

[News story: Defence Minister and Prince Harry celebrate 200 year relationship with Nepal](#)

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster, who served with the Queen's Gurkha Engineers himself, was at a special ceremony at the Nepali Embassy in London this afternoon to celebrate the end of the 200th year of UK-Nepal relations by the Nepali calendar.

The Minister and His Royal Highness Prince Harry met Gurkha families and watched Nepali cultural performances, including a traditional Khukuri dance by a Brigade of Gurkhas.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Having served in the Brigade of Gurkhas myself, I'm particularly proud of our brave Nepali Gurkhas and the key part they play in our Armed Forces and Britain's role on the world stage. This bicentenary year has been a unique chance to celebrate this and, as well as looking back, we can look forward our special relationship continuing long into the future.

With formal relations between the countries ratified in March 1816, the Brigade of Gurkhas of the British Army has recruited soldiers from Nepal since the 19th century. Gurkha soldiers fought bravely in both the First and Second World Wars, the Falkland Islands and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. Gurkha servicemen from Nepal have won 13 Victoria Crosses, the highest British award for gallantry.

They remain a fully integrated part of the British Armed Forces and, with a unique set of local knowledge, language skills and engineering experience, they also played a vital role in the humanitarian relief effort after Nepal suffered a devastating earthquake in 2015. They, along with the UK's C-130 RAF Hercules aircraft which delivered vital aid to vulnerable people, contributed to the UK's overall response to the disaster.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary's Nowruz message 2017 \(1396\)](#)

Boris Johnson wishes those celebrating in Britain and around the world a

happy new year

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

“I want to give my best wishes to all those celebrating Nowruz around the world.

“People from many countries, communities and backgrounds will be gathering with their loved ones to celebrate the New Year and mark the start of Spring.

“Nowruz is an opportunity to look back on the year that has passed and look ahead to the year to come. So, however and wherever you are celebrating the New Year, I wish you health and happiness for the future. Nowruzetan piruz.”

Further information

[Press release: Planned roadworks in the North East: summary for Monday 20 to Sunday 26 March 2017](#)

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of Friday 17 March but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

A1 junction 56 Barton to junction 51 Leeming Bar

There will be phases of overnight lane closures and full carriageway closures while work takes place to upgrade the road to motorway standards. There will also be narrow lanes and a 50mph speed restriction 24 hours a day. On Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 March there will be a carriageway closure northbound between junction 50 and Scotch Corner, and southbound between Scotch Corner and junction 51 as well as a southbound closure of the carriageway over Barton interchange with a diversion down and under the interchange.

On Wednesday 22 March there will be a carriageway closure northbound between junction 50 and Scotch Corner, and southbound between Scotch Corner and junction 51 as well as a southbound closure of the carriageway over Barton interchange with a diversion down and under the interchange and a partial closure of Scotch Corner interchange.

On Thursday 23 March there will be a carriageway closure northbound between junction 50 and Scotch Corner, and southbound between Scotch Corner and junction 51 as well as a southbound closure of the carriageway over Barton

interchange with a diversion down and under the interchange. Then on Friday 23 March there will be a southbound closure of the carriageway over Barton interchange with a diversion down and under the interchange and a closure of the carriageway under Scotch Corner interchange with a diversion up and over the interchange and a partial closure of Scotch Corner interchange.

All these closures will take place between 8pm and 6am with diversions in place. From 8pm on Friday 3 March through to mid April the Junction 56 northbound exit slip will be closed 24/7 with a diversion.

A1 Blaydon Haugh Viaduct, junction 73 to junction 74, Newcastle upon Tyne

There is a 50mph limit in operation over Blaydon Haugh Viaduct due to the installation of temporary plates over defective viaduct joints. From Monday 20 to Friday 25 March there will be a carriageway closure southbound between 8pm and 6am. From 8pm on Saturday 26 March until 6am on Monday 27 March the southbound carriageway will be closed for the bridging plates to be removed. All these closures will take place with a diversion in place.

A1 Morpeth, Northumberland

There will be work ongoing until spring 2017 for the construction of a bypass. There will be various phases of daytime and night time lane and carriageway closures, with narrow lanes and a 40mph speed restriction in place. On Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 March there will be traffic signals in place southbound between 8pm and 6am.

A1 Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland

There will be a carriageway closure with traffic signals in place north and southbound for resurfacing work. This will take place on Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 March between 8pm and 6am, with diversions in place.

A1 Warreners House to Earsdon, Northumberland

There will be convoy working in place north and southbound for resurfacing work. This will take place from Wednesday 22 to Tuesday 28 March between 8pm and 6am.

A19 Silverlink, North Tyneside

From Monday 20 March for five nights the A19 will be closed between 8pm and 6am with diversions in place for interchange improvement work. There will also be a 24 hour 30mph speed restriction with narrow lanes. This project is due for completion in March 2019.

