

Tory expert denies defeatism

The Conservatives' campaign director has denied a report claiming he warned Michael Howard the party could not win the next general election.

The Times on Monday said Australian Lynton Crosby told the party leader to focus on trying to increase the Tories' Commons presence by 25 to 30 seats. But Mr Crosby said in a statement: "I have never had any such conversation... and I do not hold that view." Mr Howard later added there was not "one iota" of truth in the report. The strategist helped Australia's PM, John Howard, win four elections. Mr Howard appointed Mr Crosby as his elections chief last October. Mr Crosby's statement said: "The Conservative Party has been making an impact on the issues of lower tax and controlled immigration over the past week." It added: "The Labour Party will be wanting to do all they can to distract attention away from the issues that really matter to people."