

Newspaper	THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
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# NAJIB

*Continued from Page One*

Malaysia for decades. But the stakes are greater for Mr. Najib and his governing UMNO coalition after its near-loss in the 2013 election and the other pressures they now face.

Malaysia's Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, an independent election watchdog, this week accused Mr. Najib and his deputy prime minister of vote buying and breaching election laws in Sarawak. "It is unfettered political financing where state and federal funds are audaciously used to finance candidates' winning," said the group, known in Malay as Bersih.

Neither Mr. Najib nor his deputy responded to requests to comment and both haven't responded to that allegation.

"I anticipate that the government will throw away a lot of money in the elections," said Faisal S. Hazis, head of the Center for Asian Studies at the National University of Malaysia. "This is a common feature in Malaysian elections including Sarawak."

In an October budget speech, Mr. Najib's government pledged to build a \$4.2 billion pan-Borneo highway through Sarawak. It has begun to upgrade airports, build new housing and implement other projects to improve the lives

of Sarawak's residents.

During Mr. Najib's recent visits he was seen distributing checks to mosques and churches during a ceremony surrounded by political allies, in a typically Malaysian hands-on style of campaigning. He didn't say why he presented the checks.

Two charities associated with IMalaysia Development Bhd., or IMDB, the national investment fund at the center of the scandal, have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on projects in Sarawak since 2013, two people close to the charities say.

One of them, Yayasan IMDB, backed a Malaysian social-development program that recently funded 12 rooftop solar panels in Sungai Labi to power a television and fans in the village community hall here, replacing expensive and smelly diesel generators.

"We don't feel so hot anymore," said village representative Som Batu.

That development program, iM Sarawak, has made 1,400 investments in Sarawak ranging from rural firefighting systems to a Real Madrid soccer camp since it was formed in 2013. Such projects are consistent with its social-development mission. But some foreign diplomats and analysts say iM Sarawak was created to help sway the 2016 state election. iM Sarawak said it doesn't disclose details of its



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funding and declined to comment further.

Yayasan is sponsoring 150 imams and village officials from Sarawak for a Muslim Haj pilgrimage estimated to cost nearly \$400,000. Yayasan, which didn't reply to a request to comment, has previously sponsored such trips for officials in other states. Mr. Najib said recently the Haj trip was intended to reward these people for their good work and leadership.

Others suspect different motives.

"The Haj pilgrimage is definitely a form of vote-buying," Mr. Faisal said.

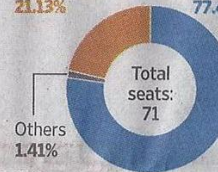
IMDB didn't respond to a request to comment. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said this week that the money given to Sarawak

## Election Test

Prime Minister Najib Razak's National Front hopes it will again dominate Sarawak in the May 7 vote after winning its closest-ever election in 2013, in a state with a relatively small Malay population.

### 2011 State Election: Sarawak

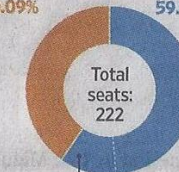
The opposition's People's Pact 21.13%  
Najib Razak's National Front 77.46%



Others 1.41%

### 2013 General Election

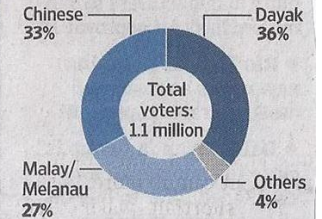
The opposition's People's Pact 40.09%  
Najib Razak's National Front 59.91%



From Sarawak 11.3%

Sources: Election Commission of Malaysia; BN Sarawak (ethnic breakdown)

### Sarawak voters ethnic breakdown



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wasn't a form of vote-buying.

The Wall Street Journal, citing Malaysian and global investigations, has reported how investigators have found about \$1 billion was transferred to Mr. Najib's personal bank accounts, the majority originating from IMDB and moving via a web of intermediary entities. The fund is under investigation by authorities in Malaysia and in at least six other countries.

Mr. Najib, who headed IMDB's board of advisers until it was dissolved this week, has denied wrongdoing or taking money for personal gain. IMDB has denied wrongdoing or giving any money to Mr. Najib and said it was cooperating with probes. Malaysia's attorney general in January said much of the money was a legal political donation from

the Saudi royal family and that most of that was returned. He cleared Mr. Najib of wrongdoing.

Many of Mr. Najib's opponents say his strategy in Sarawak echoes the 2013 general election. The Wall Street Journal has reported that IMDB indirectly supported his campaign with donations that funded projects he was able to tout during the campaign. The leader has denied any funds were improperly used. IMDB hasn't commented on the report.

Sarawak, whose steaming jungle interior is cut by rivers and speckled with tiny communities, is unique among Malaysia's 13 states. Its indigenous Dayak people have a history as headhunters. It is the only Christian-majority state in Muslim-majority Ma-

laysia.

And it was ruled for more than a century until 1946 by a dynastic monarchy of English adventurers known as the White Rajahs.

Sarawak provides Mr. Najib's coalition with nearly a fifth of its 133 parliamentary seats. Without votes from Sarawak and a neighboring state, the coalition would have lost its parliamentary majority in 2013 for the first time. The next general election is expected in 2018.

The Malaysian leader recently said he wants a strong electoral victory in Sarawak. Risk consultancy firm Eurasia Group predicts that very result due in part to a weak and divided opposition.

—Celine Fernandez  
in Kuala Lumpur  
contributed to this article.