

UK Minister for Asia visits Mongolia to boost collaboration in trade, climate change and education

Press release

Minister for Asia, Amanda Milling visited Mongolia this week (11-13 May) following a two-day visit to South Korea.



During her visit the Minister focused on areas of UK-Mongolia bilateral relations such as trade and investment, foreign policy issues, climate change and education.

Minister Milling also co-chaired the UK-Mongolia Roundtable Dialogue with the Mongolian Minister of Education and Science and the Foreign Policy Dialogue with the Deputy Foreign Minister. These covered a range of bilateral and international issues.

Minister Milling also met other Ministers and senior officials during her visit. She raised global issues, in particular the importance of international condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Minister welcomed Mongolian humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and urged Mongolia to join the international community's call to uphold the UN charter in Ukraine and press for an end to the violence. The Minister also discussed continued provocations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and sought Mongolia's views on international engagement with DPRK and deterring provocations.

Minister for Asia, Amanda Milling, said:

I was delighted to make my first visit to Mongolia as UK Minister for Asia.

I held productive discussions on a range of bilateral and international issues and look forward to strengthening our relationship with Mongolia even further.

Seeing the Oyu Tolgoi copper mine and the transformational impact of UK investment was a particular highlight.

The Minister also had the opportunity to pay a visit to the Oyu Tolgoi copper mine in the South Gobi. It is managed by the UK/Australian company Rio Tinto and is the largest investment by a UK company in Mongolia. The mine is the largest employer in Mongolia and a significant contributor to Mongolia's development. The Minister was able to see the new underground phase and operations across the mine. It is set to be the 3rd largest copper mine in the world when fully on-stream, with amazing potential for UK investment and Mongolia.

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[New airport-style security in prisons sees record level of drug busts](#)

Press release

Tougher airport-style security rolled out across the prison estate in England and Wales has intercepted almost 20,000 attempts to smuggle illegal contraband behind bars.



- New X-ray scanners have intercepted almost 20,000 smuggling plots
- Over 40 of the most challenging prisons have also been kitted out with an array of additional new technology including drug-trace machines and metal detection archways
- Prisons White Paper outlines new strategy to transform prisons and cut crime

Over the last 2 years, more than 70 cutting-edge X-ray body scanners have been installed in all closed male prisons, producing super sharp images of

concealed contraband so staff can easily find and stop dangerous items from entering jails.

These scanners have thwarted almost 20,000 attempts to smuggle contraband on to wings, including one massive haul consisting of 81 individually wrapped white rocks of crack cocaine.

Building on this success, since the beginning of the year 42 of the most challenging prisons have been kitted out with even more high-end equipment. This includes new drug-trace machines that can detect microscopic smears of new psychoactive substances such as 'spice' on mail and items of clothing – stopping dangerous drugs from getting onto wings and wreaking havoc.

Gates at these prisons have also been beefed up with new metal detection archways and wands, extra drug dogs and biometric identification for the public. As a result, for the first time ever staff can effectively search visitors coming into jails and seize items such as phones and weapons that can fuel further crime and violence behind bars.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said:

With this innovative new technology, we are enforcing our zero tolerance approach to drugs, knives and mobile phones in prisons. Illicit contraband endangers our hard-working staff and thwarts the efforts of other prisoners who are serious about their rehabilitation.

Alongside abstinence-based drug treatment, getting more prisoners than ever into work and improving facilities to maintain family ties, our strategy will make our streets safer and protect the public.

This success reflects record £100 million government investment in innovative technology to keep drugs, mobile phones and weapons out of jails.

The government's ambitious plan to transform the prison estate and cut crime builds on this, as outlined in December's Prisons Strategy White Paper.

Commitments in the White Paper include:

- All new build prisons to be equipped with security measures that cut crime as standard, including the latest technological innovations to thwart drugs, phones and weapons; X-ray body scanners and biometric visitor identification
- New facilities to support those with drug and alcohol issues to turn their backs on debilitating addictions that stand in the way of proper rehabilitation, including abstinence-based therapy
- A new Prisoner Education Service will help every prisoner leaving custody to gain the basics they need to find work on release
- Transparent prison performance data and new targets for prison

governors, with an emphasis on reducing reoffending, improving safety and security, getting prisoners off drugs and improving basic skills such as numeracy and literacy

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[New prescription charge freeze to help ease cost of living](#)

- Freeze will help ease the cost of living pressures on households, saving £17 million overall
- Comes alongside record government NHS investment to tackle the Covid backlog and reduce waiting times

NHS prescription charges will be frozen for the first time in 12 years to help with the cost of living.

