

Press release: Immigration minister signs data sharing agreements with India on criminal records and returns

Two documents, known as memorandums of understanding (MOUs), were initialled by Minister of Immigration Caroline Nokes and Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju on Thursday (January 11).

The new two-way deals reflect increased co-operation between the 2 countries which already enjoy a close relationship.

The MOU on criminal records exchange will lead to British and Indian law enforcement bodies sharing criminal records information, fingerprints and intelligence. This will assist the police in protecting the public from known criminals, including sex offenders. It will also allow the courts in both countries to access more information to support tougher sentencing decisions.

Meanwhile the agreement on returns paves the way for a quicker and more efficient process for documenting and returning Indian nationals who have no right to be in the UK to India. This has proven difficult in the past due to some Indians not having the required paperwork or travel documentation for them to be accepted back in their home country.

This agreement commits both countries to taking a more flexible approach to verifying the identity and nationality of individuals, which will help speed up the returns process.

Ms Nokes said:

I was very pleased to welcome the Indian Home Affairs Minister to the UK. The agreements we've signed cover the important issues of returns and criminal records exchanges to the mutual benefit of both countries. The Minister's visit forms part of our ongoing dialogue and demonstrates the strong and positive relationship between our 2 nations.

As my predecessor in this role noted during his visit to India last November, we are determined to create a 'living bridge' of people, ideas, institutions and technology between our 2 great countries. These new agreements are yet another example of the value we place on our strong partnership.

Details of the types of information exchanged through the MOUs and operational procedures, together with the details of any restrictions on using or disclosing the information will be the subject of further negotiations. However, the documents recognise the need to respect privacy, civil liberties and human rights.

Mr Rijiju was visiting London at the invitation of Ms Nokes' predecessor, the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis, following their successful meeting in India in November 2017.

In addition to formalising the 2 agreements, Mr Rijiju also visited Heathrow Airport to see first-hand how Border Force uses technology such as biometrics and e-passport gates.