

British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson's speech to Dhaka Reporters' Unity

Shubho oporannho. (Good afternoon.) Ami ekhane ashte pere anondito. (I am very happy to be here.)

I am delighted to address the Dhaka Reporters' Unity this afternoon, the last day of Bengali winter – my favourite season.

A free media is the cornerstone of a free society. The press role in holding the powerful to account – including in uncomfortable ways – is a key counter to corruption and vested interests.

As George Orwell said, 'Freedom of the Press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticise and oppose'.

So I am constantly impressed by the courage and commitment of journalists in Bangladesh despite the many challenges I know you face, and I am delighted that we are able to support you through training and programmes.

With other Likeminded partners we are leading the Media Freedom Coalition and this will continue to be a key element of the High Commission's work in Bangladesh.

This is an excellent time to be British High Commissioner in Dhaka.

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and Bangladesh, following Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic press conference at Claridges' Hotel, his meeting with PM Edward Heath and his return to a newly liberated Bangladesh by the Royal Air Force.

In the intervening half century the relationship has been transformed.

In the 50th year of Brit Bangla Bondhon, we are building on all the links that exist between Bangladesh and the UK, including the diaspora, the 600,000 people living in the UK with Bangladeshi heritage, and the much wider range of links that exist between us on security, defence, climate, COVID-19, trade, and a whole range of issues on which we work very closely with friends and partners in and beyond government in Bangladesh.

We do this in line with our global strategy. Last year we published an Integrated Review of our foreign policy after leaving the European Union. A key element is what we call an Indo Pacific Tilt, a rebalancing of our policy, in which Bangladesh plays an important role.

The Indo-Pacific is the fastest-growing economic region in the world, a crucial transit point for global trade.

The UK has Europe's broadest, most integrated regional presence, in support of stronger trading links, shared security priorities and shared values.

We are engaging more deeply in the region on many of the most pressing global challenges – from climate and biodiversity to maritime security and geopolitical competition linked to rules and norms.

And those norms have never looked more important, or more threatened, than they do today. Unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine would be a disaster for everyone, including Russia.

UK ministers have been at the forefront of international efforts to find a diplomatic solution, and the UK has been providing Ukraine with the weapons and training it needs for self-defence.

Here, we are working with British businesses in building a trade and development relationship as Bangladesh graduates this decade from a Least Developed to a Middle Income Country.

This is an extraordinary national achievement, based on decades of good policy making. I'm delighted that the Hon Prime Minister and other senior people promoted the opportunities at a Roadshow in London and Manchester last year.

Graduation is a milestone not a finishing line and we are supporting Bangladesh achieve a smooth and successful graduation and continue its export-led growth by providing duty-free, quota free access to the UK market until 2029.

We are Bangladesh's second largest investor, and we will continue to work with Bangladesh to deliver free and fair trade by improving the functioning of the WTO and modernising global trade rules.

The last year has been significant for UK-Bangladesh trade relations as the inauguration of the UK-Bangladesh Trade & Investment Dialogue.

This addressed tackling market access barriers and improvements to the business environment to promote free and fair trade between the UK and Bangladesh, and help UK companies realise the potential of Bangladesh's impressive economic growth, to the benefit of both countries' prosperity.

As Bangladesh prospers we hope to see the market becoming more open to international investment, especially for the high value financial, education and health services in which the UK leads the world.

I see a particular opportunity for universities if the Cross Border Higher Education Rules can be implemented. UK universities are interested in the opportunity in Bangladesh, and would like to establish the sort of presence they have in Sri Lanka or Malaysia.

This would give young Bangladeshis access to a world class education at a competitive price. And it would give Bangladesh the skills which will be needed to thrive as a middle income country.

More broadly, our view is that long term stability and economic growth flourish best in open and democratic societies with strong institutions, public accountability and competitive elections.

So with international partners, we support the plural and transparent democracy in Bangladesh provided in the Constitution, including urging a fair and credible process for the elections due at the end of 2023.