Charges usually increase in line with average inflation. This year – in a move not seen for over a decade – the cost for prescriptions will remain the same to help ease cost of living pressures and ensure prescription medication remains accessible.

This means people in England who pay prescription charges are saving £17 million overall. Charges for prescriptions will remain at £9.35 for a single charge or £30.25 for a 3-month prescription prepayment certificate (PPCs). 12 month PPCs will remain at £108.10 and can be paid for in instalments, meaning people can get all the medicines they need for just over £2 a week.

In addition to the freeze on charges, the NHS Low Income scheme offers help with prescription payments, with free prescriptions for eligible people within certain groups such as pensioners, students, and those who receive state benefits or live in care homes.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“The rise in the cost of living has been unavoidable as we face global challenges and the repercussions of Putin’s illegal war in Ukraine. Whilst we can’t completely prevent these rises, where we can help – we absolutely will.

“This is why I am freezing prescription charges to help ease some of these pressures and put money back in people’s pockets.”

The government and NHS is working to tackle the covid backlogs while reforming routine care services, ending long waits and improving patient care. The pandemic has put huge pressure on health and care services and over the next three years, a record £39 billion will be invested through the Health and Care Levy, so the NHS has the funding it needs. The NHS is opening new surgical hubs and 160 community diagnostic centres so patients have easier access to tests closer to home – with 88 already open, delivering over 800,000 scans.

In addition, the Health and Care Bill received Royal Assent last month, enacting the most significant health legislation in a decade into law. It marks an important step in the government’s ambitious health and care agenda, setting up systems and structures to reform how health and adult social care work together, tackle long waiting lists built up during the pandemic, and address some of the long-term challenges faced by the country including a growing and ageing population, chronic conditions and inequalities in health outcomes.

The government is listening to people’s concerns and targeting support at the lowest paid in society, with measures worth over £22 billion in 2022-23 to help with the cost of energy bills and to ensure people keep more of their money. This includes raising the threshold at which people start to pay National Insurance to £12,570, providing a £330 a year tax cut to 30 million workers in July. The National Living Wage has risen to £9.50 per hour – an extra £1,000 a year for a full-time worker, and taxes have been cut for the lowest paid workers on Universal Credit – so they can keep more of what they earn.

The prescription freeze will also apply to NHS wigs and fabric supports; these prices will remain at current levels:

- Surgical brassiere £30.70
- Abdominal or spinal support £46.30
- Stock modacrylic wig £75.70
- Partial human hair wig £200.50
- Full bespoke human hair wig £293.20

You are exempt from charges if you:

- are 60 or over
- are under 16
- are 16 to 18 and in full-time education
- are pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months and have a valid maternity exemption certificate (MatEx)
- have a specified medical condition and have a valid medical exemption certificate (MedEx)
- have a continuing physical disability that prevents you going out without help from another person and have a valid medical exemption certificate (MedEx)

- hold a valid war pension exemption certificate and the prescription is for your accepted disability
 - are an NHS inpatient.
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PM urges parties to restore power-sharing institutions on visit to Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland power sharing institutions must get back up and running so that they can start delivering on the issues that matter for the people of Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister will tell party leaders this week.

Delivering a “tough message” in private meetings on his first visit to Belfast since the Assembly elections, the Prime Minister is expected say that – while the UK government will “play its part to ensure political stability” – any action to fix the Protocol must result in all parties coming together to form an Executive and Assembly.

Drawing on his time as Mayor of London, he will say that there is “no substitute for strong local leadership”. Legislators must “get back to work” so that they can deal with the “bread and butter issues” like supporting families with the cost of living, cutting covid backlogs and fighting crime.

