

New UK sanctions target human rights violations and abuses in Myanmar and Pakistan

- on International Human Rights Day, the UK announces new sanctions against the Myanmar military for their role in serious human rights violations against civilians
- sanctions made in coordination with US and Canada
- the UK has also sanctioned a former commander in the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, who helped orchestrate a 2017 bombing in Pakistan

The UK has today (10 December 2021) announced new sanctions against the Myanmar military for their continued suppression of the civilian population and for serious human rights violations.

The sanctions, announced alongside the US and Canada, demonstrate the UK's staunch commitment to hold Myanmar's military accountable for human rights violations and our resolve to act, together with our partners, to limit its access to arms, equipment and funding.

The UK has also sanctioned Furqan Bangalzai, a former commander in the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, who helped orchestrate the 2017 bombing of the Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine in Pakistan. Designating Bangalzai for his role in the attack, in which more than 70 Sufi worshippers were killed, reinforces the UK's commitment to defending religious freedom where minority faith groups face persecution.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia, the UN, and the Commonwealth and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict said:

The sanctions made today target some of the most callous violations and abuses of human rights, including cases where civilians suffer unrelenting state repression and worshippers have been targeted and killed for their religious beliefs.

The UK will always be a fierce champion of human rights and we will work with our fellow democracies and partners, as a network of liberty, to hold to account those who deny these fundamental freedoms.

The UK will impose travel bans and asset freezes pursuant to the [Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations 2020](#) and the [Myanmar \(Sanctions\) Regulations 2021](#) respectively on those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses and those responsible for undermining fundamental rights and liberties.

The designations made under the Myanmar (Sanctions) Regulations 2021 are:

- the Quarter Master General's Office, which plays a crucial role in procuring equipment for the Myanmar Armed Forces and is responsible for overseeing a campaign of violence and human rights violations across Myanmar
- the Directorate for Defence Industries, a state-owned enterprise that has manufactured weapons and technology used by the Myanmar military
- the Directorate for Defence Procurement, responsible for buying arms from abroad used by the Myanmar military to undermine democracy and violate fundamental rights of the civilian population
- the Myanmar War Veterans Organisation, a quasi-reserve force for the Myanmar military which has publicly supported the military's undermining of democracy, violation of human rights, and repression of the civilian population

The individual designated under the Global Human Rights Sanctions regime today is:

- Furqan Bangalzai, a former commander in the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, for his role in the 2017 bombing of the Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine in Sehwan, Pakistan which killed 70 people

Today's announcement ensures this individual cannot freely travel to the UK, channel money through UK banks or profit from the UK economy.

Under the Myanmar (Sanctions) Regulations 2021

- the Quarter Master General's Office
- the Directorate for Defence Industries, a state-owned enterprise
- the Directorate for Defence Procurement.
- the Myanmar War Veterans Organisation, a quasi-reserve force for the Myanmar military

Under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations 2020

- Furqan Bangalzai; a former commander in the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi

[UK agrees 2022 fishing catch limits with EU and Norway](#)

The UK has today (10 December 2021) reached agreement with Norway and the European Union on catch limits for 2022 for six jointly managed fish stocks in the North Sea.

The agreement signals the Parties' continued commitment to the sustainable

management of North Sea cod, haddock, plaice, whiting, herring and saithe to ensure the long-term viability of these stocks. The agreement has also established plans to review the distribution and management of shared stocks such as hake – a measure that aims to safeguard stocks which are important for the whole UK catching sector.

Negotiating as an independent coastal State, the UK has agreed catch levels for 2022 with Norway and the EU that provide fishing opportunities estimated to be worth around £190 million to the UK fishing industry, based on historic landing prices. This will provide certainty and stability for the industry ahead of the new year.

Fisheries Minister Victoria Prentis said:

I am pleased to announce we have concluded trilateral negotiations between the UK, EU and Norway.

We are proud to have led discussion to a positive conclusion as we seek to set a gold standard for the entire fishing industry.

We are confident that this agreement has struck a balance that will benefit both our fishing industry and ensure our marine environment is healthy and viable long into the future.

Throughout negotiations the UK, as chair, has advocated for stock management decisions based on the best science available to ensure sustainable agreements are made and stocks are protected for the interests of our industry and a healthy, viable marine environment.

Catch levels for five of the six stocks have been set in line with, or lower than, the level advised by scientists at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

The catch levels agreed for 2022 (compared to 2021) are:

- Cod rollover
- Haddock +5%
- Herring +20%
- Plaice -12%
- Saithe -24%
- Whiting +25%

The UK Government has worked closely throughout the negotiations with the Scottish Government and other administrations to reach this consensus which seeks to benefit the entire UK fishing industry.

