

[News story: Prime Minister of India's visit, April 2018](#)

Updated: closer military ties announcement added

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has today begun his second visit to the UK as an official Guest of Government, as part of the [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#).

The UK and India are bound together by numerous personal, professional, cultural and institutional ties, and also share a global outlook and a commitment to the rule of law, making us natural partners. The visit will help strengthen this partnership further, improving the prosperity and security for the UK and India.

Foreign Secretary welcomes Prime Minister Modi to the UK

[Foreign Secretary welcomes Prime Minister Modi](#)

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Prime Ministers' meeting

[Prime Minister Theresa May met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#).

They held wide-ranging and constructive discussions and underlined our strategic partnership and growing convergence on regional and international issues.

Read the [UK-India joint statement](#).

Memorandums of Understanding, agreements and partnership announcements

The UK and Indian governments announced a wide range of new initiatives and agreements.

View the full list of [Memorandums of Understanding and agreements](#).

Health

The United Kingdom and India will [extend their health partnership](#) and share research, knowledge and technology in areas of anti-microbial resistance, low cost health products and high yield crops.

Research

The UK will continue to [grow our already strong research partnership](#) with India with tech-focused investments that focus on issues of global importance including agriculture, clean energy, global health and the environment.

Tech

A [new UK-India Tech Partnership](#) will pair businesses, universities and others from different regions in the UK with states in India.

Trade

A [new India-UK Trade Partnership](#) will seek to improve the accessibility of trade and remove barriers for businesses in both countries.

[UK-India trade links](#)

Closer military ties

The UK and India will [continue to strengthen their defence and security relationship](#), working more closely together than ever before to tackle terrorism and threats to cyber security.

UK-India cultural links

The UK and India are joined by a 'living bridge' as thousands of British and Indian people live, work and study together each year.

[UK-India cultural links](#)

[News story: RAF's Legendary Dambusters squadron reforms to fly F-35 jets](#)

Gavin Williamson announced the new 617 Squadron after an event in Washington DC to mark the centenary of the RAF, which was attended by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier.

The naming of the new 617 Squadron follows the 75th anniversary of the

original formation of the squadron, commonly referred to as the 'Dambusters'. Originally set up for the highly-specialised mission to knock out dams and disrupt industrial production in the Ruhr Valley of Germany, the new 617 Squadron will be the first to fly the UK's brand new, state-of-the-art F-35 fighter jets – the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in the RAF's 100-year history.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The 617 Squadron name was made famous by 'The Dambusters', who played such a vital role in the Second World War. So it is fitting that by flying the world's most advanced fighter jets, our new squadron will be ensuring that the legend of world-leading air power lives on.

The F-35B Lightning will defend our nation and ensure that Britain remains a pioneer in innovation, with a unique ability to adapt to this increasingly dangerous world.

The UK is currently flying the F-35B Lightning, a multi-role fighter jet capable of a wide range of operations. It is the world's first jet to combine radar evading stealth technology with supersonic speeds and short take-off and landing capability.

Lightning Force Commander Air Commodore David Bradshaw said:

This is a most momentous day for the UK Lightning Force as we celebrate the reformation of 617 Squadron. Manned by highly capable Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel and equipped with the truly remarkable F-35B Lightning, 617 Squadron will once again provide potent, flexible Air Power for the nation.

In a simple yet highly significant ceremony held in the heart of Washington DC amongst friends and colleagues as part of celebrations for RAF100, the famous Dambusters marked the start of another exciting chapter in their Squadron's proud history. I very much look forward to welcoming 617 Squadron home to RAF Marham this summer as they prepare for operational service from land and sea.

The Dambusters

Wing Commander Guy Gibson hand-picked his bomber crews for the original 617-squadron, who then went on to deploy the iconic 'bouncing bomb' which had to be dropped above the water at an exact height of 60 feet and a speed of 220mph. The crews successfully managed to breach the Mohne and Eder dams.

Today's 617 Squadron

Today's 617 Squadron, currently training with the UK's 15 F-35B Lightning jets in America, will move to the UK with a number of aircraft to their new home at RAF Marham this Summer. Like their predecessors they will be operating at the forefront of aircraft technology.

The aircraft will be jointly operated by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy and have the ability to operate from land and sea, forming an integral part of Carrier Strike operating from the Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers.

[News story: Defence Secretary highlights importance of partnering with charities during visit to military recovery centre](#)

Updated: tweak

Mr Williamson visited Tedworth House on Monday, a recovery centre run by Help for Heroes.

The £24million residential centre offers comprehensive post-rehabilitation programmes and life skills courses to help injured veterans, service personnel and their families, lead active, independent and fulfilling lives.

The Defence Secretary was shown round the facility and spent time looking in the adaptive gym kitted out with specialist equipment.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are committed to making sure that our troops, veterans and their families get a fair deal and the best possible support on offer for their sacrifice and service to protecting our country.

Military charities such as Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion play a vital role and we work closely with them to deliver the care and opportunities our service personnel deserve.

Tedworth House is an excellent example of the Defence Recovery Capability initiative in action.

Tedworth House, based just outside the garrison town of Tidworth, is part of the Defence Recovery Capability initiative.

The Defence Recovery Capability is a MOD and Third Sector Partnership, providing the framework within which all injured service personnel are provided with the right support to enable a return to duty or effective transition to civilian life.

The MOD has a deep and longstanding partnership Help for Heroes. As well as the Tedworth House facility, the MOD, Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion partner on delivering the UK's Delegation to the Invictus Games, for which the Government provides £350,000 in LIBOR funding.

UK Team Trials for the Invictus Games were recently held at the University of Bath, with a record number of hopefuls trying out to see if they can make the team for Sydney.

