

News story: Vaisakhi 2017: Theresa May's message

I send my best wishes to everyone in Britain and around the world celebrating Vaisakhi, one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar and a time when families and friends come together to commemorate the birth of the Khalsa.

As Sikhs across the globe take part in spectacular processions, and neighbourhoods and gurdwaras burst forth with colour, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the immense contribution British Sikhs make to our country. Whether it's in the fields of business, the armed forces or the charitable sector, you consistently follow the pillars of your faith and in so doing set an example to us all.

Your values – of equality and respect, of fairness and helping those less fortunate than yourselves – are values we need more than ever, as we forge a new, ambitious, role for Britain in the world.

I am determined to build a country that works for everyone; a country where no matter who you are, you can achieve your goals, and the Sikh community is a vital part of that mission.

So as the dancing and the festivals begin, at home and abroad, I'd like to thank you for all that you do and to wish you a very happy Vaisakhi.

Press release: New £10 million fund to restore peatland

A £10 million grant scheme to restore England's iconic peatlands has been launched by the Government today.

Peatlands cover 11 per cent of England's landscape and provide a fantastic habitat for a wide range of birds such as the merlin, dunlin and golden plover.

They also provide 70 per cent of our drinking water and reduce greenhouse gases by locking away at least 3.2 billion tonnes of CO₂.

The £10 million will be available for wildlife trust and charity projects to re-wet mosses, bring back missing plants and restore a thriving habitat to our peatlands across the country. This is in addition to the £4 million Defra has already allocated to existing Natural England peatland restoration

schemes in England.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Peatlands are an iconic aspect of the English landscape which are not only a haven for wildlife but also provide us with clean water and help reduce greenhouse emissions.

This funding will help restore thousands of hectares of this precious habitat to its natural state and is a key part of our ambition to be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it.

Natural England Chairman Andrew Sells said:

Peatlands are one of the most important resources in England for wildlife and people. They are our answer to tropical rainforests, storing hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon a year, providing clean drinking water, beautiful landscapes and valuable wildlife habitats, as well as reducing the risk of flooding.

This investment will support practical restoration initiatives such as rewetting and seeding with Sphagnum mosses, an essential ingredient in restoring our peatlands for future generations.

In addition to this, plants and animals unique to this habitat, including the white-faced darter dragonfly and round-leaved sundew, will be better protected for years to come.

The funding will be available for projects that restore upland and lowland peatlands to their natural state, increasing their capacity to prevent carbon entering the atmosphere, reduce flood risk by slowing the flow of rain water and create habitats for vulnerable wildlife.

The scheme will open in May and funding will target sites with the greatest potential for greenhouse gas reduction. Projects that deliver better value for money and maximise environmental benefits will be favoured for funding.

Funding will be available for three years from April 2018 as part of Defra's £100 million of capital funding for direct investment in projects that support the natural environment. More details, including how to bid for grants, will be provided when the scheme opens for bids.

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Speech: "Al Shabaab remains a vicious threat to security in Somalia, and indeed to the region."

Thank you Madam President for convening this session and for maintaining the Security Council's focus on preventing conflict in Africa.

I also thank Kairat for his comprehensive briefing, as Chair of the Committee, and for his tireless efforts to advance the work of the Committee since he took on the role.

And as he has reminded us, Al Shabaab remains a vicious threat to security in Somalia, and indeed to the region.

The sanctions regime remains in place to reduce that threat from Al Shabaab and to tackle threats to peace and security.

It does so firstly through the arms embargo. The regime makes it harder for illicit weapons to flow into Somalia, and it supports the Federal Government of Somalia to establish robust arms and ammunition management, accountability and transparency. These are key elements in wider security sector reform, which is both essential and urgent.

To help make progress on this vital issue, in May the United Kingdom will host the London Somalia Conference, co-chaired with the Secretary-General and the Federal Government of Somalia. We will accelerate progress on security and agree the new international partnership needed to keep Somalia on track towards increased peace and prosperity by 2020. Central to this is continuing

the battle against Al Shabaab.

But as several Security Council members said during the peacekeeping debate convened by the United States Presidency last week, we cannot defeat armed groups through military means alone. The political progress made by Somalia in 2017 has laid the essential foundations for peace, stability and growth which will be so vital to ensuring that Al Shabaab's support is choked off at the political and economic level, as well as through the restrictions of the sanctions regime which denies Al Shabaab its revenue streams.

This sanctions regime cuts off Al Shabaab's funding, it preserves Somalia's natural resources for the benefit of its people and Somalia's economic empowerment, it tackles spoilers to Somalia's political progress, and it helps to support the development of Somalia's security forces. In this way this regime supports the Federal Government of Somalia's fight against Al Shabaab, alongside the bravery and sacrifice of the troops of AMISOM.

And now more than ever Somalia needs our continued support. The consequences of the drought in Somalia are far reaching and we must all take action now to address the humanitarian crisis, and preserve the political and security gains that have been made since 2012.

Turning to Eritrea, Madam President, I would like to commend the Chair for his great efforts, and those of his team for their work to engage with the Government of Eritrea since assuming the role.