An assessment on the number of individual TACs set consistent with ICES advice will be published on the conclusion of the UK's annual fisheries negotiations.

Additional information:

- This trilateral agreement marks the conclusion of one in a series of annual fisheries negotiations. The UK's bilateral negotiations are underway, namely consultations with the Faroes Islands and Norway to agree quota and access arrangements for 2022, and consultations with the EU concerning TACs and management measures for the relevant stocks.
- This year the UK chaired the talks with rounds taking place in Edinburgh and London, maximising opportunities for face-to-face negotiations. Throughout the consultations the UK pressed for evidenced-based and pragmatic decisions to provide fishing opportunities whilst promoting the sustainability of stocks for the marine environment and industry.
- ICES produced a substantial increase in advice for a number of North Sea stocks, with haddock and whiting showing considerable expansion in their biomass. However, all Parties recognised that it would not be appropriate to take the full quota increase advised by scientists for these two stocks given their interactions with stocks like cod in the North Sea mixed fishery. Parties therefore agreed moderate increases in catches compared to 2021 to promote the health of all stocks in the fishery. The Parties have also agreed a catch level for North Sea herring below that recommended by ICES to deliver stability in the TAC.
- North Sea cod will be subject to the same tonnage limits as set for 2021. The agreed catch limit for 2022 is based on the published ICES advice, but is higher than that advice. This decision was based on the provisional landings data for the 2021 fishing year, which were not available when the advice was originally produced. This data suggests a realised fishing mortality in 2021 that is lower than that assumed for the published ICES advice. This catch level is predicted to allow the stock size to increase by a similar amount compared to following the published ICES headline advice. All parties will continue their individual management plans to protect the cod stock. The [UK's cod avoidance plan](#) uses spatial measures and selective fishing gear to protect high abundances of cod and spawning grounds

[Digging deep to mark end of £24m congestion-busting work at National Highways junction](#)

Press release

A VIP tree planting ceremony has taken place to mark the end of a £24million scheme by National Highways to tackle congestion at a busy roundabout.



MPs, councillors and representatives from National Highways and its contractors mark the improvements scheme coming to an end

The extensive works have included creating a 'half hamburger' roundabout at the A45/A6 Chowns Mill junction and widening the roads approaching the roundabout to create extra capacity for traffic.

Work is now coming to an end – ahead of schedule – on the Northamptonshire junction with the final batch of trees and bushes going in the ground.

MPs Peter Bone (Wellingborough) and Tom Pursglove (Corby and East Northamptonshire) were on hand to help plant one of the last trees on the roundabout today (Friday) and mark the successful completion of the much-needed work.

North Northamptonshire Council leader Jason Smithers and Council Executive Member for Highways, Councillor Graham Lawman, also attended the tree planting event as well as representatives from National Highways and contractors Carnell and Ground Control.

MPs Tom Pursglove and Peter Bone plant one of the final trees in the Chowns Mill roundabout scheme

Since work began on the junction in February 2020, the scheme has involved:

- around 275,000 man hours
- installing 43 new lighting columns, with energy saving LED lamps
- laying 6,250m of kerbing – stretching to almost four miles
- using 60,000 tons of imported stone
- lifting three superspan gantries, each around 40m long and weighing up to 25 tons, into place

National Highways Project Manager Dean Holloway said:

The completion of these ambitious improvements is good news for local businesses, communities and road users who will all benefit from smoother, safer and more reliable journeys without much of the congestion they previously had to endure.

Pedestrians and cyclists will also be able to use the junction much more safely thanks to the traffic lights and improvements we have introduced.

Knowing how important this work is for people and the local economy, we are delighted that we have been able to complete the scheme ahead of schedule and road users are already experiencing better journeys through this busy junction.

MP Peter Bone said:

It is a pleasure to be here, and ahead of schedule! I am particularly delighted for my constituents, especially those in Higham Ferrers and Rushden, who are already benefiting from the completion of this fantastic project. "The listening campaign, which was supported by so many local people, has delivered this extraordinary double roundabout which has massively reduced traffic congestion.

MP Tom Pursglove added:

These improvements are massively important to my constituents. This is a huge upgrade to our local road infrastructure on what was an incredibly dangerous road previously.

