

UK govt says must tackle social problems after riots

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By Avril Ormsby

LONDON, Aug 14 (Reuters) - Britain needs to tackle deep-seated social problems following riots and looting in English cities this week, the centre-right government said on Saturday, and a U.S. street crime expert it has brought in said arrests alone would not solve the problem.

"There are communities that have just been left behind by the rest of the country. There are communities that are cut-off from the economic life-blood of the rest of the country," Finance Minister George Osborne said.

Prime Minister David Cameron, criticised by some in his Conservative party as being too liberal on crime and punishment, has taken a hard line on rioting in statements this week after returning from his summer holiday and recalling parliament.

He has also come under attack for austerity measures his government is introducing to tackle a huge debt burden.

Osborne said throwing money at the issue was not the answer and the government would press on with deep cuts to the numbers of police, who have been criticised by Cameron for their handling of the riots.

The Conservative mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has said the riots, which broke out a week ago after a demonstration against the police shooting of a suspect, weakened the case for those cuts.

Cameron has said political and economic grievances had little to do with days of looting and violence which followed in which five people were killed, calling it "criminality pure and simple" and saying gang violence lay at its heart.

He enlisted U.S. street crime expert William Bratton on Friday to advise the government on handling it.

Bratton, credited with curbing street crime as police chief in New York, Los Angeles and Boston, said he would offer advice based on his experience tackling gangs.

"You can't arrest your way out of the problem," he told U.S. broadcaster ABC on Saturday. "Arrest is certainly appropriate for the most violent, the incorrigible, but so much of it can be addressed in other ways and it's not just a police issue, it is in fact a societal issue."

Cities were largely quiet on Friday and Saturday. British police flooded the streets again to ensure weekend drinking does not reignite the rioting that shocked Britons and sullied the country's image a year before it hosts the Olympic Games.

More than 1,200 people have been arrested in connection with violence disorder and looting and hundreds have been charged. Police have set up screens in city centres showing pictures of suspects and plan to display them at soccer matches on Saturday.

THANKS

Tariq Jahan, whose 21-year-old son was one of three men who died in an apparent hit-and-run incident in Birmingham on Wednesday, told reporters he was "humbled" by the letters of support from people around the world.

"I also want to thank the young people in Birmingham for listening to what I had to say and staying calm," he said.

Osborne said lessons needed to be learned. "There are very deep-seated social problems which we need to tackle," he said in the interview with BBC radio.

"This about a far bigger challenge for our society which is dealing with people who we have ignored for too long and helping them feel they have a stake in society, feel that they know the difference between right and wrong, understand their responsibilities to other communities, not just their rights."

About 200 people took part in a demonstration on Saturday in north London calling for more support for youngsters living in grim and violent housing estates, a Reuters reporter said.

A ComRes poll for The Independent newspaper showed 54 percent of Britons say Cameron failed to provide leadership early enough to control the riots.

Most offenders are unemployed young men, though they have included a millionaire's daughter, a charity worker, a journalism student and a soldier.

The scale and ferocity of the rioting, not only in inner-city areas but also in some middle-class suburbs, has generated a debate with starkly different views, with many people saying the police should have been tougher.

The former leader of one of London's most feared street gangs said the riots were not the brainchild of gang leaders but, in many cases, the result of a build-up of frustration among young people growing up on grim housing estates with little hope.

"The fire's there, secured in a room, locked away and then someone's opened the door and it's spread through the house," Elijah Kerr, who transformed his gang into an organisation helping young people, told Reuters in an interview.

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