In his meetings with party leaders, the Prime Minister will also guarantee the delivery of three pre-existing commitments to Northern Ireland in the “coming weeks” including:

- Taking forward the Language and Culture Package agreed as part of the New Decade, New Approach.
- Intervening to deliver abortion regulations and place a duty on the Department of Health, so that women and girls have access to services that are their legal right.
- Introducing new measures to deal with the legacy of the past, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland setting out more detail in the coming days and weeks.

The PM will update party leaders on the UK Government’s discussions with EU leaders over recent days, in which the EU have confirmed that they will never change their current negotiating mandate.

He will tell party leaders “that we will always keep the door open to genuine dialogue” however “there will be a necessity to act” and protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement if the EU does not change its position.

The PM will make clear that the government has never suggested scrapping the

Protocol. There will always have to be a treaty governing the UK's relationship with the EU in respect of Northern Ireland in order to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland and protect the integrity of the EU single market.

Instead, the Protocol needs to be reformed so that it delivers on its initial objectives to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions.

He will say that there is "no disguising the fact" that the delicate balance of the Agreement has been upset by the Protocol, because one strand of the Agreement (North-South) has taken precedent over another (East-West).

This undermines the text of the Agreement, which makes clear that all strands are of "interlocking and of equal importance". It has eroded the historic economic bonds which link Great Britain and Northern Ireland and resulted in the Unionist community feeling like its aspirations and identity are threatened.

The UK and EU's "shared objective" should be for a reformed Protocol to enjoy "the broadest possible cross-community support" when it faces a consent vote in 2024, he will say.

[Bathing water season begins for 2022](#)

The bathing water season started today (15 May) with the Environment Agency carrying out regular testing of water quality at designated bathing sites until the end of September.

High standards of water quality at swimming locations are important for people's enjoyment of beaches and other beauty spots in England.

Throughout the bathing season the Environment Agency will issue warnings of any forecasted pollution risk on its [Swimfo Find a Bathing Water website](#). Signs are also put up at these swimming locations to inform bathers about any possible dips in quality as a result of factors like rainfall, wind and high tides.

In the autumn Defra will publish its classifications – Sufficient, Good, Excellent or Poor – for each designated bathing water site.

Since the 1990s, the Environment Agency has driven £2.5 billion of investment and facilitated partnerships to bring about the change needed to make our bathing waters a success story. The long-term trend for bathing water quality in England remains upward and overall quality is high. In 2021 99% of bathing waters achieved the minimum standard of Sufficient. Of these, almost 95% achieved the highest standards of Excellent or Good – the highest since new

standards were introduced in 2015. But while progress has been made, there is still much more to be done to ensure cleaner and healthier waters for people to enjoy.

Environment Agency Chair Emma Howard Boyd said:

Before the pandemic, coastal tourism in England generated £13.7 billion, supported 10,000 tourism related jobs, with 15 to 20 percent of employment in coastal locations linked to tourism – in some places over 50 percent. Public confidence in bathing water quality is key to the tourism industry as well as people's health and wellbeing. We monitor sites and provide pollution risk forecasting at over 170 sites throughout the bathing water season so people understand the local situation.

Targeted regulation and investment over several decades on the coast have driven significant improvements to bathing waters, but there is work to do inland. Water companies, industry and farmers need to meet regulatory requirements or face legal action, and there are small steps we can all take to help. For example by never flushing away wet wipes or plastic products like nappies so they don't end up in the water.

Designation does not guarantee clean water for swimming. Bringing rivers up to bathing water standards will be a challenge and places greater responsibility on farmers, water companies and communities to remove pollution that is harmful to swimmers. The EA is calling on them to play their part and working hard with all those who want to be part of the solution.

And individual actions count: small steps such as not pouring fats and oils down the sink or flushing wet wipes and other plastic products down the loo can help to protect water quality.

Knowing more about bathing water quality and the range and location of designated sites can help people get the most out of their visit. The EA's [Swimfo: Find a Bathing Water](#) website provides immediate access to information on over 400 designated bathing waters and notifies bathers when Pollution Risk Warnings have been issued. including coastal locations, inland lakes and the newly designated section of Wolvercote Mill Stream at Port Meadow in Oxford.