I want to say a huge thank you to everyone at National Highways and to my constituents who supported all of the campaigning that went on to deliver these improvements. I think it's really welcome that it is a much safer roundabout. The new layout makes absolute sense and is really easy to navigate. It's a big success.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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Change to maximum Plan 2 and Plan 3 student loan interest rates

News story

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a change to maximum Plan 2 and Plan 3 student loan interest rates



From 1 January 2022 until 28 February 2022, the maximum interest rate applied to Plan 2 Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) student loans and the interest rate applied to Postgraduate loans will be capped in line with the prevailing market rate for comparable unsecured personal loans, which have recently reduced. From 1 March 2022, the maximum Plan 2 and the Postgraduate loan interest rates are expected to revert to RPI +3%.

The Government regularly monitors the interest rates set on student loans against the interest rates prevailing on the market for comparable loans. Following a decline in the prevailing market rate, the Government will temporarily reduce the maximum Plan 2 and the Postgraduate loan interest rate in line with the prevailing market rate. The reduction will be 0.1 percentage point on the maximum student loan interest rate to reflect the average market rates during the preceding monitoring period.

- The maximum Plan 2 ICR student loan interest rate and the Postgraduate loan interest rate will be 4.4% between 1 January 2022 until 28 February 2022.
- The maximum Plan 2 ICR student loan interest rate and the Postgraduate loan interest rate is expected to revert to 4.5% (RPI +3%) from 1 March 2022.

Interest rates on Plan 2 ICR student loans vary by income. Where the applied interest rate is already below the level of the cap, the interest rates will be unaffected.

- The SoS is required by section 22(4) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (THEA) to ensure that student loan interest rates are either below the prevailing market rate, or no higher than the

- prevailing market rate if the loan offers better terms and conditions.
- The Department for Education and the Welsh Government have confirmed the change following a decrease in the prevailing market rate.
 - Plan 2 borrowers will continue to repay 9% of their earnings over the repayment threshold. The repayment threshold for Plan 2 ICR loans remains at £27,295 for FY21-22.
 - Plan 2 ICR loans are those loans taken out for a course starting after 1 September 2012 (England and Wales).
 - Postgraduate loan borrowers will continue to repay 6% of their earnings over the repayment threshold. The repayment threshold for Postgraduate loans remains at £21,000 for FY21-22.
 - Postgraduate loans are those loans taken out for Postgraduate level study.
 - Plan 1 ICR loans, those loans taken out for a course starting before 1 September 2012 are not affected.
 - By “RPI” we mean the percentage increase between the retail prices all items index published by the Office for National Statistics for the two Marches immediately before the commencement of the academic year.

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[Martin Thomas is confirmed as the new Charity Commission Chair](#)

Press release

Martin Thomas has been confirmed as Chair of the Charity Commission, following pre-appointment scrutiny.



Martin Thomas appeared before MPs on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee for pre-appointment scrutiny on 9th December 2021, who have now confirmed the appointment.

In a [report published today](#), MPs commented that Mr Thomas will bring 'considerable experience in, and knowledge of, the charity sector' as that he had a 'sound awareness of the challenges facing the sector and the regulator's role vis-à-vis its wide range of stakeholders'.

Martin has been appointed from 27th December 2021 – 26th December 2024.

Martin Thomas has over 20 years' experience in the insurance and financial services sectors including roles at the Bank of England, the European Commission and the European Central Bank. Martin currently holds a number of charitable roles (which he will step down from) and is the Chair of NHS Resolution.

Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Nadine Dorries said:

I would like to offer a very warm welcome to Martin Thomas, who brings both a broad range of regulatory and charity sector experience to the role of Charity Commission Chair.

I look forward to working with Martin as he takes on this important post, ensuring public confidence in our charities is maintained. I would also like to thank and pay tribute to Ian Karet for all his hard work as interim chair.

Martin Thomas said:

The Charity Commission is seen as independent, precise, clear, consistent, calm and just. It has true authority and expertise in the areas where it operates. I am very honoured and very proud to have a chance to help it hold fast to these attributes as it enters the next chapter of its history.

Under the terms of the legislation, the appointment is made by the Secretary of State.

Ministers were assisted in their decision-making by an Advisory Assessment Panel which included a departmental official and a senior independent panel member approved by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The appointment is for a term of three years. The role is for two and a half days per week, remunerated at £62,500 per annum.
- This appointment is made in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Governance for Public Appointments.

- The regulation of public appointments against the requirements of this code is carried out by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.
- In accordance with the code, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if any declared) to be made public. Martin Thomas has not declared any political activity.

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