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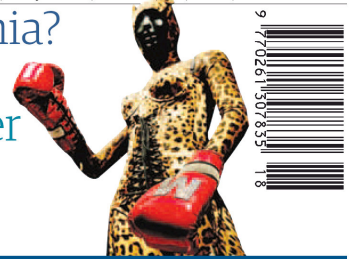


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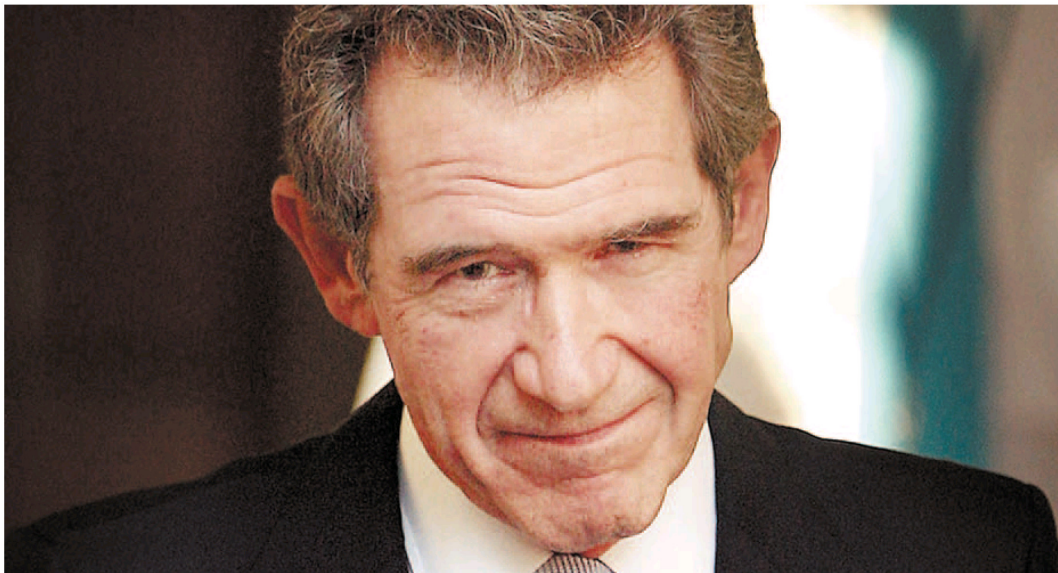


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BP's Browne quits over lie to court about private life

Cover-up over how he met partner leads to dramatic exit and costs him £15m



Lord Browne leaves BP's London headquarters yesterday after he left his job as chief executive two months early Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty

Ian Cobain and Clare Dyer

The career of one of the titans of British industry came to a dramatic end yesterday when Lord Browne quit as chief executive of BP after lying to a court about his relationship with another man.

Following crisis talks at the company's London headquarters, BP said Lord Browne had resigned with immediate effect after losing his four-month battle to suppress newspaper reports about the relationship. In doing so, he forfeited a leaving package worth up to £15.5m.

Lord Browne went all the way to the House of Lords in his attempts to prevent Associated Newspapers, the publisher of the Mail on Sunday, from disclosing details of his relationship with Jeff Chevalier, his Canadian partner between 2002 and 2006.

A series of hearings considered evidence about the pair's extravagant international lifestyle, disputed allegations that company resources were diverted for Mr Chevalier's use, and claims – firmly denied – that Lord Browne attempted to evade tax payments.

The 58-year-old, once hailed as "the Sun King of the oil industry" lost his case, in large part, because he claimed to have met his partner while jogging in a London park. They had, his close associates conceded last night, made contact through a male escort agency's website.

In a statement which marked the end of a remarkable career, including a decade during which the company he led was regarded as the country's most successful,

Lord Browne said: "In my 41 years with BP I have kept my private life separate from my business life. I have always regarded my sexuality as a personal matter, to be kept private. It is a matter of deep disappointment that a newspaper group has now decided that allegations about my personal life should be made public.

"I wish to acknowledge that I did have a four-year relationship with Jeff Chevalier, who has now chosen to tell his story

to Associated Newspapers. These allegations are full of misleading and erroneous claims. In particular, I deny categorically any allegations of improper conduct relating to BP."

