

France to tighten immigration controls after riots

November 29, 2005

PARIS (Reuters) - Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin announced plans on Tuesday to tighten immigration controls in response to France's worst urban rioting in almost 40 years.

He proposed a longer wait for citizenship for foreigners who marry French people, a tougher selection process for students visiting France and close checks on immigration by families joining a foreign worker already living in the country.

"The government will act firmly and with a sense of responsibility," Villepin told reporters after a ministerial meeting on immigration control.

He also called for tight policing of polygamy, which is illegal in France but some center-right politicians say was one of the causes of the unrest because children from large polygamous families have problems integrating into society.

Thousands of cars and some schools were burned in three weeks of violence in poor suburbs that abated two weeks ago. The rioting involved many disaffected youths of African or Arab origin, as well as some white youths.

Many of the rioters complained of a sense of exclusion from mainstream French society, as well as unemployment, and the unrest fueled a broad debate in France about immigration.

Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who threatened to expel any foreigners involved in the riots, told parliament on Tuesday that France no longer wanted "those people that nobody else in the world wants."

"I agree with what the prime minister said. We want selective immigration," Sarkozy said.

Foreign workers in France can now be joined by their family after a year, and around 25,000 people were involved in such moves in 2004. But Villepin said this was not long enough and the waiting time should be increased to two years.

"Integration into our society, notably a grasp of the French language, should be a condition for bringing your family here," he said. "That ensures the future of the spouse and of the children but also of society."

He said the conservative government should pay more attention to the level of integration by anyone being joined by his or her family in France.

Around 34,000 French married foreigners from countries outside the [European Union](#) and Switzerland last year.

Under Villepin's plans, a foreigner who marries a French person will obtain French nationality after 4 years if the couple lives in France -- 2 more than now. The wait will increase from 3 to 5 years for couples living abroad.

Foreign students wishing to follow courses in France will be subject to a tougher selection process.

Villepin said he hoped the legal changes necessary to carry out his plans could be presented "very quickly."