

# UK shines spotlight on Iran's human rights violations

The UK yesterday [25 Sept] brought together members of the international community and independent legal experts at a high-profile UN event to defend the rule of law and shine a spotlight on increasing concerns about Iran's human rights record.

UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth, UN and South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, opened the UK-hosted event at the UN's General Assembly in New York by saying Iran's recent behaviour sees them moving in the wrong direction and countries have a moral obligation to hold them to account, including on human rights.

Lord Ahmad opened the event, and on the panel was Caoilfhionn Gallagher, a leading QC who represents BBC Persian, Maziar Bahari, a journalist who experienced first-hand Iran's opaque judicial practices when he was detained, and Hossein Ahmadiyaz, a human rights lawyer who was arrested after openly criticising Iran's judicial practices. Professor Javaid Rehman, the UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, also gave his remarks by pre-recorded video.

UK Minister for the UN, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, said:

If Iran is going to come in from the cold it must comply with the basic rules of international law. It has got to stop seizing vessels unlawfully, fulfil its commitments set out in the nuclear deal, and start respecting the basic principles of human rights instead of arbitrarily detaining dual nationals.

Iran is moving in the wrong direction, and we have a moral duty as part of the international community to shine a light on their violations and hold them to account.

The event set out evidence showing Iran's failure to uphold its international obligations, which underpin the ongoing harassment of legitimate organisations, its own citizens, and the arbitrary detention of British and foreign nationals.

Lord Ahmad referenced a number of high profile cases that show Iran does not afford the rights guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including Kavous Seyyed-Emami, an environmentalist who died in suspicious circumstances in 2018 while in Iranian custody, Anoosheh Ahsoori, who was not afforded a lawyer for his initial trial, and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has experienced long periods of solitary confinement during her detention.

The audience consisted of several concerned states, as well as families and

relatives of those detained in Iran, including Richard Ratcliffe whose wife has been detained since 2016.

## **Further information**

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# **Government's streamlined messaging service to save taxpayer £175m**

- Government's Notify messaging service saves people time and hassle, reducing the need for chasing information and making time consuming calls to call centres
- Notify is on track to save taxpayers an average of £35m a year over the next 5 years
- Since its launch, the service has been used to send more than 500 million messages

A system designed to make it easier for people to communicate with the Government has sent out more than half a billion messages since it was launched less than four years ago – and is on track to save taxpayers £35m a year.

The GOV.UK Notify system allows public sector bodies and local authorities to send people important messages, ranging from council tax reminders to details of doctors appointments.

By reaching out directly with important information and cutting out the need for people to phone call centres or chase up information, it is set to produce savings of £175m over the next 5 years – a saving equivalent to the construction of 8 new secondary schools.

### **Minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden, said:**

Notify is a great example of how the government is using technology to make people's lives easier and save money.

This allows us to invest more in the public's priorities, with the savings from this initiative alone equivalent to the cost of building 8 new secondary schools.

More than 1,200 services across central government, local government, and the wider public sector use the Notify service.

**Minister for Implementation, Simon Hart, said:**

By working smarter, our Notify system has led to people having half a billion fewer phone calls, letters or reminders over the last four years – generating huge savings in time, money and stress for them.

The organisations with the highest number of services using Notify are:

- Cabinet Office
- Ministry of Justice
- Home Office
- Ministry of Defence
- Department for Education
- Department for Work & Pensions
- HM Courts and Tribunals Service

The work of the team that runs GOV.UK Notify has previously been recognised with the Operational Excellence Award in the 2018 Civil Service Awards.

**Pete Herlihy, who leads the Notify team at the Government Digital Service said:**

Notify is designed to meet the messaging needs of service teams right across the public sector. It's brilliant to see it so widely adopted and a great example of meeting users' needs at scale with a small diverse team.