This means first, allowing all parties to organise and be heard in advance of the election so that there is a real debate about the future of the country. Second, it means everyone can cast their vote freely. Third, it means the votes being counted reliably and transparently. And finally, it means credible results being accepted by all parties, including those who did not win.

Milestones such as the Election Commission formation process send a signal on the trajectory of this administration. Strong commitments from all parties on a free and fair process would help set the tone, including inclusive and non-partisan Election Commission oversight for the contest due next year.

The strongest, safest and most prosperous societies are those in which everyone can live freely, without fear of violence or discrimination, and where all citizens can play a full and active part. This year, the UK will host a global equality conference to promote the fundamental human rights we all share. This includes empowering women and girls, and standing with those who support tolerance and religious freedom, as set out in Bangladesh's Constitution, which enshrines freedom of expression and religion.

We stand with those who support tolerance and religious freedom, as set out in Bangladesh's Constitution, which enshrine freedom of expression and religion.

We're also working together on regional security, including the Rohingya crisis. Our shared aim is to see voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation for the Rohingya as soon as conditions in Myanmar allow.

Bangladesh continues to be extraordinarily generous in its response. The refugees have access to healthcare, food, shelter and water and sanitation.

We have seen generosity in the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines for refugees. However, despite progress, the situation remains challenging both for the Rohingyas, especially for women, and for their hosts in Bangladesh.

We are leading donor to the international response to the Rohingya refugee crisis having contributed over £320 million since 2017 to support both refugees in the camps and host communities including in building resilience against COVID-19.

At the same time, the Rohingya crisis is a tragedy for all involved. No one chooses to live in a refugee camp, or to host a large influx of displaced people. As with so many other refugees worldwide, the great majority of the Rohingya population say they want to return home.

We are ensuring the Rohingyas and Bangladesh are not forgotten. We raise the plight of the Rohingya on the international stage, including in the UN Security Council. As a new Dialogue Partner of ASEAN we support the efforts of the ASEAN Special Envoy.

We are supporting the COVID-19 pandemic response in Bangladesh. We have been supporting the Bangladesh Ministry of Health to develop a well-coordinated national response plan, resourced by all the development partners and the Government of Bangladesh.

Last December we provided 4.1 million vaccines under COVAX facility. We hope to provide more soon.

And 2021 was a good year for UK-Bangladesh defence relations, as a Royal Navy ship sailed to Chattogram after 13 years as part of our Carrier Strike Group (CSG21) deployment to the Indo Pacific region.

The visit highlighted our bilateral defence connections, taken forward again this week by strategic level training being provided by the UK to the Bangladesh National Defence College.

I am looking forward to talks soon to put this relationship on a more strategic basis.

The UK-Bangladesh Climate Partnership launched in January 2020 is strengthening cooperation across all COP26 priority themes: adaptation, clean energy, nature finance, and clean transport.

We will continue to exchange expertise, share technology, facilitate partnerships, and identify practical solutions to common climate challenges, with the shared aim of producing the real change we need to keep the rise in global temperatures below 1.5 degrees.

I think we can do more in this field as well.

So this is an exciting time for the UK here, as we work with an increasingly confident and outward looking Bangladesh, tackling shared challenges and grasping shared opportunities as we head into the next 50 years together.

I am delighted to be here as High Commissioner leading the effort in Dhaka.

Apnader jonno shubho kamona roilo (Best wishes) Sobaike onek dhonnobad.
(Thank you, everyone.)

Further information

British High Commission Dhaka
United Nations Road
Baridhara
Dhaka – 1212
Bangladesh

Email: Dhaka.Press@fco.gov.uk

Follow the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh on Twitter: [@RCDicksonUK](https://twitter.com/RCDicksonUK)

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[Prime Minister to set out plan for living with Covid](#)

- New plan for living with Covid to be set out this week
- Prime Minister expected to confirm all regulations that restrict public freedoms will be repealed
- Vaccines and other pharmaceutical interventions will continue as first line of defence
- All remaining domestic covid regulations that restrict public freedoms are expected to end this week as part of the Living with Covid Plan.

