stay in power, Najib, 59, must see off a resurgent opposition led by former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim (right).

Brokerages, including Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Citigroup Inc, expect an even closer election result than in 2008, when BN retained power by its narrowest margin since Malaysia's independence from Britain in 1957.

The risk of the ruling coalition losing seats in the election has helped make the FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI Index South-East Asia's worst-performing benchmark this year.

The stock gauge is little changed, while Indonesia and Thailand's leading indexes have risen more than 14 percent.

Focusing on his track record

Najib, who inherited a country in recession when he replaced Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as the premier mid-term in 2009, wants a mandate to complete his economic and government reforms started less than three years ago.

He is focusing on his track record in boosting investment and improving incomes as he seeks a popular mandate for the first time.

Malaysia's economy has shown resilience in the face of the global slowdown, expanding by more than four percent for each of the 13 quarters to the end of 2012, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Private investment has tripled since Najib began his economic-transformation programme in September 2010, rising 25 percent last year to RM139.5 billion (US\$46 billion), according to government data.

Almost half of the voters surveyed in a poll by the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research said fighting graft is a more pressing issue for the next government than taming inflation or boosting foreign investment.

The survey of 1,021 voters was conducted from Jan 23 to Feb 6 in the country's peninsula and had a margin of error of 3.07 percent.

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