

Daily Vocab-5

IN MOST countries a government that allowed \$4.5bn to go missing from a state development agency would struggle to win re-election. If some \$681m had appeared in the prime minister's personal account around the same time, which he breezily explained away as a gift from an unnamed admirer, the task would be all the harder. An apparent cover-up, involving the dismissal of officials investigating or merely complaining about the scandal, might be the last straw for voters. But in Malaysian elections, alas, voters do not count for much. Under any reasonable electoral system, the coalition running Malaysia would not be in office in the first place. The Barisan Nasional, as it is known, barely **squeaked** back into power at the most recent election, in 2013. It lost the popular vote, earning only 47% to the opposition's 51%. But thanks to the shamelessly biased drawing of the constituencies, that was enough to secure it 60% of the 222 seats in parliament.

This ill-deserved victory, however, occurred before news broke of the looting of 1MDB, a development agency whose board of advisers was chaired by the prime minister, Najib Razak. America's Justice Department has accused him and his Step son, among others, of **siphoning** money out of 1MDB through an elaborate series of **fraudulent** transactions. Much of the money went on luxuries, it says, including paintings by Picasso and Monet, a private jet, diamond necklaces, a penthouse in Manhattan and a gambling spree in Las Vegas. In February Indonesia seized a \$250m yacht that the Americans say was bought with Malaysian taxpayers' money. Authorities in Switzerland and Singapore have also been investigating. Mr. Najib denies any wrongdoing—and of course he has loyal supporters. But his administration has not tried very hard to clear things up. Only one person has been charged in connection with the missing billions: an opposition politician who leaked details of the official investigation after the government had refused to make it public. All this is unlikely to have improved Mr Najib's standing with voters. Yet an election must be held by August. Faced with the risk of losing power, the government is **rigging** the system even more **brazenly**. Parliament will soon vote on new constituency boundaries. The proposed map almost guarantees Mr. Najib another term, despite his appalling record.

How to rig an election

One trick is gerrymandering, drawing constituency boundaries so that lots of opposition voters are packed into a few seats, while ruling-party supporters form a narrow majority in larger number. Lots of this goes on in Malaysia, as elsewhere: the new boundaries put two opposition **bastions** in the state of Perak into the same seat. Gerrymandering is made even easier by another electoral abuse called malapportionment. This involves creating districts of uneven populations, so that those which support the opposition are much bigger than those that back the government. That means, in effect, that it takes many more votes to elect an opposition MP than it does a government one. The practice is so unfair that it is illegal in most countries, including Malaysia, where the constitution says that electoral districts must be "approximately equal" in size. Nonetheless, the constituencies in the maps proposed by the government-appointed election commission range in size from 18,000 voters to 146,000 (see Asia section). The Barisan Nasional controls all the 15 smallest districts; 14 of the 15 biggest ones are in the hands of the opposition. The average Barisan seat has 30,000 fewer voters

than the average opposition one. And this is the election commission's second go at the maps—the first lot were even more **lopsided**. Unfortunately, the electoral boundaries are not the only way in which the system is stacked against the opposition. The media are **supine**. The police and the courts seem more interested in allegations of minor offences by opposition figures than they are in the **blatant** bilking of the taxpayer over 1MDB and the open violation of the constitution at the election commission. The latest budget seems intended to buy the loyalty of civil servants, by promising a special bonus to be disbursed just after the likely date of the election. But these biases, as bad as they are, are not the same as **fiddling** constituencies. As long as the electoral system is fair, Malaysians will be able to judge the government and vote accordingly. But a rigged system will rob their votes of meaning. That is the point, of course. Mr Najib may be venal, but he is not stupid. He fears that most voters would not return him to office if given a choice, so he is taking their choice away.

1. Squeak: / 'skwi:k/ : □□□□

Noun: a short, high-pitched sound or cry

Synonyms: creak, screech, squeal, cheep, grate, peep, shrill, yelp

Antonyms: be quiet

2. Siphon: / 'sɪf(ə)n/ : □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□

Verb: draw off or transfer over a period of time, especially illegally or unfairly.

Synonyms: convey, funnel, carry, route, traject

Antonyms: hold, keep

3. Fraudulent: / 'frɔ:dʒʊl(ə)nt/ : □□□□□□□□

Adjective: obtained, done by, or involving deception, especially criminal deception.

Synonyms: counterfeit, crooked, deceitful, fake dishonest, forged, crafty

Antonyms: frank, genuine, honest, true, sincere, trustworthy, authentic

4. Rigging: / 'rɪgɪŋ/ : □□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□

Noun: the system of ropes or chains employed to support a ship's masts (standing rigging) and to control or set the yards and sails

Synonyms: apparatus, equipment

5. Brazenly: / 'breɪz(ə)nli/ : □□□□□ □□

Synonyms: blatantly, candidly, flagrantly, willingly, artlessly

Antonyms: incompletely, shamefully, secretly

6. Bastion: / 'bastɪən/ : एक □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ पर एक □□□ पर □□□□□□□□ एक □□□□□ □□ एक □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□,

Noun: a projecting part of a fortification built at an angle to the line of a wall, so as to allow defensive fire in several directions

Synonyms: bulwark, fortress, mainstay, fortification, stronghold

Antonyms: weakness, weak spot

7. **Lopsided:** / 'lɒp' sʌɪdɪd/ : □□□□□□

Adjective: with one side lower or smaller than the other.

Synonyms: unbalanced, unequal, awry, squint, warped

Antonyms: even, level, balanced

8. **Supine:** / 's(j)u:pʌɪn/ : □□□□□□□□

Adjective: failing to act or protest as a result of moral weakness or indolence

Synonyms: weak, enervated, spineless

Antonyms: strong, assertive

9. **Blatant:** / 'bleɪt(ə)nt/ : □□□□, □□□□□□□□ □□

Adjective: (of bad behaviour) done openly and unashamedly.

Synonyms: flagrant, glaring, obvious, manifest, palpable, evident

Antonyms: inconspicuous, subtle

10. **Fiddle:** / 'fɪd(ə)/ : □□□□-□□□□ □□□□

Noun: an act of defrauding, cheating, or falsifying.

Verb: falsify (figures, data, or records), typically in order to gain money.

Synonyms: fraud, swindle, fix, wangle, ruse, wile

Antonym: leave alone, work

PINNACLE