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Lord Ian Blair, Former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Dies at 72

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Lord Ian Blair, who led the Metropolitan Police Service through one of the most turbulent periods in recent U.K. history, has died. He was 72.

Blair, who served as Commissioner between 2005 and 2008, passed away, as confirmed by Christ Church, Oxford, where he was an honorary student and alumnus. The institution extended condolences to his family and described his significant contributions to policing and public life.

His tenure coincided with the July 7 bombings in London, one of the deadliest terror attacks on British soil.

Blair took charge just months before the 2005 attacks, which claimed 52 lives and injured hundreds more. The event shaped the Met's counter-terrorism strategy and became a defining moment in his leadership.

Blair, knighted in 1999 and later appointed a crossbench peer in the House of Lords in 2010, began his police career in 1974 on the streets of Soho. He quickly rose through the ranks and played a key role in identifying victims of the 1987 King's Cross fire.

Before leading the Met, he served as Chief Constable of Surrey Police and later as Deputy Commissioner under Sir John Stevens.

Blair's career

However, Blair's time at the top was not without controversy.

Just weeks after the 7/7 bombings, Brazilian national Jean Charles de Menezes was mistakenly shot dead by police at Stockwell Underground station. The incident, which took place under Blair's watch, sparked public outrage and intense scrutiny of police tactics.

Blair resisted calls to resign but was repeatedly criticised for his handling of the aftermath, including a delay in learning Mr de Menezes' innocence and alleged obstruction of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

Despite mounting criticism, Blair held his position for several years, backed by senior officers and then Home Secretary Charles Clarke, who called the shooting a "tragedy" and stood by the officers involved.

The Met was later convicted under health and safety laws and fined £175,000 over the incident.

Eventually, political pressure mounted.

In 2008, Boris Johnson, then Conservative Mayor of London, informed Blair he no longer had confidence in his leadership. Blair stepped down shortly after.

His tenure was also marred by high-profile rows within the Met.

Several incidents exposed divisions within the force and raised concerns about internal governance.

After stepping down, Lord Blair kept a relatively low profile but continued to speak publicly about crime, youth violence, and policing strategy.

In one interview, he criticised media exaggeration of knife crime, saying public perception often overrides statistics.

His death comes as the country continues to reflect on issues of policing, accountability, and leadership. For many, Lord Blair's career remains emblematic of the immense pressures faced by modern police chiefs as they navigate national crises and political shifts.