With a renewed focus on mental health the Defence Secretary last month launched the 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline alongside over £200 million of dedicated funding. This is delivered through Combat Stress who are the leading specialists in mental health services.

[News story: Clean-up work underway in Salisbury in next phase of recovery](#)

Clean-up work is beginning in Salisbury after the appalling nerve agent attack, to bring a small number of potentially contaminated sites back into safe use for the people of the city and its visitors.

This follows the continuing handover of sites from the police investigation to recovery operations, including The Maltings, the cemetery, Zizzi and the Ashley Wood compound. In total nine sites, three of which are in the city centre, have been identified as requiring some level of specialist cleaning.

Today (Tuesday 17 April) a small cordoned area of London Road cemetery was the first area to be reopened to the public after extensive investigations and testing established that it was not contaminated.

All remaining potentially contaminated sites will remain secured and the current scientific assessment is that the remainder of Salisbury is safe for residents and visitors. Public Health England have reaffirmed that the risk to the general public is low.

Work to clean each site will involve a process of testing, removal of items which may have been contaminated, chemical cleaning and retesting. Sites will not be released back into use until test results and the work undertaken has

been reviewed and approved by the government's decontamination science assurance group.

The work, which is expected to take a number of months, is being planned and overseen by Defra based on expert advice from Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), Public Health England, Department for Health and Social Care, Home Office, and Ministry of Defence (MOD). The clean-up operation will be carried out in partnership with Wiltshire Council with support from the MOD, who are providing specialist teams to carry out work on the sites. Around 190 specialist military personnel from the Army and RAF will support the operation.

Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser Ian Boyd, who is chair of the decontamination science assurance group overseeing the work, said:

Our approach is based on the best scientific evidence and advice to ensure decontamination is carried out in a thorough and careful way. Our number one priority is making these sites safe for the public, so they can be returned to use for the people of Salisbury.

Thanks to detailed information gathered during the police's investigation, and our scientific understanding of how the agent works and is spread, we have been able to categorise the likely level of contamination at each site and are drawing up tailored plans.

Meticulous work is required and we expect it will be a number of months before all sites are fully reopened.

The public will begin to see more activity in the city as the work gets underway. In the coming days residents can expect to see current cordons around the most public sites replaced with secure fencing, backed by police patrols and security guards. At certain points during decontamination, some cordons will be temporarily expanded to allow workers access to the sites with specialist equipment and ensure public safety as work is underway. Wherever possible this sort of disruption will be kept to a minimum.

As work in the city moves from site to site the local authority will keep businesses and the community informed.

The clean-up work goes hand in hand with the [£2.5m already announced](#) to support businesses, boost tourism and meet unexpected costs in recognition of the exceptional response and recovery effort in Salisbury.

Baroness Jane Scott, the Leader of Wiltshire Council, said:

We are pleased that work will be starting to decontaminate the sites affected by the shocking attack in our city. Working together with local and national agencies we are doing all we can to help Salisbury return to normal. Our main concern is to ensure that Salisbury is safe for residents, businesses and visitors and that the city can focus on the future, its recovery and that it will go

from strength to strength.

News story: UK reaffirms African military commitments after five-nation visit

The reaffirmation was made by Mark Lancaster following a week-long visit to the continent that took in a wealth of projects in Rwanda, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Minister for Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, said:

From tackling terrorist threats in Somalia, to the role we have played alongside our UN partners in South Sudan, I have been extremely proud to see the way Britain's global influence is being exerted to support our partners in east Africa.

At the start of the visit, in Rwanda, Mr Lancaster met with President Paul Kagame, to find out how UK aid – which has helped to lift almost two million people out of poverty since 2005 – can continue to support continued growth and prosperity.



The Minister for Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, meets the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Crown Copyright.

He also paid his respects at a genocide memorial event in Kigali, which marks the start of 100 days of mourning for the hundreds of thousands killed in the mass slaughter of 1994.

The Minister then travelled to Mogadishu to examine the work being done towards the African Union Mission in Somalia, to which the UK is the third-largest donor, tackling the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and rebuilding stability in the country.

During the next leg of the trip, to Kenya, the Minister held talks with Cabinet Secretary for Defence Raychelle Omamo and senior Kenya Defence Force Officers.

He also visited the British Army Training Unit Kenya, where he observed UK troops conduct training, and met the staff of Permanent Joint Headquarters' East Africa Support Node, which provides support to our troops in Somalia and South Sudan.

The Kenyan leg finished with a brief from the British Peace Support Team (BPST), who coordinate much of the UK's military training with African countries, including work to stop the illegal wildlife trade. The BPST also supports the Women, Peace and Security agenda and helps to counter sexual and gender-based violence on peacekeeping missions.

Whilst in Malakal, South Sudan, he met members of the UK Task Force who are building accommodation and helicopter landing sites for the UN Mission in

South Sudan (UNMISS), to which the UK has pledged continued assistance until at least April 2020.

In Bentiu, the Minister met personnel operating a UK-run field hospital for UN aid workers, where British medics deal with the complex range of injuries and illnesses that UN operations in this area might face.

After meeting Mr Lancaster, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General David Shearer said:

I admire the way UK troops in the UN mission in South Sudan have integrated themselves and that they are now fully part of the UNMISS team delivering excellent engineering and medical aid and supporting the UNMISS Headquarters too.

In Juba the Minister met with the South Sudanese Minister of Defence Kuol Manyang Juuk where they discussed how peace could be brought to South Sudan and where Mr Lancaster reaffirmed the UK commitment to bringing an end to the violence in the country.

The final leg of the visit, in Ethiopia, included a meeting with the Chief of The Defence Staff, General Samora Younis and a visit to The Ethiopian Peace Support Training Centre.

Each provided an opportunity to reinforce the UK's continued support to the Ethiopian National Defence Forces with training for peacekeeping support operations.