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## **[CMA holds major consumer event in Edinburgh](#)**

The conference is the first of its kind to be hosted by the CMA's Edinburgh office and will enable the organisation to better identify and resolve consumer protection issues affecting people in Scotland. It's also the first time Andrew Tyrie will be speaking in Scotland as Chairman of the CMA. He will use his speech to highlight the benefits of the CMA's decision to significantly expand its Edinburgh office. The CMA will soon have space to accommodate 100 people – around 10% of its workforce. This will enable it to operate on major competition and consumer cases on behalf of the UK from Edinburgh. He will also set out some of the ways in which the CMA's work is already benefiting Scotland.

Scottish Government Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, Jamie

Hepburn, will also be speaking about ensuring the consumer voice in Scotland is heard.

The event follows major fuel company Certas confirming in discussions with the CMA and publicly this year that it will not enter into potentially exclusive contracts with petrol stations – a voluntary continuation of a guarantee it had previously made to the CMA. This means that drivers on the Western Isles will continue to benefit from the CMA's action to foster greater competition, helping to keep fuel prices competitive and ensuring people understand the price they are going to pay.

Topics being discussed at the event in Scotland today include how regulators can best protect vulnerable consumers; the growth and power of digital platforms; and the opportunities presented by Open Banking.

CMA Chairman Andrew Tyrie, said:

With our decision to expand greatly our office in Edinburgh, we have gone, in 18 months, from a team of 3 to a team of 50 people. And we are taking space to accommodate 100 people. This means that a great deal of CMA work that matters most to Scotland will now be done from Edinburgh. But we have decided to go much further. We want Edinburgh to look after more of the UK's interests. And we are already running UK-wide cases from Scotland.

1. The CMA board met in Edinburgh on 25 September. Minutes will be published on the CMA website.
  2. The CMA is continuing to increase its body of work in Scotland to ensure that consumers are protected. In June this year, for example, it launched research into Scottish legal services to determine whether there is a lack of competition among legal service providers in Scotland and what this could mean for customers.
  3. Beyond these specific Scottish projects, people across the UK are benefiting from the CMA's work. In August this year, for example, the [CMA secured £8 million for the NHS](#), which included a £800K share for the NHS in Scotland, as part of its investigation into drug firm Aspen for suspected anti-competitive arrangements. It also [blocked the merger of Sainsbury's and Asda](#) after finding the deal would lead to higher prices, less choice, and poorer quality for shoppers.
  4. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial department of the UK government with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries, and enforcing competition and consumer law.
  5. Media queries should be sent to [press@cma.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gov.uk) or journalists can call 020 3738 6460.
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# Free schools leading the way with top primary school results

Free schools in England are helping give six and seven-year-olds the basic skills they need for future success, as they outperform other types of school for the fifth year in a row.

Phonics results from the 188 primary free schools in England are 4 percentage points higher than in council-run schools.

KS1 assessment and phonics screening checks released today show nationally 82% of year 1 pupils are meeting the expected standard in phonics while 75% of year 2 pupils reach the expected standard in reading, 69% in writing, 76% in maths and 82% in science in their Key Stage 1 assessments.

The statistics show:

- 82% of pupils met the expected standards in phonics – up from 58% in 2012
- This figure rises to 87% in mainstream free schools
- 75% of year 2 pupils reach the expected standard in reading, 69% in writing, 76% in maths and 82% in science
- For mainstream free schools these figures rise to 79% in reading, 73% in writing, 79% in maths and 85% in science
- Girls outperform boys in both phonics and Key Stage 1 assessments
- London is the best performing area in the country in both phonics and Key Stage 1 assessments

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

If children are to achieve their full potential it's vital that they are given firm foundations to build on – and that's what these statistics show is happening. It's particularly pleasing to see free schools doing so well, illustrating the important role they play in the system.

Mastering phonics, which provides a solid foundation for reading, along with basic numeracy and literacy, means these pupils will be able go on to apply these skills in more and more advanced ways.

It's because of the hard work of teachers and our keen focus on raising standards at the earliest stages of education that we've been able to see these results.