The Prime Minister has been clear that the pandemic is not over but we must learn to live with Covid. Thanks to our improved understanding of the virus and successful vaccination programme we can now move away from government intervention to personal responsibility.

Surveillance systems and contingency measures will be retained to stand up if needed, such as increased testing capacity or vaccine programmes to respond to new variants.

The pandemic was the biggest public health emergency in a century and led to unprecedented challenges.

Lockdowns and other non-pharmaceutical interventions were necessary to save lives and protect the NHS as scientists and clinicians worked on a global scale to detect and respond to new variants, but they took a significant toll on lives and livelihoods.

For example, restricting face to face education has resulted in detrimental effects to children's learning, mental health, development, and future earning potential. Mental wellbeing has been adversely impacted, particularly among young people and those living in deprived neighbourhoods.

The government and its advisors were clear from the start that vaccines were our way out of this pandemic. The UK was the first in the world to authorise the use and roll out the Pfizer and Oxford/Astrazeneca vaccines, with the first jab given in December 2020.

Since then, nearly 53 million people or 91% of the UK population have had one

dose, and nearly 49 million or 85% a second. New treatments continue to be rolled out including antivirals that significantly reduce the risk of severe disease or death.

Vaccines, testing and public health guidance meant we were able to complete our Roadmap to unlocking England in 2021, and respond effectively to the Omicron variant over winter.

Plan B was implemented to slow its spread and get more jabs in arms. A successful campaign was launched – Get Boosted Now – offering all adults a booster dose by the New Year. Nearly 38 million boosters have now been administered. This, coupled with improved scientific understanding, meant restrictions were avoided and Government intervention in people's lives can now finally end.

Pharmaceutical interventions, led by the vaccination programme, will continue to be our first line of defence and will remain open to anyone who has not yet come forward. The government will continue to be guided by JCVI advice on any necessary future vaccination programmes.

Public responsibility and an awareness of public health guidance should remain, as with all infectious diseases such as flu.

Further detail will be set out next week. The plan is expected to focus on:

- Removing regulations and requirements while emphasising public health advice, in line with long standing methods of managing a range of infectious diseases
- Protecting the vulnerable through pharmaceutical interventions and testing, in line with other viruses
- Maintaining resilience against future variants with ongoing surveillance capabilities
- Securing innovations and opportunities from the Covid response

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

Covid will not suddenly disappear, and we need to learn to live with this virus and continue to protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms. We've built up strong protections against this virus over the past two years through the vaccine rollouts, tests, new treatments, and the best scientific understanding of what this virus can do.

Thanks to our successful vaccination programme and the sheer magnitude of people who have come forward to be jabbed we are now in a position to set out our plan for living with covid this week.

PM meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz: 19 February 2022

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson met German Chancellor Olaf Scholz today in Munich.



The Prime Minister met German Chancellor Olaf Scholz today in Munich.

The leaders discussed the tensions in Ukraine and agreed on the need for NATO unity in response to current threats.

The Prime Minister said that we are currently in the most dangerous phase in the crisis with a Russian invasion possible at any moment. The Prime Minister and Chancellor Scholz resolved to redouble efforts to reach a diplomatic resolution to prevent unnecessary bloodshed.

The leaders also agreed that, should President Putin make the catastrophic miscalculation to further breach Ukrainian sovereignty, allies must put in place a comprehensive response which strikes at the heart of Russia's strategic interests.

The Prime Minister underscored that to reduce the threat from Russia in the long-term Europe must end its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons.

The leaders agreed to stay in close contact on this issue in the coming days.

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G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Russia and Ukraine

Press release

G7 Foreign Ministers remain gravely concerned about Russia's threatening military build-up around Ukraine.



