

Foreign Secretary goes East to seize economic opportunities of South East Asia

The Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will join a meeting of ten South East Asian countries in Bangkok today (31 July) as the Government gets ready to leave the EU and strengthen ties with countries around the world.

On his first visit overseas since taking office, the Foreign Secretary is set to meet with foreign ministers from countries that collectively represent a market of 650 million people and have bilateral trade links with the United Kingdom worth £36 billion per year. This trading relationship is only set to grow, with economic growth forecasted for ASEAN countries, to be significantly above the global average over the next 5 years and the ASEAN region on course to become the world's fourth largest economy by 2030.

Speaking about his first visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

For too long, our trade focus has been on Europe. We need to expand our horizons, and raise our game. That means grasping the enormous global opportunities for the UK – and my first trip as Foreign Secretary will look to strengthen our friendships across Asia.

This region is already worth £36 billion per year in trade with the UK – and there are opportunities for us to boost that trade to benefit UK businesses and consumers. I'll also be looking at how we can strengthen our regional security cooperation, and work together on global challenges like climate change.

The Foreign Secretary will attend the opening ceremony of the annual meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers on 31 July and the gala dinner on 1 August. He will also hold a bilateral meeting with Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai.

Alongside economic issues, the Foreign Secretary is also expected to discuss a range of regional security challenges and how to deepen co-operation to strengthen the rules-based international system.

Notes to editors

- ASEAN countries – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam,
- As part of the FCO's diplomatic expansion, the UK will open a new permanent British diplomatic mission in Jakarta specifically dedicated to growing our links with the ASEAN group later this year. By the end of 2020 the UK will have 282 posts in 180 countries & territories including representation at 10 international organisations.

Further information

PM heads to Northern Ireland for discussions on restoring the devolved institutions

Devolution must be restored in Northern Ireland as soon as possible, the Prime Minister will say during a visit to Northern Ireland today (31 July 2019).

Boris Johnson will meet the leaders of Northern Ireland's five main political parties and hear from them on the progress of talks to restore the Northern Ireland Executive.

He will be joined by the new Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith who is representing the UK Government at the ongoing discussions.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The people of Northern Ireland have now been without an Executive and Assembly for two years and six months – put simply this is much, much too long.

Northern Ireland's citizens need and deserve the Executive to get up and running again as soon as possible, so that locally-accountable politicians can take decisions on the issues that really matter to local people.

I'm pleased to meet each of Northern Ireland's party leaders today to stress that I am going to do everything in my power to make the ongoing talks to restore devolution a success.

The Prime Minister also spoke with the Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar yesterday about how the UK Government will continue to work with the Irish Government to deliver a successful outcome to Executive talks.

Today's visit to Northern Ireland is Boris Johnson's first as Prime Minister and follows trips to Scotland, Wales and cities across England.

The Prime Minister talked on the steps of Downing Street about unleashing the productive power of every corner of the United Kingdom and ensuring there are opportunities for people right across the country.

He also announced this week that the Mid South West Growth Deal in Northern

Ireland will receive a share of £300m new funding, to help boost business and enhance opportunities for people in the region.

Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith said:

The Prime Minister's visit during his first full week in office shows just how important Northern Ireland is to this government.

It is of critical importance that new momentum is now introduced to the ongoing talks process, and that all of the parties work collectively to reach agreement. I'm pleased the Prime Minister has agreed to meet each party and help drive the process forward.

I want to ensure Northern Ireland continues to thrive and intend to work alongside the PM to build a prosperous, secure Northern Ireland for everyone.

[New UK border campaign warns of threat of African swine fever](#)

A new campaign was launched today (31 July) at the UK's border to help keep the damaging animal disease African swine fever (ASF) out of the country.

The disease, which poses no threat to human health but is fatal for pigs, has already spread widely across Asia – including China and Vietnam – and parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Cases have also been reported throughout Sub Saharan Africa.

This has led to the deaths of over 800,000 pigs and wild boar in Europe and an estimated four million pigs in Asia, causing global pork prices to rise. If the disease was found in this country, it could have a devastating impact on the UK's commercial pig stock of five million pigs, as well as the trade of our pork products.

The main ways that the disease can spread are:

- Tourists or travellers bringing contaminated pork products with them from infected areas. All travellers are strongly advised to avoid bringing any pork products – including preserved meats, ham or pork sandwiches – back to the UK. Bringing in potentially contaminated pork products from affected regions is an offence – it can result in prosecution and a large fine.
- Pig keepers and members of the public feeding catering waste, kitchen scraps or pork products to their animals. It is illegal to do so.
- Travellers returning from ASF-affected areas coming into contact with

domestic pigs, commercial holdings or smallholdings. The disease can spread via contaminated clothing, footwear or equipment, as well as pork products.

