

# Boris Johnson to visit India to boost jobs and prosperity

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will travel to India in January 2021 to strengthen a key strategic relationship which supports jobs and investment across the UK.

This will be the Prime Minister's first major bilateral visit since taking office, and the first since our departure from the EU, and underlines his commitment to step up the UK's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region.

The trip in January will kick off a significant year for Global Britain on the world stage. In 2021, the UK will host both the G7 Leaders' Meeting and COP26 Summits, as well as a global education conference aimed at getting girls into school, and an event to mark the first meeting of the UN General Assembly in London in 1946.

The Prime Minister has written to Prime Minister Modi to accept his invitation, and to invite India to attend the UK's G7 Summit as one of three guest nations alongside South Korea and Australia – delivering the Prime Minister's ambition to work with a group of like-minded democracies to advance shared interests and tackle common challenges.

The Prime Minister will use his visit to India to boost our cooperation in areas that matter to the UK and that will be priorities for our international engagement throughout 2021 – from trade and investment, to defence and security, and health and climate change.

The UK and India are significant investors and markets for each other's economies and our growing trade and investment relationship is worth around £24 billion a year, supporting more than half a million jobs.

There are 842 Indian companies in the UK with a combined turnover of £41.2 billion, creating jobs in all four corners of the United Kingdom.

That includes 19,500 people employed by Tata Consulting Services at sites including Peterborough, Liverpool, and Edinburgh; around 5,700 people in Warrington, Derby, Cardiff, Derry/Londonderry and Belfast working for business support firm Firstsource Solutions – which is soon to open a new office in Middlesbrough; and 1,200 people employed by Accord Healthcare Ltd in Newcastle and Barnstaple to manufacture and supply medicines to the NHS.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I am absolutely delighted to be visiting India next year at the start of an exciting year for Global Britain, and look forward to delivering the quantum leap in our bilateral relationship that Prime Minister Modi and I have pledged to achieve.

As a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, India is an increasingly indispensable partner for the United Kingdom as we work to boost jobs and growth, confront shared threats to our security and protect our planet.

As the 'pharmacy of the world' India supplies more than 50% of the world's vaccines, with over a billion doses of the UK's Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine being manufactured at India's Serum Institute in Pune.

Our countries have cooperated closely throughout the coronavirus outbreak to maintain the flow of medical goods for our citizens. The UK has received 11 million face masks and 3 million packets of paracetamol from India during the pandemic, and we continue to work together to keep vital supply chains open.

There are more than 400 British companies in India, including those at the forefront of our collaboration to tackle climate change. Our partnership is creating jobs and opportunities for UK firms in areas such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, as our countries work together to reduce global emissions ahead of next year's COP26 Summit in Glasgow.

During the visit, the Prime Minister will be only the second British leader since Indian independence to attend India's annual Republic Day parade in New Delhi as Guest of Honour, after John Major in 1993.

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## WTO Trade Negotiations Committee: UK statement

Thank you, Chair.

Chair, this discussion comes at the end of an exceptionally challenging year.

We still have a long way to go to defeat Covid-19, and there remain other threats to our collective prosperity and wellbeing.

The WTO has a crucial role to play and we must re-commit ourselves to delivering real progress. We need to cement the WTO's role as a forward-looking Organization able to deliver for 21st century enterprises and citizens, and able to deliver collective solutions to global problems – from the impact of the pandemic, to the enduring challenge of climate change.

Last month, the UK was pleased to co-sponsor the call for establishing an enhanced dialogue on trade and environment at the WTO. As host of COP-26, the UK is proud to take a leading role in tackling climate change. Working together, we can find ways to mitigate climate change, to protect our forests and oceans, and conserve biodiversity while promoting trade and economic

development.

We are therefore exceedingly disappointed that, as we reach the end of 2020, we have not reached an agreement on disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies. As others have said, we have missed the deadline set by leaders under the SDGs.

The UK remains committed to the mandate and it will be essential that we return to our work next January with a sense of urgency, and with a willingness to find compromises to reach an outcome that is both meaningful and fair.

We remain optimistic that by maintaining our ambitious schedule of monthly clusters and with the dedicated leadership of Ambassador Wills, we can reach an outcome that will support a sustainable future for our oceans and for fishing communities around the world.

Chair, on a more positive note, the UK warmly welcomes the adoption of the MSMEs package, as a major milestone towards better integrating small businesses into global trade. We would like to put on record our thanks to Ambassador Cancela of Uruguay for his effective coordination of the group, culminating in the successful outcome last week.

This is an important file: 99.9% of all British businesses are MSMEs. We look forward to remaining an active participant in the work of the group going forward, including through our TAF2 project.

