

**PM's 'rifle' comments pounced on
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Outgoing Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi set tongues wagging today when he described the Finance Ministry that he used to head as a 'jelapang' or repository (for cash) and the Defence Ministry that he has assumed since last month as a 'senapang' or rifle.

"Some Umno members have asked me why I gave up the repository and took the rifle," Bernama quoted the prime minister as having said in jest.

Despite seemingly innocuous, the comments were nevertheless seized on and dissected by both experts and laymen alike for 'hidden meaning' in politics-crazy Malaysia.

Some believe the comments were meant as a warning to certain quarters in Umno, who have repeatedly called for him to step down in favour of his deputy Najib Abdul Razak earlier than his stated retirement timeline of March 2009.

They point to the Umno supreme council meeting slated for 8.30pm tonight, during which there is a possibility that some leaders might press to bring forward the party's annual congress and election to December.

Subterfuge

According to opposition stalwart Lim Kit Siang, there was 'subtle subterfuge' afoot to shorten Abdullah's remaining five months in power.

lim kit siang 03"Will Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi again be humiliated at the Umno supreme council meeting tonight or will he be able to redeem the dignity of his office after repeated battering in the past few months?" Lim asked.

"Abdullah will again be humiliated if the Umno supreme council ends tonight with a final modification of his original mid-2010 power transition plan, shortening it from June 2010 to March 2009 and then to December this year!" he added.

Abdullah swapped his finance seat with Najib's defence portfolio last month.

Last week, the 55-year old deputy premier came under scrutiny over a questionable, high-cost helicopter deal allegedly sanctioned during his time at the Defence Ministry.

Bowing to pressure from the uproar that ensued, Abdullah has promised to look into the deal.