A66 Long Newton, Stockton on Tees

There will be an off-peak lane closure in operation along the A66 westbound between Elton Interchange and Long Newton Interchange until Friday 24 March. It is anticipated that the works will be completed by Friday 31 March.

A66 Blands Corner, Darlington Bypass, County Durham

The circulatory will be closed for resurfacing work. This will take place from Saturday 18 to Monday 20 March between 8pm and 6am.

A66 Rokeby to Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire

There will be a carriageway closure east and westbound for barrier work. This will take place on Wednesday 22 March between 8pm and 6am, with diversions in place.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Nowruz 2017: Prime Minister's message](#)

I send my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating the festival of Nowruz in Britain, Iran and around the world.

At this time of year families and friends will be gathering to celebrate the New Year and mark the start of spring.

To everyone celebrating Nowruz in the UK – I wish you a happy, healthy and peaceful new year.

Har ruzetan Nowruz, Nowruzetan piruz.

Press release: Prisons and Courts Bill to improve access to justice and better protect the vulnerable

Plans to revolutionise the courts to make them more straightforward and efficient, and deliver swifter justice for victims, will be outlined by the Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC today.

The Prisons and Courts Bill, which also contains a range of measures to help boost the reform of our prisons, will be debated by MPs in the House of Commons this week (week commencing 20 March 2017).

Measures in the ground-breaking Prisons and Courts Bill will mean that more cases can be progressed securely online and through video and telephone conferencing, eradicating the need for many administrative hearings to take place in the traditional courtroom setting and reducing the need for travel.

To ensure justice is also open and seen to be done, video booths will be installed in courts across England and Wales to allow members of the media and public to observe virtual hearings from court buildings anywhere in the country. Lists and results of cases that have taken place online, as well as those concluded in a physical courtroom, will also be available digitally.

Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald QC said:

Britain has the best justice system in the world, but it should also be the most modern. Victims and the most vulnerable are at the centre of our changes, which will help deliver swifter and more certain justice for all.

We want courts that are efficient and fit-for-purpose, with facilities across the entire estate that are modern, user-friendly, and work in favour of our hard-working and dedicated judges and magistrates.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins this vision – building on the good progress we have already made in improving the experience of all users and cementing our reputation for global legal excellence so victims get the justice they deserve as quickly as possible.

The Prisons and Courts Bill proposes an extension to the use of video links and virtual hearings which allow victims to take part in cases without having to meet their alleged attacker face-to-face.

Under our virtual hearings measures a further 60,000 pre-trial hearings in the magistrates' court and 17,000 contested bail hearings can also take place by video, along with 30,000 pre-trial hearings in the crown court. This will

save around 34,000 hours of courtroom time. Proposals to introduce online convictions for some limited offences will also benefit the courts. Potentially around 8,000 offences – including 7,000 cases of people travelling without a train and tram ticket, and a further 1,300 cases of people fishing without a licence – could be handled online, taking away the need to be in a courtroom.

Bill measures will also mean around 420,000 summary and triable either way offences can be progressed without the need for administrative hearings to take place in a court. For example, offenders will be able to enter a plea online reducing the need to go to court until they need to attend trial or a hearing where they can be sentenced.

Discussions between the court and legal representatives about issues such as trial location will be able to take place via email or telephone or video conferencing, instead of being in a courtroom.

The government is also removing the requirement for indictable only offences to have a 'first appearance' in the magistrates' court, instead sending those cases straight to the crown court.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins our investment of over £1 billion for a modern justice system. The government is investing over £850 million to modernise and digitise the courts, and preserve the full majesty of the physical courtroom for cases that require it, in addition to around £250 million to deliver a fully connected criminal courtroom. This will result in savings of £252 million a year for the taxpayer.

We will move from too many underused and badly maintained buildings to fewer, better buildings with modern facilities. More modern and robust technology will be put in place in courts, such as Wi-Fi, modern telephony and screens for sharing evidence, to make the lives of our excellent judiciary and legal professional users easier.

The Prisons and Courts Bill also provides courts with the power to put an end to domestic violence victims being cross-examined by their alleged attackers in the family courts, calling time on what the Justice Secretary has described as a "humiliating and appalling" practice.

Car insurance premiums will also be cut by around £40 a year, with new fixed tariffs capping whiplash compensation pay-outs and a ban on claims without medical evidence, helping to crack down on the compensation culture epidemic.

In addition, the legislation sets in law for the first time that a key purpose is to reform offenders as they are punished for the crimes they have committed.

Notes to editors

1. [The Bill](#) was introduced on 23 February 2017. Follow its progress on the Parliament website.
2. Recent announcements:

3. [Impact assessments](#)