Tony Hayward, Lord Browne's designated successor, who had been due to take over in July, was immediately appointed as chief executive.

The disclosure of the relationship follows the refusal by the House of Lords yesterday to grant Lord Browne permission to appeal against rulings made earlier this year by the high court and court of appeal.

The high court had decided to lift an injunction which covered a wide range of subjects, including alleged



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Hoon admits fatal errors in planning for postwar Iraq

Patrick Wintour
Political editor

A catalogue of errors over planning for Iraq after the invasion, and an inability to influence key figures in the US administration, led to anarchy in Iraq from which the country has not recovered, the British defence secretary during the invasion admits today.

In an exclusive interview with the Guardian, Geoff Hoon reveals that Britain disagreed with the US administration over two key decisions in May 2003, two months after the invasion – to disband Iraq's army and "de-Ba'athify" its civil service. Mr Hoon also said he and other senior ministers completely underestimated the role and influence of the vice-president, Dick Cheney.

"Sometimes... Tony had made his point with the president, and I'd made my point with Don [Rumsfeld] and Jack [Straw] had made his point with Colin [Powell] and the decision actually came out of a completely different place. And you think: what did we miss? I think we missed Cheney."

Giving the most frank assessment of the postwar planning, Mr Hoon, admits that "we didn't plan for the right sort of aftermath".

"Maybe we were too optimistic about the idea of the streets being lined with cheering people. Although I have reconciled it in my own mind, we perhaps didn't do enough to see it through the Sunni perspective. Perhaps we should have done more to understand their position."

He said history should have to decide whether the coalition should have anticipated the Sunni-Shia violence. "Given what we know now, I suppose the answer is that we should, but we did not know that at the time."

Of the summary dismissal of Iraq's 350,000-strong army and police forces, Mr Hoon said the Americans were uncompromising: "We certainly argued against [the US]. I recall having discussions with Donald Rumsfeld, but I recognised that it was one of those judgment calls. I would have called it the other way. His argument was that the Iraqi army was so heavily politicised that we couldn't be sure that we would not retain within it large elements of Saddam's people."

Mr Hoon, now minister for Europe, accepted that the sacking of so many Iraqis in possession of weapons and military

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National

Scotland's election hangs in the balance

The Scottish National party may be denied a clear victory in tomorrow's elections to the Holyrood parliament, due to a last minute Labour surge, according to a Guardian/ICM poll today – the last in the campaign. The gap has narrowed significantly, with the poll suggesting Labour rising five points since ICM's survey at the start of April, to 32% – though the SNP also climbs two points to 34%. Under Scotland's PR system, voters have a second choice according to regional lists, and though the SNP leads Labour by 1 point in these choices, if the surveys are replicated on polling day, Labour will win most seats overall. 16 >>



A portrait of the Queen by Annie Leibovitz has been released ahead of a visit to the United States

International

Teenager challenges Irish abortion law

Ireland could face a constitutional crisis over its abortion laws after a 17-year-old was prevented from travelling to England to terminate her pregnancy after doctors said her baby would only survive for a few days. The teenager, who is four months into her pregnancy and is in state care, is to ask the courts to overrule the decision, as the baby has a rare, fatal brain condition. Successive Irish governments have failed to clarify the Catholic country's abortion laws after a supreme court judge warned in 1992 that failure to introduce proper legislation was "inexcusable." Abortion remains illegal and the law is written into the constitution. 4 >>

Financial

Murdoch in \$5bn bid for Dow Jones

Rupert Murdoch wants to add the world's most influential business newspaper to his News Corporation empire through a \$5bn takeover offer for Dow Jones, publisher of the Wall Street Journal. His \$60-a-share offer could spark a bid battle. The New York Times and the Washington Post have previously expressed interest in buying Dow Jones, controlled by the Bancroft family, a wealthy but disparate dynasty. The offer, made privately two weeks ago, was almost double the prevailing market price for Dow Jones' shares and the stock rocketed by 51% to \$54.84 on the New York Stock Exchange when the news leaked yesterday. 19 >>

Best on the web – three years running

Guardian Unlimited has beaten the New York Times and Wall Street Journal Online to win the Webby award for the best newspaper website for the third consecutive year. The international Webby awards are widely regarded as the most prestigious benchmark for online publications. 