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Malaysia Steps Up Security

New bill allows for warrantless arrests, fuels criticism of Najib's government

By JAMES HOOKWAY

Malaysia's government pushed a sweeping new security bill through Parliament in the face of growing criticism

from opposition politicians and human-rights activists that the country is sliding toward becoming a more authoritarian state.

The late-night passage of the law, which among other things allows the creation of security zones in which police can impose curfews and make warrantless arrests, comes at a tense time for this country of 30 million people.

Rifts are growing in Malaysia's ruling party before a key political assembly next week, with a leader warning a scandal over a state investment fund could cost it the next election and activists urging the prime minister to resign.

The annual assembly of the United Malays National Organization, which has ruled the country uninterrupted since independence from Britain in

1957, is the biggest event of Malaysia's political calendar.

This year's meeting, starting on Tuesday, is the first since government investigators in July said they had traced nearly \$700 million that had been deposited into Prime Minister Najib Razak's

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