

PM call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany: 11 October 2020

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke with Chancellor Merkel of Germany.



The Prime Minister spoke to Chancellor Merkel of Germany this afternoon.

He outlined the current situation with respect to negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU, emphasising the UK's desire to reach an agreement. The Prime Minister stressed that while achieving a deal in the coming days would be beneficial for both sides, the UK was also prepared to end the transition period on Australia-style terms if a deal was not possible.

The Prime Minister emphasised that progress must be made in the coming days to bridge the significant gaps, in particular in the areas of fisheries and the level playing field, through the process of intensive talks between Chief Negotiators.

The leaders also discussed the importance of like-minded democracies, such as the UK and Germany, working together to defeat coronavirus and lead a green, sustainable recovery. They resolved to continue working closely on this in the months ahead.

Published 11 October 2020

Business Secretary urges businesses to

prepare for the end of the transition period

- With just 81 days to go until the end of the transition period, Business Secretary calls on companies to take action now to prepare
- Government to host range of webinars to help businesses get ready for the UK's new start
- Sector-specific webinars will cover areas such as visas, work permits, and tariffs

Businesses need to take action now to prepare for the UK's new start on 1 January 2021, the Business Secretary Alok Sharma will write in a letter to over 600,000 firms across the UK tomorrow (Monday 12 October).

In his letter, the Business Secretary will call on businesses to familiarise themselves with the actions they will need to take, by visiting [gov.uk/transition](https://www.gov.uk/transition) and using the checker tool. When the transition period ends on 31 December 2020, there will be a guaranteed set of changes and opportunities for which businesses need to prepare as the UK leaves the customs union and single market, including changes to the way businesses import and export goods, the process for hiring people from the EU, and the way businesses provide services in EU markets.

The vast majority of these actions will need to be completed regardless of the outcome of our negotiations with the EU. These include ensuring staff register for residency rights and preparing for customs procedures when trading with the EU.

To make sure businesses are prepared, the government will also host a series of sector-specific webinars throughout October to remind them of the changes they will need to make.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

With just 81 days until the end of the transition period, businesses must act now to ensure they are ready for the UK's new start come January. There will be no extension to the transition period, so there is no time to waste.

I urge all businesses across the country to check [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) to see what action they need to take, sign up for updates, or attend one of our sector-specific webinars.

Businesses have a crucial role to play in ensuring a smooth transition, and we will be there to support them through this change every step of the way.

Businesses can sign up for the most recent updates [here](#).

A range of webinars for have been arranged by the Business Department for businesses to attend online. The first of these is on Tuesday 13 October, focusing on services and investment.

The launch of the webinars follows extensive Government engagement with businesses in recent months, including roundtables led by the Business Secretary and BEIS ministers with business leaders and representative organisations. These roundtables have focussed on the next steps for business as the UK prepares for our new relationship with the EU.

The webinars cover general areas that businesses of any shape and size will need to understand and act on, such as visas, work permits, and tariffs – as well as sector specific information.

Business sectors being covered by these webinars are:

- Services and Investment – 13 October
- Retail – 14 October
- Automotive – 14 October
- Metals and Materials – 20 October
- Electronics and machinery – 21 October
- Consumer Goods – 22 October
- Life Sciences – 27 October
- Construction – 28 October
- Aerospace – 29 October

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Businesses can sign-up to attend BEIS webinars [here](#).

[Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam's Op-Ed](#)

In our national fight against Covid-19, we are at a tipping point similar to where we were in March; but we can prevent history repeating itself if we all act now.

ONS data show that an estimated 224,000 people have the virus – up from 116,000 last week, hospital admissions for Covid-19 are rising again, as are intensive care admissions. Although the epidemic re-started in younger adult age groups in the last few weeks, there is clear evidence of gradual spread into older age groups in the worst affected areas. Sadly, just as night follows day, increases in deaths will now follow on in the next few weeks. The good news, is that we are much more certain now that children are usually not badly affected by this virus.

