

Former welfare minister Frank Field MP said the prime minister should sack Mr Brown, but did not believe Mr Blair was strong enough to do so. Mr Blair said the claims were "reheated from six months ago" and that he was concentrating on running the country. The Liberal Democrat parliamentary chairman Matthew Taylor said the personal ambition of Mr Blair and Mr Brown was "getting in the way of good government". According to Mr Peston the prime minister said: "Help me to get through the year and I will then stand down." According to a new book, Brown's Britain, Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown after Cabinet allies intervened in June 2004. Mr Blair said: "I've dealt with this six months ago. And that at a dinner hosted by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott he told Mr Brown of his intention to stand down. During the interview Mr Blair also said the former home secretary David Blunkett would play a "big role" at the general election. Tory leader Michael Howard accused the prime minister and Mr Brown of "squabbling like schoolboys". But, in a wide-ranging BBC interview covering issues such as the Asian tsunami disaster, the Middle East peace process and Northern Ireland, Mr Blair said: "When you get to the top in politics you get this huge swell around you. But the prime minister said he had discussed these claims with the chancellor and dismissed them as a "load of nonsense". Tony Blair has dismissed reports he told Gordon Brown he would quit before the next general election.