The UK continues to urge the Government of Eritrea to comply with its international obligations, including compliance with the Chapter VII resolutions of this Council. We welcome the increased engagement by Eritrea with UN human rights mechanisms. And we continue to urge Eritrea to engage with the Committee, its Monitoring Group and this Council.

We should also recall that some serious outstanding issues remain. Firstly, the ongoing mediation by Qatar is vital to ensure that all Djiboutian combatants missing as a result of the 2008 conflict, including the bodies of any who have died, are accounted for, and their families given all the information available.

And secondly, the ongoing refusal by the Government of Eritrea to cooperate with the Monitoring Group, including by allowing them to visit Eritrea, means that we have no way of verifying the Group's lack of evidence for Eritrea's support for Al Shabaab, and of understanding the concerns about support for other regional armed groups.

We hope that by the time of the review of the sanctions on Eritrea, due following the mid-term report of the Monitoring Group, the Council will have some positive momentum to reflect on. To that end, we encourage Eritrea to take the opportunity for engagement, which this Council is once again offering.

Thank you Madam President.

News story: Joint statement: India-UK Defence Partnership

Minister of Defence Shri Arun Jaitley and Secretary of State for Defence Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP set out a shared vision for the India-UK Defence Partnership.

At the invitation of Minister of Defence Shri Arun Jaitley, the Secretary of State for Defence Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP visited India for the India-UK Strategic Defence Dialogue during 11-14 April 2017. The visit reaffirmed and consolidated UK-India defence cooperation in the framework of the Defence and International Security Partnership, agreed in November 2015, and the subsequent Joint Statement between the governments of India and the UK in November 2016.

This enduring defence partnership will encompass not only cooperation in defence industry but also stronger military to military engagement, including training and advanced joint exercises.

The renewed engagement will place capability and technology development at its core and seek to harness the complementary strengths of both nations in defence manufacturing and use the combined strengths of their respective private and public sectors to develop defence solutions for use in both home and shared export markets.

The Defence Ministers will also continue to consult and co-ordinate policies across a range of global security challenges, especially those intended to eliminate the scourge of international terrorism, in pursuit of their shared goal of a more secure world.

An Enhanced Defence Partnership

Based on the Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP) and building on existing Defence Consultative Group (DCG) mechanisms, both sides will explore additional areas for institutional engagement.

The Ministers agreed to further strengthen their naval and maritime interactions, including enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through the bilateral technical agreement to exchange information to track terrorist and pirate vessels, a key deliverable of the DISP. The two Ministers also agreed to further develop cooperation between the UK Hydrographic Office and the Indian Navy Hydrographic Office.

India and the UK will endeavour to build a range of Capability Partnerships focussing on varied aspects of military effectiveness such as specialised training interactions and exchange of best practices in the following areas: Counter Terrorism (CT), Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (CIED), Air

Force Training, Air Total Safety, Aircraft Carriers, Maritime Safety, Shipbuilding and UN Peacekeeping. Efforts are already underway with exchanges of subject matter experts to discuss air safety collaboration and future CT requirements. The Ministers tasked the relevant Executive Steering Groups (ESGs) to finalise proposals for consideration at the next DCG meeting scheduled later this year. As India and UK continue to transform and modernise their defence structures with a shared desire to maximise the efficiencies and operational benefits of establishing joint force structures, the two Ministers agreed to sharing relevant experience in this domain.

Defence Industry

Whilst acknowledging the progress being made, the two Ministers recognised the potential for further cooperation in defence manufacturing between UK and Indian companies under the 'Make in India' framework.

Minister Jaitley welcomed the UK's interest in manufacturing in India as evidenced through recent announcements including the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Bharat Dynamics Ltd and Thales UK on technology transfer opportunities for missile systems and efforts to develop an Advanced Hawk jet trainer jointly by the BAE Systems and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

To further encourage and facilitate cooperation between UK and Indian companies, the two Ministers agreed to extend the current Defence Equipment Cooperation MOU and work towards early completion of an expanded MOU that will provide a platform for UK and Indian industries to collaborate on and support transfer of technology on projects in areas of mutual interest.

The two Ministers welcomed measures to ensure life cycle support and sustenance of UK-origin defence platforms used by India, which may include setting up joint ventures and other collaborative arrangements.

The UK and India will encourage interactions between the Indian Army Design Bureau and Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S)/Army Capability Branch through their Defence Equipment Sub-Group.

The UK and India will explore establishing a secure communications method in order to share classified material. The two countries will also consider upgrading their bilateral General Security Arrangement.

Science and Technology

The two Ministers recognised the need for stronger R&D cooperation, including access to defence R&D training, to enable new and vibrant technology partnerships across the defence domain.

They noted recent progress made on Defence Science and Technology collaboration with the signing of the Phase 2 follow-on research Collaborative Project agreement on Human Sciences, signed at Aero India 2017.

Conclusion

The above commitments will better enable the UK and India to meet the evolving threats and challenges that face democracies in the 21st century. Both countries recognised their shared perspectives on the regional and international security situation and agreed to maintain their close interaction in this regard.

Secretary of State for Defence Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP thanked Minister of Defence Shri Arun Jaitley for the warm hospitality extended to him and his delegation and looked forward to a return visit by the Minister of Defence to the UK.