

## 7 Labor MPs resign to protest against Blair's reign

www.chinaview.cn 2006-09-07 07:27:28



British Prime Minister Tony Blair is seen in August 2006.(AFP file Photo)  
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LONDON, Sept. 6 (Xinhua) -- Seven Labor members of parliament quit their government posts on Wednesday in protest against Tony Blair's refusal to set a timetable for his departure as both Labor leader and British prime minister.

Tom Watson quit as a junior defense minister and was followed by six Parliamentary Private Secretaries including Khalid Mahmood, Wayne David, Ian Lucas, Mark Tami, Chris Mole and David Wright, Sky news reported.

They said it was not "in the interest of either the party or the country" for Blair to remain in office.

Four of the group said in a joint statement that Blair had "not ended the uncertainty over when he intends to leave office, which is damaging the government and the party."

"I share the view of the overwhelming majority of the party and the country that the only way the party and the government can renew itself in office is urgently to renew its leadership," Watson wrote in his resignation letter.

He was also among a group of MPs who had earlier signed a confidential letter to Blair urging him to name a date for his departure.

In reaction, Blair accused Watson of being "disloyal, discourteous and wrong" by leaking the letter to the press.

The Sun newspaper on Wednesday published a front-page story screaming that Blair will resign on May 31 as party leader and depart as Prime Minister on July 26 next year. There has been no official comment from Downing Street.

Meanwhile, supporters of Chancellor Gordon Brown are also calling for Blair to make a public declaration about when he will go.

The wave of resignation and appeal gives rise to John McDonnell, chair of the socialist Campaign Group of Labor MPs, who confirmed on Wednesday that he would stand for the leadership campaign to succeed Blair.

Although Blair had publicly announced that he would not run in the next general election, he refuses to set a timetable for his departure, insisting that he wants to go ahead with the reforms instead of being pressed with the obsession of the exact time to quit his job.

Recent opinion polls showed that the Conservative Party has been taking the lead over Labor in support rate, largely due to Blair's foreign policy both on the war against Iraq and

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