

Pak Lah to exit on April 2?
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is expected to step down on April 2, five days after he is to quit as Umno leader at the party's general assembly.

It is learnt that Abdullah would inform the cabinet at its weekly meeting this afternoon that the transfer of power is on, and that he would go to the palace on April 3 to meet the Agong.

Subsequently, incoming Umno president Najib Abdul Razak is expected to be sworn in as the country's sixth prime minister on April 4.

Ruling party Umno will have its general assembly next week over three days from March 26 to 28 where it will hold its hotly-contested party polls.

Najib, who is the only candidate for party president, will officially be annointed the new Umno leader at the general assembly.

The power transfer will happen days before three crucial by-elections in Bukit Gantang (Perak), Bukit Selambau (Kedah) and Batang Ai (Sarawak) - all to take place on April 7.

Power transfer not raised at meeting

However, several ministers later denied that the matter was raised at today's cabinet meeting.

At his post-cabinet press conference, Transport Minister Ong Tee Keat said that the matter was not discussed at the meeting.

"There is no need to raise this matter at the cabinet meeting. He (Abdullah) can announce it at other forums," he said.

Abdullah's continued silence on the date of handing over the reins has caused some concern and alarm.

There is also speculation that the premier - who came under tremendous pressure to quit following the March 8 polls - might decide to stay in office.

The protracted delay is also bad for Najib, whose popularity appears to be on the decline.

Commenting on the matter, Umno strongman and Cheras division leader Syed Ali Abbas Alhabshee said: "I hope it's true. Why wait any longer?"