

UK hosts Iraqi Prime Minister for talks – October 2020

- Today the UK launched the Iraqi Economic Contact Group to mobilise international support for an urgent economic reform programme.
- A three-year project worth £6 million will also be set up by the UK to provide world-leading expertise to and improve security and deliver the economic reforms.
- Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi met with HRH The Prince of Wales, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab during his first official visit to the UK since becoming Prime Minister in May.

Reforming the economy and improving the security situation are vital if Iraq is to build back better from coronavirus, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said, after his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi yesterday (Thursday 22 October).

HRH The Prince of Wales and Prime Minister Boris Johnson also met Kadhimi yesterday (Thursday 22 October), their first meetings with him since he became Prime Minister of Iraq.

Rising COVID-19 cases and depressed oil prices have left Iraq in urgent need of international support. The UK is launching a £6 million three-year programme to support the Government of Iraq's capacity to tackle these challenges. The new project will draw on world-leading expertise from the public and private sectors to boost stability and deliver critical economic changes to drive growth.

The UK has also brought together the international community to form the Iraqi Economic Contact Group (IECG), which will work with the Iraqi Government to develop a roadmap to halt an economic crisis and create opportunities for Iraq's people to secure better futures. The IECG's inaugural session was opened at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance minister Ali Allawi and UK's Minister for the Middle East James Cleverly, and attended virtually by delegations across the world.

Recent militia attacks in Baghdad and Erbil have endangered both Iraqi citizens and diplomatic personnel. The UK is working with the Iraqi Government to strengthen security measures, so that Iraqi citizens and foreign personnel can live and work safely. As a leading member of the Global Coalition, we are also at the forefront of efforts to support the Iraqi people against Daesh's violent extremist ideology.

The UK and Iraq also have a long history of collaborating to protect cultural heritage and to celebrate this, the Iraqi Prime Minister and UK Media & Culture Minister John Whittingdale visited the British Museum on Friday morning to see the museum's ancient Mesopotamian collections. They also saw the Sumerian Plaque identified by the British Museum on the art market as

being illegally exported from Iraq and which is being temporarily displayed at the Museum, before it is repatriated to Iraq.

The UK-led Protect Cultural Heritage campaign helps to preserve and restore Iraq's cultural heritage, which has ruthlessly been targeted by Daesh for exploitation and destruction. The campaign, which is run by the Global Coalition's Communications Cell also includes the UK Government supported British Museum Iraq scheme, which has helped to train over 50 Iraqi archaeologists from the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to deliver the expertise needed to undertake vital reconstruction projects in damaged heritage sites.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- The inaugural meeting of the Iraqi Economic Contact Group (IECG) was opened at the FCDO by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance minister Ali Allawi and UK's Minister for the Middle East James Cleverly. Countries and institutions including the G7, EU, and the World Bank, attended and signed a communique pledging their support for Iraqi Economic Reform.
- The £6 million Technical Assistance Facility project, will be funded by UK aid from the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF).
- The UK has also committed £16.9 million to combat COVID-19 in Iraq since the start of the pandemic, working with organisations including the UNDP, World Bank, IOM and Red Cross.
- The meeting between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi took place yesterday (Thursday 22 October), and you can find the readout [here](#).

[Foreign Secretary statement on normalisation of Israel and Sudan relations](#)

News story

Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, comments on the announcement of the normalisation of relations between Israel and Sudan.



Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said:

I welcome today's announcement of the normalisation of relations between Israel and Sudan – a positive step between two valued friends. This step is a boost for the democratic transition in Sudan, and peace in the region.

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[Five simple steps to transform gardens into 'hedgehog havens'](#)



Small changes to our outdoor areas and gardening habits can help create a 'hedgehog haven' and protect this iconic animal, announced Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss.

Speaking today, the Environment Secretary lent her support to campaigns encouraging local communities to work together to look out for the hedgehog and make gardens as welcoming as possible. From letting grassy areas grow wild to providing food and shelter, she explained the simple steps we can all take to protect hedgehogs.

Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Hedgehogs are one of our most treasured animals and play an important role in both this country's heritage and natural environment.

Glimpsing hedgehogs in my garden is one of my fondest childhood memories and inspired me to learn more about the world around me.

I want to ensure children for generations to come can enjoy this special sight, but this can only happen if everyone does their bit to look out for these important creatures – that's why we have developed these simple tips to help adults and children alike learn more about our precious wildlife and how we can all support it.

