

Cameron: Will mend 'broken society' after riots August 15, 2011

LONDON, Aug 15 — Prime Minister David Cameron said today his government would mend Britain's "broken society" to prevent a repeat of the country's worst riots in decades.

More than 2,800 people have been arrested since a protest over the fatal shooting of a suspect by police prompted rioting and looting in the poor north London area of Tottenham, which spread across the capital and sparked violence in other English cities. Cameron, who returned from holiday in Italy last week at the height of the unrest, is seeking to tap into widespread public anger over the protests, which occurred 15 months after he took office at the head of a cost-cutting coalition.

"This has been a wake-up call for our country. Social problems that have been festering for decades have exploded in our face," Cameron, leader of the center-right Conservatives, will say in a speech on Monday.

"Now, just as people wanted criminals robustly confronted on our street, so they want to see these problems taken on and defeated. Our security fightback must be matched by a social fightback," he will say, according to advance extracts of his speech.

The stakes are high for Cameron. Any repeat of last week's lawlessness, in which shops were smashed up and set on fire and five people were killed, will sap public confidence in his government.

However, analysts say Cameron, a slick former public relations executive, could benefit politically if he provides the tough law and order response some voters are seeking.

Cameron has responded to the crisis by taking a hardline stance and his speech on Monday will refer to the dangers of indiscipline in schools and family breakdown, succour to traditional Conservatives who feel their young leader is too liberal on social issues.

NO EXTRA CASH

Cameron, 44, and his centre-left Liberal Democrat coalition partners will review their programme over the coming weeks, looking at issues like welfare and addiction to ensure that stronger communities can be built.

But the prime minister has ruled out easing spending cuts which some left-wing critics say are fuelling tensions in Britain's cities, where the gap between rich and poor is gaping.

Cameron believes that jittery financial markets will take fright at the first sign of backtracking on plans to erase by 2015 a budget deficit that peaked at over 10 percent of national output.

"Yes, we have had an economic crisis to deal with, clearing up the terrible mess we inherited, and we are not out of those woods yet - not by a long way," Cameron will say on Monday.

"But...the reason I am in politics is to build a bigger, stronger society," he said.

Opposition Labour leader Ed Miliband said the government had to help young people who felt they would face tougher lives than their parents or grandparents.

"Are issues like education and skills, youth services, youth unemployment important for diverting people away from gangs, criminality, the wrong path? Yes. They matter," Miliband will say in a speech he will deliver on Monday at the state school where he was educated in north London.

Miliband said a lack of morality was not confined to a "feral underclass" but had also been displayed by greedy bankers, legislators who fiddled their expenses and newspaper reporters who hacked telephones for stories.

"When we talk about the sick behavior of those without power, let's also talk about the sick behavior of those with it," he said, according to advance extracts from his speech.

ANGRY POLICE

Planned spending cuts have put Cameron on a collision course with the police, still smarting over his criticism of their initial response to the riots.

Police chiefs say a 20 per cent cut in their budget over the next four years will make it harder for them to maintain law and order.

Their anger has been stoked by Cameron's decision to seek advice from William Bratton, a US police chief who has worked in Boston, New York and Los Angeles and is considered an expert at tackling gang culture.

"I am not sure I want to learn about gangs from an area of America that has 400 of them," Hugh Orde, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, told the Independent on Sunday newspaper. — Reuters

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