

No election TV debate, says Blair

Tony Blair has said he will not take part in a TV debate with his political rivals ahead of the next election.

"We answer this every election campaign and, for the reasons I have given before, the answer is no," he said at his monthly news conference. In October Tory leader Michael Howard said Mr Blair would be running scared if he refused calls to go head-to-head. In recent years the leader of the opposition has always called for a debate, although it has never happened. Before the 2001 election, plans for a debate between Mr Blair, William Hague and Charles Kennedy collapsed. In 1997 a debate between Mr Blair and John Major was also cancelled when a format could not be agreed. Televised debates have become the high point of the US presidential election campaigns.