The R for the UK is between 1.2 – 1.5. Roughly this means that every one case generates more than one new case, through onward transmission – so the epidemic grows larger. Every NHS region of England has an R that is well above 1.0, suggesting that widespread increases in transmission continues across the country, not just in the north of England. Scientists estimate that the doubling time in the UK for new infections is between 8 and 16 days and is even faster in some areas.

SAGE is clear that we need to act now.

Winter in the NHS is always a difficult period, and that is why in the first wave our strategy was: “contain, delay, research and mitigate” to push the first wave into Spring. This time it is different as we are now are going into the colder, darker winter months. We are in the middle of a severe pandemic and the seasons are against us. Basically, we are running into a headwind.

The NHS is bracing itself and they will do what they always do, which is work their socks off to help as many people as possible. But we need to be realistic – there is only so much they can do. We all have to help our hard-working NHS staff continue to care for everyone who needs it urgently, and provide as many non-urgent tests, checks and treatments as possible, by helping to stem the rising tide of infections.

People point out that we must not lose sight of the indirect harms of Covid-19. They are absolutely right. We need to keep elective surgeries and non-urgent services open for as long as we can; we need to keep cancer treatment and diagnostic services going; and we need to continue to provide mental health services. And importantly, we need people to come forward for that care when they need it – and we know that, during the first peak, fear of the virus put many off from doing so.

The best way we can do this is to keep the number of Covid-19 cases down. If cases rise dramatically the NHS will need to focus more on dealing with the life threatening situations immediately in front of them; this can mean freeing up staff and space by postponing other non-urgent procedures and treatments. We need to help the NHS by keeping Covid-19 numbers low; and in turn the NHS will be there for us, our families and loved ones.

The principles for how we keep transmission low have not changed. Above all else, if you have Covid-19 symptoms you must self-isolate in line with published guidance and get a test. At all times, even when you are well, wash your hands regularly, wear a face covering in confined spaces and follow the 2 metre social distancing rules. By keeping our contacts low we reduce the number of opportunities for the virus to spread. I know this is very hard, but it is an unfortunate scientific fact that the virus thrives on humans making social contact with one another.

What I would give to have had the level of data, testing and medical insight we have now back in February and March this year. We now have much-improved testing capabilities, we know in more detail where the disease is, and we have better treatments.

Earlier in the year we were fighting a semi-invisible disease, about which we had little knowledge, and it seeded in the community at great speed. Now we know where it is and how to tackle it – let's grasp this opportunity and prevent history from repeating itself.

Indian teenager takes charge of British High Commission for a day

As top boss – overseeing the UK's largest overseas network – Chaitanya's busy day included handing out tasks to the High Commission's department heads, interacting with senior female police officers, meeting the press, and launching a study tracing the impact of British Council STEM scholarships on Indian women participants.

Chaitanya is the 4th young woman to take over as British High Commissioner in an annual competition run by the UK mission, aiming to empower the next generation of women as leaders and trail-blazers, and to highlight some of the challenges women and girls around the world still face. The competition is run in celebration of International Day of the Girl Child (11 October).

Chaitanya Venkateswaran, High Commissioner for the Day, said:

I used to visit the British Council library in New Delhi when I was younger, and that's where I cultivated my love of learning. Building on that knowledge, to be the British High Commissioner for a day was a golden opportunity. My day was full of diverse experiences which have really broadened my perspective on the role of women and their representation in fields of media, policing and STEM. I am now more determined than ever to use my new knowledge and experience to help promote equitable treatment of women everywhere.

Jan Thompson, Deputy High Commissioner for the Day (on other days, Acting High Commissioner to India), said:

This competition is one of my favourite moments of the year – an opportunity to provide a platform to extraordinary young women, and show how the UK and India are sharing expertise to ensure women and girls reach their full potential around the world. I was thrilled to relinquish my duties to Chaitanya for the day and was impressed with how confidently and competently she took on this role, a deserving winner out of an incredible 215 entries.