Making progress on the Joint Initiative on e-Commerce remains a priority for the UK. We have seen an acceleration of the use of technology this year, and services, digital and data trade continues to grow. The UK submitted its own written text proposals in November, including on the cross-border transfer of information, on the location of computing facilities and on source code. The new consolidated negotiating text marks an important milestone in achieving our shared aim of delivering an outcome that benefits developed, developing and least-developed members.

We also welcome progress being made by the Joint Initiatives on Investment Facilitation for Development and Services Domestic Regulation. Trade, and the investment it brings, delivers jobs, better living standards, and higher wages at home. We have been working closely with other Members of the Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation, with the aim of finalising the draft Reference Paper by the end of the year.

To close Chair, I wanted to reiterate the importance of restoring a fully functioning dispute settlement system. Therefore, we look forward to continuing work with all Members, as well as the next WTO Director-General, to ensure that we do not become accustomed to the current impasse.

Thank you, Mr Chair and good evening everyone.

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## LoveHolidays to refund over £18 million for cancelled holidays

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating LoveHolidays after receiving hundreds of complaints that people were still awaiting refunds.

When customers contacted LoveHolidays to request a refund for a cancelled holiday, they were told they would only receive money back for their flights once the firm had received refunds from the respective airlines.

Under the Package Travel Regulations, online travel agents are legally bound to refund customers for package holidays cancelled due to coronavirus, regardless of whether or not the agent has received money back from suppliers, for example airlines.

Following CMA intervention, LoveHolidays has now signed formal commitments – known as undertakings – that ensure these customers receive all their money back.

In total, over £18 million will be refunded to 44,000 LoveHolidays customers. Of this, so far £7m has been refunded to 20,000 customers.

Having carefully reviewed LoveHolidays' financial information, and how quickly it can realistically repay customers, the CMA has accepted LoveHolidays' commitment to repay these customers in full by March 2021 at the latest. Insisting on earlier repayment would result in LoveHolidays dipping below its regulatory obligations.

In order for customers to receive their money back as quickly as possible, refunds will be made in two parts, for example:

Refunds for the cost of hotel accommodation and transfers:

- by 31 December 2020: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled before 1 November 2020
- cancellations from 1 January 2021: customers will receive refunds within 14 days of the holiday being cancelled

Refunds for the cost of flights:

- by 28 February 2021: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled before 24 August 2020

- by 31 March 2021: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled between 24 August and 31 October 2020

Further details of the relevant payment dates can be found on the [CMA's package travel webpage](#).

To ensure that LoveHolidays adheres to its commitments, the company must provide the CMA with regular reports on the progress of its repayments.

If the firm fails to repay customers by these dates, the CMA is prepared to take the company to court.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

"Travel agents have a legal responsibility to make prompt refunds to customers whose holidays have been cancelled due to coronavirus.

"Our action today means that LoveHoliday's customers now have certainty over when they will receive their money back and they will receive this without undue delay.

"We are continuing to investigate package travel firms and where we find evidence that businesses are breaching consumer law, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action to protect consumers."

Today's announcement follows significant action by the CMA in relation to holiday cancellations. It has [written to over 100 package holiday firms to remind them of their obligations to comply with consumer protection law](#), and has already secured refund commitments from [Lastminute.com](#), [Virgin Holidays](#), [TUI UK](#), [Sykes Cottages](#) and [Vacation Rentals](#).

In order to help businesses to understand their legal obligations with regard to consumer protection law, the [CMA published a statement on its view of how the law relates to cancellations and refunds due to coronavirus](#).

Further information on this case can be found on the [COVID-19 cancellations: package holidays web page](#).

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## **Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: letter to the Minister for Equalities**

The independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has provided an update to the government and the sponsoring minister, Kemi Badenoch MP.

The update calls on the government to put social mobility at the heart of its equalities agenda, and sets the Commission's report date.

Since its launch in July 2020, the Commission has taken evidence from a wide range of stakeholders representing thousands of people across the UK, and has conducted a deep dive into the latest disparities data. The evidence and data have unearthed the multiple, interacting factors driving life chances for people in the UK.

The Commission's chair, Dr Tony Sewell, says "the evidence is showing that many of the disparities are driven by differences in gender, age, class and geography", rather than race alone.

The impact of COVID-19, however, has made it difficult for the Commission to complete extensive and vital engagement activity with public, private and voluntary organisations, frontline staff and citizens in communities across the country. For example, the recent national restrictions coincided with the launch of the public call for evidence – issued at the end of October – and proved particularly disruptive to the work of the Commission.

With over 2,300 responses to the Commission's call for evidence, it is clear that the public wants the Commission and government to hear their views, and it is right that the Commission is able to review and consider all submissions in full. The Chair has therefore asked that the work of the Commission continue until February 2021, when it will then report to the Prime Minister.