- Contaminated vehicles and equipment being taken onto commercial pig premises or workers wearing contaminated clothing or boots when entering pig premises.

Today's new campaign aims to safeguard the UK's pork and pig industries by targeting anyone who has the potential to introduce African swine fever to the UK. It includes a new poster campaign, which will be introduced to UK airports and ports throughout the summer, to raise awareness of the disease and the risks of bringing back contaminated products.

UK Border officials enforce controls at the border on illegal meat by searching freight, passengers and luggage and will seize and destroy illegally imported meat products.

Lord Gardiner, Minister for Biosecurity, said:

While there has never been an outbreak of African swine fever in the UK, we are not complacent and already have robust measures in place to protect against animal disease outbreaks.

This poster campaign at UK airports and ports adds to the strict control measures we have put in place to ensure that no live pigs, wild boar or pork products from affected areas reach the UK.

It is essential all tourists and holidaymakers do not bring to the UK any pork products to protect the UK's high biosecurity.

The Chief Veterinary Officers from the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, said:

Keeping African swine fever out of the UK is one of our top priorities. As we have seen around the world, its impact on pig farmers and the wider pork industry has been devastating.

The virus survives incredibly well in pork meat and can survive for months in smoked, dried and cured meats and likely years in frozen meat.

That is why it is crucial that anyone travelling from affected regions takes this advice seriously in order to ensure that there is no spread of the disease to animals in the UK.

Dr Zoë Davies, Chief Executive of the National Pig Association, said:

The NPA is delighted that Defra and UK Border Force are launching this campaign.

We have always stressed that the biggest threat to our pig herd is from products coming in from affected countries, so this is an important step to help keep ASF from entering our country.

The Government has estimated that a 'reasonable worst-case scenario' ASF outbreak could cost the country £90 million. We believe the figure would be much higher and that is why we need to mobilise every available resource and effort to help prevent such a catastrophe.

Major campaign launched to encourage the nation to 'Love Water'

The British public are being asked to help the country protect water resources for future generations as part of a major campaign launched today by more than 40 environmental groups, charities, water companies and regulators.

Clean, healthy and readily available water is essential for health and wellbeing, as well as economic growth, but as the climate emergency and population growth put increasing pressure on the water environment, the UK is facing hotter and drier summers and an increased risk of water shortages.

The UK already has less available water than most other European countries and the average person uses a staggering 150 litres per day. Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, gave a stark warning earlier this year that the country is approaching the 'jaws of death' as parts of England are at risk of running out of water within 25 years.

The 'Love Water' campaign aims to raise awareness of the importance of water and the role everyone plays in protecting it. It is the first time such a large group of partners have joined together to work with businesses and consumers to tackle issues such as pollution and wastage.

The long-term campaign is led by bodies including the Environment Agency, Water UK, Ofwat, NFU and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) among others. It will feature events and initiatives, such as beach and river cleans-ups and water saving projects, designed to engage the public and encourage them to enjoy water and the environment.

'Love Water' is also inviting businesses and other companies to get involved by supporting the campaign through promotional activity while pledging to do their bit to save water and protect the environment by reducing pollution and waste.

The campaign's long-term ambition is to call on businesses to make water-saving and pollution reduction part of their operational and corporate responsibility targets.

It is being launched as part of the government's Year of Green Action which aims to help people to connect with, protect and enhance nature.

Many people are not aware that actions like tipping waste liquids down roadside drains, flushing wet wipes or washing up greasy pans in the sink harm wildlife and affect water quality by causing pollution in local rivers, lakes and the sea. The campaign will raise awareness of the small changes people can make to achieve a big difference:

- The UK water industry spends £100 million each year on clearing blockages caused by the wrong things going down sinks and loos. In February, United Utilities spent 8 weeks clearing a 90 tonne fat berg beneath the streets of Liverpool – more than 84 metres long.
- Research by Keep Britain Tidy shows that 1 in 4 people admit to littering. Last year, a spring beach clean organised by Surfers Against Sewage removed almost 66 tonnes of litter from beaches across the country.
- 72% of people surveyed said they used wet wipes, although most brands are not flushable and can cause blockages and pollution when they get into sewers.
- One litre of oil poured down the sink can pollute one million litres of water.
- If everyone in the UK turned off the tap when brushing their teeth we would save 1,584,000,000 litres (1584 megalitres) a day.

