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Nick Clegg under fire as leaders head to Bristol for TV debate

Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg has come under fire over political donations as he prepares for the second televised election debate in Bristol tonight.

Widely seen as having 'won' last week's first TV debate, and riding a surge in popularity in the polls as a result, Mr Clegg woke to headlines in this morning's Daily Telegraph which claim he received up to £250 a month from three businessmen in 2006, paid into his bank account.

Meanwhile, the Daily Mail led on comments he made in 2002 about Anglo-German relations under the headline "Nick Clegg in Nazi Slur on Britain". He was also attacked in The Sun and the Daily Express, while the Tories said he had "questions he needs to answer".

Mr Clegg, whose popularity was on a par with Winston Churchill according to one headline last week, said: "I have done nothing wrong. In the next few days I will publish figures to prove it. I must be the only politician in the space of a week to go from Churchill to Nazi."

All three leaders are out campaigning in the South West ahead of the debate in Bristol. Mr Brown is visiting Airbus UK in Filton and Mr Cameron has been speaking to armed services personnel and veterans in Exeter as his party unveils its armed forces manifesto. Mr Clegg is visiting a parents and toddler group in Bristol.

The debate – focussing on foreign affairs – is due to be shown live on Sky News, Sky 3 and BBC News Channel from 8pm to 9.30pm. It will also be streamed live on the BBC News website, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. It will then be re-run on BBC Two, starting at 11.30pm.

Protests are expected at the Arnolfini on the city's waterfront where the debate will be held, while the Power2010 group are organising a 'Democratree' at nearby Bush House – where passers-by and protesters can post their ideas for reform as leaves on a 'tree'.

In other election news:

- Local politics are still firmly on the agenda with the city among the most searched for constituency on leading candidate website hustings.com. The city provided the most viewed constituency in the last seven days (April 13-20) as local issues such as access to preferred schools and regeneration dominate the election locally. The Bristol-hosted leaders' debate this week is expected to keep the city in the top 10 as the election approaches.

- The Labour Party Candidate for Bristol East is calling on fellow candidates to back the ban against fox hunting and reject cruelty against animals in the coming election. Kerry McCarthy has reaffirmed her support for Vote Cruelty Free, a non-partisan coalition of animal protection organisations working to put animal welfare on the political agenda. The alliance has sent its manifesto to all candidates announced for the next General Election and asked them to show their support for the issues raised.
- Bristol-based business information website FreeIndex has a poll of UK businesses which puts Nick Clegg way ahead in terms of which party leader they think will do the most to help their firms grow. 53% of businesses believe that Nick Clegg is going to do the most to help their business grow. This compares to 31% for David Cameron and 16% for Gordon Brown.