

**Two French ministers quit in row over perks**  
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Two French ministers resigned Sunday after rows over the spending of thousands of euros of taxpayers' money on a private jet and cigars at a time when budget cuts are hitting the public.

Development Minister Alain Joyandet and Christian Blanc, a junior minister tasked with overseeing development of a Greater Paris region, both tendered their resignations, President Nicolas Sarkozy's office said.

"The president and the prime minister have accepted their resignations," said the statement from the Elysee palace. The pair had been in office since March 2008.

Sarkozy and his prime minister, François Fillon, had asked the two ministers to step down on Sunday, government spokesman Luc Chatel told AFP.

In March Joyandet, 56, was criticised for spending 116,500 euros (157,000 dollars) to hire a private plane to take him to Martinique for an emergency meeting on the earthquake in Haiti.

Blanc, 68, came under fire in June after it emerged that he had spent 12,000 euros (14,700 dollars) of taxpayers' money on Cuban cigars.

Last month Joyandet was again criticised over claims that he was granted a permit illegally to build an extension to his house in the chic Riviera resort of Saint Tropez.

Joyandet wrote on his blog - where he initially announced his resignation earlier Sunday - that "as a man of honour, I cannot accept being the victim of allegations. After much thought, I have decided to leave the government."

"Not one euro of public money was used toward my personal wealth or toward those of my near ones," he wrote.

But Sarkozy and Fillon "decided to address the consequences of the events of the past few days, that the French people neither understand or accept," Chatel said.

"After much thought, they asked Ministers Joyandet and Blanc, after having spoken with them, to resign," he said.

The resignations came as Sarkozy's government was struggling to weather a crisis over Labour Minister Eric Woerth's ties to France's richest woman, L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt.

Woerth's name came up in conversations secretly taped by Bettencourt's butler in which she allegedly plotted to evade taxes on her fortune at a time when the minister's wife worked for a firm managing the billionaire's estate.

Sarkozy on Monday ordered his prime minister to crack down on government perks by restricting use of official planes and cars, and scrapping parties.

"At a time when our compatriots are hit by the crisis, the state must more than ever set an example," Sarkozy wrote in a letter to Fillon.

"Those who represent the general interest cannot be exempted from the effort demanded of the nation. They have a particular responsibility which comes with their mission - to be irreproachable in their use of public funds."

The president cancelled his own traditional Bastille Day garden party planned for July 14 to set the tone and announced plans for a government reshuffle in October to try to quell public anger.

Sarkozy's personal approval rating took another beating in the polls last week, hitting an all-time low of 26 percent while the opposition Socialists hammered away at the government's "lost sense of public duty."

Socialist Party leader Martine Aubry at the weekend charged that France was "damaged by three years of Sarkozy rule" and pointed to the Bettencourt scandal to show that there was an unhealthy relationship between politics and money.

"We just need to remember what has been happening over the past weeks with our politicians. Where has their sense of public duty gone?" Aubry said.

A Viavoice poll to be published in Liberation newspaper on Monday shows that nearly two out of three French voters (64 percent) consider their politicians to be "mostly corrupt."

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