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency said:

Most people agree that water is a precious resource but too often we take it for granted and don't see how our actions have a direct effect on the local rivers, lakes and beaches we all care about.

Our campaign intends to change that by urging people to use water wisely and to think before pouring cooking oil down the drain or flushing a wet wipe away.

We know that everyone has a duty to preserve and protect water and the campaign will also work with industry, water companies and other regulators in the longer-term to cut down on wastage.

Michael Roberts, Chief Executive of Water UK said:

The Love Water campaign is a great way to get the public to think about the link between the water we all use and the rivers and lakes that provide it and sustain our environment.

But we also know the water industry must play its role which is why

we have set out ambitious plans to reduce leakage alongside a new programme for helping the environment, which will see 8000 km of rivers cleaned and improved.

We all need to take action so that this country does not run out of water in the middle part of this century. Only by working together can we bring about the changes needed to ensure we have a resilient water environment now and in the future.

Rachel Fletcher, Chief Executive at Ofwat said:

We all have a part to play to protect and preserve this most vital resource. We look forward to working with partners within and outside the water sector to encourage everyone to do their bit and think about the value of water.

Martin Spray CBE, Chief Executive of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) said:

Every day in our wetlands we see the impact that poor water quality and quantity can have on wildlife. More than half of species in British freshwaters are in decline, with 13% threatened with extinction including wading birds like curlew and plants like triangular club rush.

We all need to make the mental connection that our water comes from and returns to the natural world – via our taps and drains – so it's up to us to care for that water for the sake of all life, including ourselves.

NFU Vice President Stuart Roberts said:

Water is fundamental to food production and is absolutely essential to nearly every food item British farmers produce. Water availability is often only talked about during times of flood or drought but we need to raise the awareness of its essential role 365 days a year. It plays an absolutely critical part in delivering safe, traceable and affordable food to the nation.

Tim Wainwright, Chief Executive at WaterAid, said:

Around the world, one in ten people live without safe water close to home. Water is a precious resource that we cannot take for granted, and we are delighted that the Love Water campaign is raising awareness of this important issue. It is vital that we work together to manage this precious resource in the UK and globally so

we can achieve a world where clean water is normal for everyone, everywhere.

Competition launches to find best quality early years apps

A competition to find the best educational apps for young children will be launched today (31 July) as part of a society-wide push to encourage disadvantaged parents to kick-start their children's early language and literacy skills at home.

Families in 12 pilot areas around the country will get free access to a choice of two of the highest-quality apps focused on early language, literacy and communication. These are designed to help parents think about how to use screen time constructively and provide meaningful learning activities for their young children in the years before they start Reception.

Tech companies coming forward with apps that meet agreed educational criteria, including elements of play, interaction and ranging difficulty levels, will be given a stamp of approval. Parents across England will be able to make informed choices about the apps they choose from among the hundreds already available on the market.

Children and Families Minister Kemi Badenoch said:

A great education is the key to unlocking every child's potential and ensuring no-one is left behind. We want to work together with families to give all children the best possible start and support parents to begin the learning process at home.

Digital technology means there is a wealth of fun activities at parents' fingertips, but the content of these is important too. That's why we want to help parents make confident, informed choices about the resources they use, so they can help inspire a love of learning in their children.

Today's competition builds on the Department for Education's announcement in February to provide free apps to disadvantaged families in 12 pilot areas. It reaffirms an ambition set last year to halve the proportion of children leaving Reception without the early literacy, language and communications skills they need by 2028.

While the percentage of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception has increased from 51.7% to 71.5% since 2013, more than 1 in

4 children still leaves that first year of school without the key communication skills needed to thrive.

Families in the following areas will benefit from the apps pilot free of charge from next year:

- Middlesbrough
- Oldham
- Halton
- Stoke-On-Trent
- Sandwell
- Leicester
- Enfield
- Tower Hamlets
- Brent
- Peterborough
- Luton
- Plymouth

Areas to take part in the pilot were chosen based on factors including the proportion of children achieving below the expected level of development in communication, language and literacy at age five, as well as a focus on some of the most deprived communities.

On average, disadvantaged children are 4 months behind in their overall development at age 5. It grows by an additional 6 months by the age of 11 and by the time they take their GCSEs they are, on average, 19 months behind their peers in overall attainment.

In July, the Department for Education launched a 3 year behaviour change campaign called Hungry Little Minds, giving parents access to video tips, advice and suggested games to help with early learning and helping to tackle the barriers some parents face in supporting their child's learning at home, including time, confidence and ideas of things to do.

It follows a partnership with the National Literacy Trust to bring together a coalition of businesses and organisations supporting parents to play a bigger role in their child's early education.