Defra has worked with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and People's Trust for Endangered Species to provide five easy ways everyone can help hedgehogs thrive in back gardens.

[Help a hedgehog today](#)

The five tips for creating a hedgehog haven in your garden are:

1. Let areas of garden grow wild to mimic hedgehogs' natural habitat
2. Provide shelter through logs piles and hedgehog homes
3. Do not use pesticides and poisons
4. Leave out water and foods such as meaty cat or dog food and cat biscuits
5. Consider adding a 'hedgehog highway' – a CD case sized gap – in fences or walls to allow hedgehogs to move between gardens

Fay Vass, Chief Executive of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society said:

We are delighted that the Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss is speaking out on how to help hedgehogs.

With their population falling by a third in urban areas and by half in rural areas since 2000, doing all we can to help Britain's only spiny mammal is more important now than ever.

I hope these tips will inspire people to find out more and perhaps even become a Hedgehog Champion themselves at www.hedgehogstreet.org.

These tips come ahead of plans to provide one million native British trees to schools and local communities as part of a new Government campaign later this year to connect children with nature and the environment. They also support Defra's 25 year environment plan which will be published later in the year as part of a comprehensive, long-term vision to protect and enhance the country's natural environment.

Published 9 March 2016

Last updated 23 October 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 23 October 2020

Updated the 5 tips with the latest advice.

2. 9 March 2016

First published.

[Local COVID alert level update for South Yorkshire](#)

Following close discussions with local leaders, South Yorkshire will move from local COVID alert level high to very high from 00.01 on Saturday 24 October. This means that new measures will come into place including:

- people must not socialise with anybody they do not live with, or have formed a support bubble with, in any indoor setting or in any private garden or at most outdoor hospitality venues and ticketed events
- people must not socialise in a group of more than 6 in an outdoor public space such as a park or beach, the countryside, a public garden or a sports venue
- all pubs and bars must close, unless they are serving substantial meals
- people should try to avoid travelling outside the very high alert level or entering a very high alert level area, other than for work, education or for caring responsibilities or to travel through as part of a longer journey
- residents should avoid staying overnight in another part of the UK, and others should avoid staying overnight in the very high alert area

In addition, following discussions with local leaders it was agreed that from 00.01 on Saturday 24 October additional closures will include:

- betting shops
- adult gaming centres
- casinos
- soft play centres

The rate of COVID-19 infections is rising rapidly across the UK.

The case rate in England stood at 169 people per 100,000 from 9 October to 15 October, up from 100 people per 100,000 for the week 25 September to 1 October. Cases are not evenly spread, with infection rates rising more rapidly in some areas than others.

In South Yorkshire rates are among the highest in the country and continuing to rise rapidly with case rates ranging from 285 people per 100,000 in Doncaster up to 402 people per 100,000 in Sheffield.

Although originally focused on the younger population, we are seeing rises in the older population now as well. In order to reduce these numbers and ensure that the NHS isn't overwhelmed and has capacity to treat other conditions we need to act now.

To support the local authority during this period, the government will be providing a financial support package. In addition to the £ 1 billion of funding the Prime Minister set out on Monday 12 October. This includes additional funding of £11.2 million for local enforcement and contact tracing activity.

Additional financial support will also be provided for local companies – recognising the additional strain these measures will place on businesses.

Local COVID alert level very high will take effect across all parts of South Yorkshire. It will cover:

- Barnsley
- Doncaster
- Rotherham
- the City of Sheffield

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I'm very grateful to the local leadership in South Yorkshire who have worked together closely, cross party, on the need for additional measures to protect lives and livelihoods. A failure to act now would only lead to tougher and longer lasting restrictions later.

I understand the sacrifice people in South Yorkshire have already made and the enormous impact further measures will have on people's lives. That is why we are also providing support to businesses and contact tracing activity across South Yorkshire.

Now is the time for us all to work together to get this virus under control.

Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick said:

I would like to thank the Mayor of the Sheffield City Region Dan Jarvis and the leaders of the local councils of South Yorkshire for the constructive discussions we have had about how to get the virus under control in the region.

Given rates are amongst the highest in the country I am pleased that we were able to reach an agreement that ensures swift action is taken in accordance with the public health advice. I fully recognise the huge impact this will have on communities in the area and the sacrifices people will be making. That's why we have agreed an extensive package of support for local people, businesses and councils.