In the side-lines of her very busy day as High Commissioner, we also enjoyed discussing our mutual love of the arts. I look forward to seeing what Chaitanya achieves next, as she joins a cohort of young women whose voices we have been proud to amplify through this annual initiative; the next generation of global leaders.

The British High Commission has run the 'High Commissioner for a Day' competition annually since 2017, inviting young Indian women aged 18 to 23 to take over as their most senior diplomat. This year, entrants were invited to submit a 1-minute video on social media, answering the question: 'What global challenges and opportunities do you see for gender equality in the age of COVID-19?'

In line with COVID-19 health and safety precautions, Ms. Venkateswaran participated in the day via video conference, but was happy to meet Acting High Commissioner Jan Thompson at a later date for a socially distanced walk.

Further information

Chaitanya Venkateswaran was High Commissioner for a Day on Wednesday, 7 October. Over the course of the day she: met with the Editor of Anandabazar Patrika to learn about gender representation in the media industry; discussed gender and policing with senior police officers from Madhya Pradesh and Telangana; interacted with the Marks & Spencer India team; launched the British Council STEM Tracer Study documenting the stories of 166 Indian women scholars; and chaired a meeting with youth leaders (including previous competition winners) on some of the biggest challenges facing the world.

About the winner

Chaitanya Venkateswaran is an 18-year-old recent high-school graduate from New Delhi. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree with a full scholarship in International Studies and Economics, and certificate programmes in Advanced Leadership Studies and Political Thought at American University, Washington DC, studying remotely. An active volunteer, she has worked to aid visually-impaired students, acid attack survivors and marginalised LGBT+ groups. She is also a trained classical dancer, an art enthusiast and avid reader. She aims to pursue a career in economics and global public policy. Ms. Venkateswaran's winning [entry](#) was selected from a pool of over 200 submissions.

UK and India gender equality work

The UK and India are working together to help ensure women and girls can reach their full potential. In India, the UK is working hand-in-hand with state governments, law enforcement agencies, education authorities and British businesses to promote gender equality. Examples of ongoing collaborative programmes include:

- Working with the Ministry of Rural Development to strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change and promote livelihood security among

women in rural communities, as part of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

- Working with adolescent girls from socio-economically marginalised communities to develop their English, digital and leadership skills.
- Financial inclusion programmes focusing on financial and digital literacy, which have given 12 million Indian women access to credit to build livelihoods. Projects have helped set up or scale 10,000 women-owned micro businesses, created 6,000 jobs, and supported over 270 micro-entrepreneurs.

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[Home Secretary and international partners tell tech companies to put child safety first](#)

Seven countries, whose populations represent a fifth of Facebook's users across the world, have today (Sunday 11 October 2020) published an [international statement](#) on the impact of end-to-end encryption policies which erode the public's safety online.

A year after the Home Secretary wrote an [open letter to Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg](#) requesting the company halts its end-to-end encryption plans unless they can address child safety fears, the UK, alongside the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and Japan, have called on all tech companies to ensure they do not blind themselves to illegal activity on their platforms, including child abuse images.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We owe it to all of our citizens, especially our children, to ensure their safety by continuing to unmask sexual predators and terrorists operating online.

It is essential that tech companies do not turn a blind eye to this problem and hamper their, as well as law enforcement's, ability to tackle these sickening criminal acts.

Our countries urge all tech companies to work with us to find a solution that puts the public's safety first.

The 7 signatories of the international statement have made it clear that when end-to-end encryption is applied with no access to content, it severely undermines the ability of companies to take action against illegal activity on their own platforms.

It also prevents law enforcement investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes being committed on these services such as online child sexual abuse, grooming and terrorist content.

This international intervention calls on tech companies to ensure there is no reduction in user safety when designing their encrypted services; to enable law enforcement access to content where it is necessary and proportionate; and work with governments to facilitate this.

The UK and its international partners are clear that they support strong encryption, but not where it is applied in a way that precludes all legal access to content, therefore putting the public at significant risk of harm.