

PM greets the people of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, on their Statehood Day

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has greeted the people of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, on their Statehood Day.

Major problems with overseas aid for Eastern European countries

I was surprised to read in the Sunday press that some people think it a good idea to divert overseas aid to Eastern European members of the EU to “buy” a better deal with that organisation.

As I have explained before, there is no Treaty power to require a UK leaving payment above and beyond completing our annual payments to their budget for the period of our continuing membership. Nor is it legal under WTO rules to pay for more favoured trade with a particular country or group of countries than the rest. Payment for trade under WTO rules takes the form of accepting tariffs, and these have to be limited to the current mfn schedules the EU has agreed.

The trade choice is for the rest of the EU to make. The UK would be quite happy to carry on tariff free. That will help the rest of the EU more than us. It would mean registering our current trade arrangements as a Free Trade Agreement at the WTO. Or we can trade under mfn arrangements under the WTO. Most of UK trade will be tariff free, whilst EU sales of agricultural products would suffer heavy tariffs into the UK. The UK could agree lower or no tariffs with other cheaper suppliers of food around the world through the WTO process. I have said it is in the EU's interest to accept the tariff free offer, and they may do so after much huffing and puffing. I have also always said that they might decide to harm themselves by accepting WTO terms instead. Under the general WTO arrangements the UK will be fine.

The overseas aid idea also falls well foul of the overseas aid rules. The Eastern countries in the EU do not qualify for overseas aid under the international definition, as they are too well off. UK Ministers by law have to hit the 0.7% Aid target under international definitions, so they could not switch this aid money to Eastern Europe unless they repealed the 0.7% requirement. It would not be easy to achieve repeal, given the likely fact that all the opposition parties would oppose repeal other than perhaps the one UKIP MP. The government might be able to persuade enough Conservative

MPs to get it through the Commons, but the Lords would be likely to have a big majority the other way. As it would not be a Manifesto pledge, and does not stem directly from a referendum, the Lords might become very difficult.

In circumstances where the EU Commission and one or two large countries were not wanting a free trade Agreement with the UK for political despite their interests in having one, it is difficult to see how offering to send money to Eastern countries would buy a change of heart.

Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN

20 February 2017 – Famine has been formally declared in parts of South Sudan, the United Nations said today, warning that war and a collapsing economy have left some 100,000 people facing starvation there and a further 1 million people are classified as being on the brink of famine.

“Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan and our worst fears have been realised,” said Serge Tissot, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representative in South Sudan, in a news release issued jointly with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

“Many families have exhausted every means they have to survive,” he stated, explaining that these people are predominantly farmers who have lost their livestock, even their farming tools.

Famine is currently affecting parts of Unity State in the northern-central part of the country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan

The situation is the worst hunger catastrophe since fighting erupted more than three years ago between rival forces – the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar.

The three UN agencies warned that urgent action is needed to prevent more people from dying of hunger.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) update released today by the government, the three agencies and other humanitarian partners, 4.9 million people – more than 40 percent of South Sudan’s population – are in need of urgent food, agriculture and nutrition

assistance.

The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

More than one million children are currently estimated to be acutely malnourished across South Sudan; over a quarter of a million children are already severely malnourished. If we do not reach these children with urgent aid many of them will die," said Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Representative in South Sudan.

We have also warned that there is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security, both for relief workers and the crisis-affected people they serve," said WFP Country Director Joyce Luma.

Critical food aid shortages hit Africa's refugees hard, UN warns

20 February 2017 – Across Africa, some two million refugees are facing critical shortages in food assistance, the United Nations warned today.

Refugee operations in 10 African countries have experienced cuts affecting the quantity and quality of food assistance for approximately two million refugees, according to a joint press release from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Millions of refugees depend on WFP food and our work to treat and prevent malnutrition to stay alive. But in Africa they are in danger of being overshadowed by large humanitarian crises elsewhere," WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said in the release.

Food rations have been dramatically cut in some cases by up to 50 per cent in large operations including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, South Sudan and Uganda.

Refugees in Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Burundi and Ethiopia have had specific commodities cut including micronutrient fortified blended foods, needed to ensure an adequate quality diet.

RELATED: Famine hits parts of South Sudan, UN warns

We can't imagine how difficult life is for thousands of refugee families with no food, and often denied the possibility to work or provide for themselves in other ways," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Filippo Grandi. “Refugees are extraordinarily resilient, but cuts in food assistance sometimes as high as 50 per cent are having a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of thousands of families.”

The number of refugees in Africa nearly doubled from 2.6 million in 2011 to nearly five million in 2016, the release said. While donor funding for refugee assistance increased during this period, it did not keep pace with rapidly rising needs. As a result, the humanitarian response is significantly underfunded.

Amid global paradox, solutions that unify economic and social progress needed – UN labour chief

20 February 2017 – Highlighting that many around the world are left out from being able to benefit from global prosperity dividends and that even flourishing societies are seeing inequalities widen, the head of the United Nations labour agency today called for solutions that can bring economic growth combined with social progress.

In his message on World Day of Social Justice, UN International Labour Organization chief Guy Ryder also underlined that the feeling of absence of social justice: children without secure futures, parents without decent jobs and a general feeling of abandonment, have grave consequences not only for communities and societies, but for economies as well.

“We need solutions that lead away from conflict and towards recovery, to economic growth with social progress, solutions that build institutions girded by labour standards that guarantee rights at work,” said Mr. Ryder.

“In an interconnected world this is a global agenda and a global responsibility,” he added.

Marked this year with the theme ‘Preventing conflict and sustaining peace through decent work’ the Day calls upon the international community work towards eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, gender equity, and access to social well-being and justice for all.

Mr. Ryder also stressed that lack of decent jobs and the fear that aspirations for a better life will remain unfulfilled multiplies people’s worries, leaving young people without a stake in society.

Urging for the formulation of policies that can deliver the decent work

opportunities given their importance for the stability and success of societies, he added: “The words] *Si vis pacem, cole justitiam*: ‘If you seek peace, cultivate justice’ [...] are as compelling today as they were when written nearly one hundred years ago when the world was emerging from the ravages of war.”

RELATED: Responses to global ills must integrate peace and sustainable development, UN Member States told

In 2007, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 20 February as World Day of Social Justice, inviting Member States to promote national activities in accordance with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

Also today, UN independent human rights experts underlined everyone’s right to a standard of living that ensures adequate health and well-being for themselves and their families, including access to food, clothing, housing, health care and social services.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out these rights, also makes clear that all people are entitled to a social and international order in which their rights and freedoms can be fully realized,” said Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; and Idriss Jazairy, UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

They also underlined that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include commitments to eradicate poverty, provide clean, affordable energy, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including social protection floors.