1. We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union, remain gravely concerned about Russia's threatening military build-up around Ukraine, in illegally annexed Crimea and in Belarus. Russia's unprovoked and unjustified massing of military forces, the largest deployment on the European continent since the end of the Cold War is a challenge to global security and the international order.
2. We call on Russia to choose the path of diplomacy, to de-escalate tensions, to substantively withdraw military forces from the proximity of Ukraine's borders and to fully abide by international commitments including on risk reduction and transparency of military activities. As a first step, we expect Russia to implement the announced reduction of its military activities along Ukraine's borders. We have seen no evidence of this reduction. We will judge Russia by its deeds.
3. We took note of Russia's latest announcements that it is willing to engage diplomatically. We underline our commitment vis-à-vis Russia to pursue dialogue on issues of mutual concern, such as European security, risk reduction, transparency, confidence building and arms control. We also reiterate our commitment to find a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the current crisis, and we urge Russia to take up the offer of dialogue through the US-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue, the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE. We commend the Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue launched by the Polish OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office and express our strong hope that Russia will engage in a constructive way.

4. Any threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states goes against the fundamental principles that underpin the rules-based international order as well as the European peace and security order enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter and other subsequent OSCE declarations. While we are ready to explore diplomatic solutions to address legitimate security concerns, Russia should be in no doubt that any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences, including financial and economic sanctions on a wide array of sectoral and individual targets that would impose severe and unprecedented costs on the Russian economy. We will take coordinated restrictive measures in case of such an event.
5. We reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Ukraine and our support to Ukraine's efforts to strengthen its democracy and institutions, encouraging further progress on reform. We consider it of utmost importance to help preserve the economic and financial stability of Ukraine and the well-being of its people. Building on our assistance since 2014, we are committed to contribute in close coordination with Ukraine's authorities to support the strengthening of Ukraine's resilience.
6. We reiterate our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters. We reaffirm the right of any sovereign state to determine its own future and security arrangements. We commend Ukraine's posture of restraint in the face of continued provocations and efforts at destabilization.
7. We underline our strong appreciation and continued support for Germany's and France's efforts through the Normandy Process to secure the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which is the only way forward for a lasting political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We acknowledge public statements by President Zelensky underlining Ukraine's firm commitment to the Minsk Agreements and his readiness to contribute constructively to the process. Ukrainian overtures merit serious consideration by Russian negotiators and by the Government of the Russian Federation. We call on Russia to seize the opportunity which Ukraine's proposals represent for the diplomatic path.
8. Russia must de-escalate and fulfil its commitments in implementing the Minsk Agreements. The increase in ceasefire violations along the line of contact in recent days is highly concerning. We condemn the use of heavy weaponry and indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, which constitute a clear violation of the Minsk Agreements. We also condemn that the Russian Federation continues to hand out Russian passports to the inhabitants of the non-government controlled areas of Ukraine. This clearly runs counter to the spirit of the Minsk agreements.

9. We are particularly worried by measures taken by the self-proclaimed “People’s Republics” which must be seen as laying the ground for military escalation. We are concerned that staged incidents could be used as a pretext for possible military escalation. Russia must use its influence over the self-proclaimed republics to exercise restraint and de-escalate.

10. In this context, we firmly express our support for the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission, whose observers play a key role in de-escalation efforts. This mission must be allowed to carry out its full mandate without restrictions to its activities and freedom of movement to the benefit and security of the people in eastern Ukraine.

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[PM meeting with Latvian President Levits and Estonian Prime Minister Kallas: 19 February 2022](#)

Press release

The Prime Minister met Latvian President Levits and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas today in Munich.



The Prime Minister met Latvian President Levits and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas today in Munich.

The leaders discussed the ongoing tensions on Ukraine’s border and agreed on the need for clear European and NATO solidarity in the face of Russian aggression.

The Prime Minister also underscored the UK's support for Baltic states and the importance of forums like NATO and the Joint Expeditionary Force. The UK is the largest contributor to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the region and Prime Minister Kallas thanked the Prime Minister for the UK doubling our troop presence in Estonia in recent weeks.

The Prime Minister, President Levits and Prime Minister Kallas agreed that there remained a window for diplomacy and that allies must work tirelessly to prevent further Russian incursion into Ukraine.

They agreed to continue working together to impose a significant cost on Russia should they decide to further violate Ukraine's sovereignty.

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