Free schools, introduced in 2010, are funded by the government but aren't run by the local council. They have more control over how they do things.

Phonics provides pupils with the building blocks they need to read fluently

and confidently, as well as aiding future learning and giving them the tools they need to express themselves. Other countries are looking to emulate the success of this approach, with policy makers in Australia currently piloting this screening check.

The government has invested in programmes to help raise standards in our primary schools. In 2018 we launched a £26.3m English Hubs programme. We have appointed 34 primary schools who will support nearly 3000 schools to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. This is on top of £41 million to follow the same approach to teaching maths as world-leading countries through the Shanghai Mastery for Maths programme. □This is on top of wider changes to the primary assessment system which will reduce unnecessary workload for teachers so they can focus on what really matters in the classroom.

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## **Report 12/2019: Near miss with a track worker near Gatwick Airport station**

PDF, 2.8MB, 35 pages

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### **Summary**

At 23:24 hrs on 2 December 2018, a track worker narrowly avoided being struck by a train between Horley and Gatwick Airport stations, on the boundary between Surrey and West Sussex. The track worker, a controller of site safety (COSS), was undertaking work related to the electrical isolation of conductor rails and moved out of the path of the train just before it reached him.

[CCTV Footage of the near miss at Gatwick Airport station \(courtesy of Govia Thameslink Railway\)](#)

The Network Rail isolation planning process meant that BAM Nuttall planners lacked the information needed for them to establish the exact location at which work was to be carried out on the track. The planners lacked the skills and experience needed to understand this and so provided a system of work which provided no protection from train movements at the actual location of the task. The COSS recognised that the planned system of work lacked adequate protection from train movements, but undertook the task without implementing

an alternative safe system of work. A second track worker involved in the isolation task did not challenge the COSS about the unsafe method of working. The underlying factor was that Network Rail isolation processes did not provide planners outside Network Rail with sufficient information to always be able to plan safe systems of work.

## **Recommendations**

The RAIB has recommended that Network Rail should improve its isolation planning processes so that safe system of work planners receive the information they need to plan all associated work safely. The RAIB has also recommended that BAM Nuttall should improve its safe system of work planning process to ensure that its planners do not plan work without sufficient information to identify appropriate protection measures.

The RAIB has also identified four learning points relating to working in accordance with appropriate safe systems of work, challenging unsafe work practices, planners seeking additional information when needed to plan safe systems of work and use of train horns.

## **Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:**

Once again the RAIB has to report on an alarming near-miss between a train and a track worker. We have seen far too many of these incidents in recent years, and the recent tragic accidents at Stoats Nest Junction, just a few miles from Gatwick, and at Margam, which is still under investigation, are a stark reminder of how terrible the consequences of mixing trains and people can be.

When engineering work takes place on and around lines electrified on the conductor rail system, it is important that the conductor rails are isolated and earthed, to protect everyone from electrical hazards. Straps between the conductor rail and the running rail are the usual means of achieving this, although it's good to see that remote isolation devices are now being introduced at some locations. Placing and removing these straps is an important task, which can expose people to great risk if it is not planned and carried out to a high standard. In this case the plan called for some straps to be fitted on tracks outside the area protected by the possession arrangements, even though there was an alternative site available, where the straps could have been placed within the possession. The information about the alternative site was not available to the planners who needed it, and they did not identify the need for additional protection from trains when the straps were to be applied. We are recommending that Network Rail improves its processes so that all planners get the right information at the right time.

The staff who were given the defective plans did not challenge them. Having managed to place the straps without incident, they went out to remove them the next day, knowing that the straps were

attached to lines outside the possession, but believing that no trains would pass by while they were doing their work. It was considered OK to take a risk to get the job done, and no-one felt able to challenge this.

We have previously recommended, in two recent reports, that Network Rail should improve the leadership skills of team leaders and supervisors. Work is being done to address this, but railway industry staff at all levels must understand the importance of good leadership: getting people to do the right thing, at the right time, all the time.

### **Notes to editors**

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.
3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

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