The restrictions we have agreed together will only be in place for as long as they are absolutely necessary. They will be reviewed jointly in 28 days' time.

The government is totally committed to working with local leaders as we tackle this challenge, for the benefit of all the people of South Yorkshire.

All available data for the areas that will move to local COVID alert level very high at 00.01 on Saturday 24 October have been assessed by the government, including the Health and Social Care Secretary, NHS Test and Trace including the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), Public Health England (PHE), the Chief Medical Officer and the Cabinet Office. Data assessed includes incidence, test positivity and the growth rate of the virus.

It is essential that these outbreaks are contained to protect lives and our NHS, and prevent greater economic damage in the future. We face a new challenge as we head into the winter, and we know that even mild cases of COVID-19 can have devastating consequences for people in all age groups, along with the risk of Long COVID. Our strategy is to suppress the virus while supporting the economy, education and the NHS, until an effective vaccine is widely available. Local action is at the centre of our response, and engagement with local authorities is, and will continue to be, a key part of this process.

The 7-day case rates per 100,000 for South Yorkshire are as follows:

- Sheffield: 402
- Barnsley: 367
- Rotherham: 341
- Doncaster: 285

On 12 October, the government introduced a new, simplified framework for local interventions based around 3 new local COVID alert levels.

The [postcode checker](#) shows which alert level applies in each area.

The NHS COVID-19 app will also direct people to this information.

We have provided £3.7 billion of funding to local authorities in England to respond to pressures in all their services.

The Prime Minister also announced on Monday 12 October additional COVID funding of around £1 billion which will provide Local Authorities with additional money to protect vital services. The Government will set out further information in due course on how this new funding will be allocated.

See guidance on each [local COVID alert level](#).

Throughout the pandemic, the government has listened carefully to the views of the scientific community, in particular the information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and its sub-groups when taking decisions on the best way to tackle the pandemic.

Minister for Africa commits £8m to mitigate famine in South Sudan

The UK Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, travelled to South Sudan this week (20 to 22 October) where he committed £8 million to help the victims of flooding, reduce extreme hunger and help mitigate the ongoing risk of famine in the country. He was joined by the UK's Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer.

This support will help the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide food assistance, nutrition support, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene support. This will help some of the most vulnerable in areas where nearly a million people have been affected by flooding and conflict, leaving them on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe.

The announcement was made during a visit to Pibor and Bor to see first-hand how UK aid is providing vital assistance to people facing flooding, conflict and severe hunger.

The minister also had the opportunity to speak to the President and Vice Presidents of South Sudan about the peace process, ensuring humanitarian access, and preventing famine.

James Duddridge, Minister for Africa said:

The UK stands with the people of South Sudan and is helping save lives.

We will provide vital food and support to thousands of people on the brink of hunger, following devastating flooding and conflict.

However, aid is not a long-term solution. The Government of South Sudan must commit more resources to ending conflict, bringing peace and stability and providing basic services including health and education to its people.

Matthew Hollingworth, WFP Country Director in South Sudan said:

Conflict, extreme flooding and increases in violence mean South Sudan is facing humanitarian catastrophe. Millions of households are skipping meals.

This new UK funding to tackle food insecurity will help alleviate some of this suffering.

However, other donors must urgently step up efforts, while the Government of South Sudan must continue to ensure access to those in need.

- Around 7.5 million people in South Sudan already need humanitarian assistance, according to the UN, with an estimated 6.5 million facing acute levels of hunger.
- An estimated 800,000 people have been affected by flooding in areas in the country along the White Nile river since July, with over 360,000 people displaced.
- Sub-national violence in several states has also displaced many and prevented humanitarian workers from delivering food assistance.
- The £8 million is being newly announced but it is not new money and forms part of the £119 million aid package announced by the UK's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 2 September 2020.
- The support will help WFP, IOM, UNICEF and ICRC provide food assistance, shelter, nutrition support and WaSH provision. The funding will be provided through the UK's existing Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience programme (HARISS). The funding will reach thousands of South Sudanese people, including:
 - provision of 67,000 consultations through rapid response mobile health clinics
 - treatment for severe acute malnutrition for 30,000 children
 - access to safe water sources for 7,000 people affected by flooding
 - provision of 1,000 emergency WaSH response kits