

Blair announces plans

by UPI

LONDON - British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced Thursday he will leave office on June 27 after 10 years.

Blair, whose departure will spark an leadership contest, made his plans known in a briefing to the British Cabinet in a speech to Labor Party activists in Sedgefield, the BBC reported.

"Today I announced my decision to stand down from the Labor Party," Blair said, adding he would tender his resignation as prime minister to the queen.

Chancellor Gordon Brown is widely expected to be elected the new leader of the Labor Party and the next British prime minister.

Blair had told members of the Cabinet he didn't want tributes on Thursday, saying "that can be left for another day."

But Brown said he "did not think it would be right to let (the) Cabinet finish without offering thanks to the prime minister," the BBC reported.

He praised Blair's "unique achievement over 10 years and the unique leadership he had given to the party, Britain and the world."

Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain described the meeting as "cordial, comradely" and with "quite a lot of laughter" and "leg-pulling".

Blair will remain "focused" on being prime minister until his party has chosen a successor -- a process expected to last seven weeks, his spokesman said.

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