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## Battle of wills between Dr Mahathir and Najib

FROM P1 *We're ok, right?*

The whole country seems to be in ennui, mired in the Sargassum and restless from a lack of direction, and lately the complains have been loud and long.

People are really dissatisfied with the Goods and Services Tax, and it is causing a lot of unhappiness, not because it's a tax, but because people are wary about where their tax ringgit will go. And don't even get me started on the ringgit.

Apart from BNM, I think every Malaysian is worried about the falling value of the ringgit. Heck even the well-heeled are complaining, one serious shopper said this week that RM15,000 would only get you a good handbag and a couple of dresses in Singapore.

But people of my age who have been through the 1997 and 2008 crises will recognise that these are not something that would not blow over.

Even the Opposition, which could always be counted on to put things in perspective, is in a disarray.

Their leader is in jail, and the seemingly self-destructive and one-tracked mind of the PAS leadership to pursue its theocratic agenda has split the rest of the leadership with their perpetual "no one's home" syndrome.

No, the real answer to why everyone is feeling restless is that there's a titanic battle going on. It's the elephant in the room that the people in charge of the country is ignoring.

This is the battle of wills between former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the present Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak.

At stake is no less than the position of the prime minister, because Dr Mahathir has been relentless in pursuing his examination of Najib's handling of the country.

The point of Dr Mahathir's spear is the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) issue, an acronym that even my 17-year-old is familiar.

Dr Mahathir has doggedly raised the same questions on

the strategic development fund that has racked RM42 billion in debt over five years because, he says, Najib, as its advisor, has not even answered one. These questions include where has the money gone and who ordered the killing of a Mongolian model.

Najib has responded by denying he knows anyone called Altantuya and has pushed the 1MDB issue down the road by asking the Auditor General and friends to validate 1MDB accounts but this has not satisfied neither Dr Mahathir nor most Malaysians who have clearly come out to tell him that he is not alone in wanting to know, including Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (if you believe an interpretation of his speech in praise of Dr Mahathir on Sunday)

1MDB's minders are trying to repair its balance sheet by spinning off some of its assets and looking to sell the rest, which include viable projects like the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) and Bandar Malaysia.

So, this is the state of the nation today. We are worried that there's no one at the controls of our country while the administration is pre-occupied with this stuff. Many of us are in a holding pattern until our leaders sort this out.

In the meantime, we invoke the Supreme Being of our choice and pray that whatever happens, the ordinary people's welfare is preserved.

"O Turner of hearts, please let it not be a Pyrrhic war for us" is mine. Whatever the outcome, we want to salvage some good out of all these issues.

In the case of 1MDB, its assets that are profitable or have potential, like Edra Global Energy Bhd, TRX and Bandar Malaysia should be allowed to fulfil their roles and let us see at least some good out of this whole mess.

*ZB Othman is the group editor of The Malaysian Reserve.*