In an update to the Minister for Equalities on its work so far, Dr Sewell recommends that the sponsorship of the Social Mobility Commission should be brought into the Cabinet Office's Equality Hub. The Commission believes the move would help the government take a more rounded view of inequalities and improve life chances for people, whatever their race or ethnicity, and whichever part of the UK they live in.

The [Social Mobility Commission](#) is a non-departmental public body, currently sponsored by the Department for Education. The government is considering the recommendation to bring the Social Mobility Commission under the work of the Equality Hub.

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## [November 2020 findings from COVID-19 study published](#)

- Over 160,000 volunteers tested in England between 13 November and 3 December as part of a significant COVID-19 study
- Prevalence rose in London from 98 per 10,000 people infected in mid-November to 121 per 10,000 infected by early December, the highest

prevalence after Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East

- Adherence to the toughened tiering system is critical to continue to bring down the varying regional rates of infections

The [results from the seventh report](#) of one of the country's largest studies into COVID-19 infections in England have been published today by Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI. It follows the publication of the interim findings in November.

Over 160,000 volunteers were tested in England between 13 November and 3 December to examine the levels of infection in the general population. The findings show infections fell by 30% across England, bringing R below 1. There was regional variation with prevalence rising in London.

The main findings from the seventh REACT study show:

- prevalence fell from an average of 1.30% in mid-October to beginning November, to an average of 0.94% during the lockdown period, meaning it fell from 130 to 94 people infected per 10,000
- national R between 13 November and 3 December was estimated at 0.96
- prevalence rose in London from 98 per 10,000 people infected in mid-November to 121 per 10,000 infected by early December, the highest prevalence after Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East
- the average regional prevalence during lockdown compared with mid-October to beginning November was highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (1.35% down from 2.32%) followed by: West Midlands (1.24% down from 1.59%); East Midlands (1.19%, down from 1.25%); London (1.09% up from 0.97%); North West (1.02% down from 2.39%); North East (0.94% down from 1.49%); South East (0.73% up from 0.69%); South West (0.58% down from 0.80%); and East of England (0.58% down from 0.69%)
- during lockdown, comparing regional prevalence from 25 November – 3 December and 13-24 November, prevalence was highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (1.39% up from 1.17%) followed by: North East (1.26% up from 0.72%); London (1.21% up from 0.98%); East Midlands (1.04% down from 1.27%); North West (0.92% down from 1.08%); West Midlands (0.71% down from 1.55%); South East (0.75% up from 0.72%); East of England (0.59% up from 0.57%); and South West (0.53% down from 0.62%)
- regional R numbers during lockdown ranged from 0.60 for the West Midlands up to 1.27 for London

The study findings demonstrate a rise in infections among secondary school age children. To tackle this rise in London and surrounding areas, additional mobile testing units will be deployed in or near schools for staff, students and their families to be tested in the worst affected boroughs of London, in parts of Essex that border London and parts of Kent. It is vital that all school children aged 11 to 18 in these areas come forward to be tested, whether they have symptoms or not. Latest figures from the ONS showed almost 1 in 3 people in England show no symptoms of having the virus but are still able to pass it on.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the programme at Imperial, said:

During the first half of lockdown our study showed that infections were on a clear downward trajectory, but we're now seeing a levelling off, driven by clusters of infections in certain regions and age groups. Behaviours and public health measures need to be guided by this fast-changing situation to prevent it from worsening, and everyone has a part to play in keeping this virus at bay, especially as we approach a relaxing of rules over Christmas.

While infections have fallen overall across England and the spread has slowed, there are clear differences in prevalence across the regions and infections remain high. Winter is always the most difficult time for the NHS and an increase in infections by the virus that causes COVID-19 is followed closely by a rise in hospitalisation levels. As infections begin to flatten, it is vital everyone plays their part by following the toughened, regional tiered system to bring down infections and reduce pressures on the NHS this winter.

Decisions on tiers are made by ministers based on public health recommendations. These are informed by a variety of criteria and not just prevalence including local context, pressure on the NHS as well as case detection rate, case rates in the over 60s, how quickly cases are changing, case rates in care homes and positivity in the general population. The government constantly monitors the data and has committed to reviewing the tiering system on 16 December.

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director- Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

As we end the year, I would like to thank the well over a million people that have taken part in the REACT studies this year which have provided a key data stream for Government to track COVID-19 in real time across England. We are currently sending out letters asking people to volunteer for the next round of the study which will take place in the new year and I urge people to participate to contribute to this vital body of work.

This report is the latest from the REACT study which was commissioned by DHSC and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

[The pre-print report is available here](#) (Claim ID: cFqjaYxzTqCePpzC and Claim Passcode: nhbtPw7o3Jxz9TWD)

Read more [information on the Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission \(REACT\) programme of work](#)

This study falls under pillar 4 of the COVID-19 National Testing Programme, which focuses on mass surveillance in the general population.