

PM greets the people of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, on their Statehood Day

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has greeted the people of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, on their Statehood Day.

Major problems with overseas aid for Eastern European countries

I was surprised to read in the Sunday press that some people think it a good idea to divert overseas aid to Eastern European members of the EU to “buy” a better deal with that organisation.

As I have explained before, there is no Treaty power to require a UK leaving payment above and beyond completing our annual payments to their budget for the period of our continuing membership. Nor is it legal under WTO rules to pay for more favoured trade with a particular country or group of countries than the rest. Payment for trade under WTO rules takes the form of accepting tariffs, and these have to be limited to the current mfn schedules the EU has agreed.

The trade choice is for the rest of the EU to make. The UK would be quite happy to carry on tariff free. That will help the rest of the EU more than us. It would mean registering our current trade arrangements as a Free Trade Agreement at the WTO. Or we can trade under mfn arrangements under the WTO. Most of UK trade will be tariff free, whilst EU sales of agricultural products would suffer heavy tariffs into the UK. The UK could agree lower or no tariffs with other cheaper suppliers of food around the world through the WTO process. I have said it is in the EU's interest to accept the tariff free offer, and they may do so after much huffing and puffing. I have also always said that they might decide to harm themselves by accepting WTO terms instead. Under the general WTO arrangements the UK will be fine.

The overseas aid idea also falls well foul of the overseas aid rules. The Eastern countries in the EU do not qualify for overseas aid under the international definition, as they are too well off. UK Ministers by law have to hit the 0.7% Aid target under international definitions, so they could not switch this aid money to Eastern Europe unless they repealed the 0.7% requirement. It would not be easy to achieve repeal, given the likely fact that all the opposition parties would oppose repeal other than perhaps the one UKIP MP. The government might be able to persuade enough Conservative

MPs to get it through the Commons, but the Lords would be likely to have a big majority the other way. As it would not be a Manifesto pledge, and does not stem directly from a referendum, the Lords might become very difficult.

In circumstances where the EU Commission and one or two large countries were not wanting a free trade Agreement with the UK for political despite their interests in having one, it is difficult to see how offering to send money to Eastern countries would buy a change of heart.

[Long-time Russian Ambassador to UN, Vitaly Churkin, dies suddenly in New York](#)



Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, briefing journalists late last year at Headquarters. UN Photo/Amanda Voisard

20 February 2017 – The General Assembly today held a moment of silence honouring the memory of the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, who died suddenly this morning in New York.

During a meeting of the Assembly on the reform of the world body, Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative, Petr Ilichev, informed those present about Ambassador Churkin's sudden passing.

The seasoned diplomat, who would have turned 65 tomorrow, served as Permanent Representative since 2006.

[UN Security Council condemns latest terrorist attack in Mogadishu](#)

20 February 2017 – Strongly condemning the latest deadly terrorist attack in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, the United Nations Security Council today reiterated that its determination to support peace, security and development in the long-troubled country would not be swayed by this, or any other such attack.

In a press statement that follows yesterday's terrorist attack at a market in Mogadishu that killed at least 39 people and injured many more, the members of the Council expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and Government of Somalia. They also wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

The Council went on to commend the swift response of Somalia's security and first responders.

It also reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice, as well as reaffirmed the need to combat the scourges in accordance with international law.

Further to the statement, the Security Council paid tribute to all Somali and international actors working to bring peace and stability in Somalia. The 15-nation body reiterated its determination to support peace, stability and development in Somalia and underlined that "neither this nor any other terrorist attack would weaken that determination."

[Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN](#)

20 February 2017 – Famine has been formally declared in parts of South Sudan, the United Nations said today, warning that war and a collapsing economy have left some 100,000 people facing starvation there and a further 1 million people are classified as being on the brink of famine.

"Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan and our worst fears have been realised," said Serge Tissot, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representative in South Sudan, in a news release issued jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

"Many families have exhausted every means they have to survive," he stated, explaining that these people are predominantly farmers who have lost their livestock, even their farming tools.

Famine is currently affecting parts of Unity State in the northern-central part of the country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan

The situation is the worst hunger catastrophe since fighting erupted more than three years ago between rival forces – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar.

The three UN agencies warned that urgent action is needed to prevent more people from dying of hunger.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) update released today by the government, the three agencies and other humanitarian partners, 4.9 million people – more than 40 percent of South Sudan's population – are in need of urgent food, agriculture and nutrition assistance.

The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

“More than one million children are currently estimated to be acutely malnourished across South Sudan; over a quarter of a million children are already severely malnourished. If we do not reach these children with urgent aid many of them will die,” said Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Representative in South Sudan.

“We have also warned that there is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security, both for relief workers and the crisis-affected people they serve,” said WFP Country Director Joyce Luma.