

[Press release: UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson holds talks with political leaders in Thailand](#)

During his visit, the Foreign Secretary met Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai. The Foreign Secretary encouraged swift progress towards democratic elections. Mr Johnson updated Foreign Minister Don on what he had seen during his recent visit to Bangladesh and Burma, and discussed how to do more to address the Rohingya crisis. The wide-ranging discussions also covered co-operation on education, the digital economy, science and innovation, financial technology, and trade and investment, as well as further co-operation to tackle the Illegal Wildlife Trade. Prime Minister Chan-o-cha confirmed that Thailand would be represented at Ministerial level at the London Illegal Wildlife Trade conference this autumn.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

The UK is a country that goes out into the world to build and develop relationships and it was a great pleasure to meet Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai.

Our relationship with Thailand spans a broad range of issues from bilateral trade and investment to regional security and the Illegal Wildlife Trade. I look forward to further strengthening the UK's relationship with Thailand in the future.

During his visit Mr Johnson also met Dr Surakiart, Chairman of the International Board to Rakhine Advisory Commission, viewed illegally trafficked ivory, pangolin scales and other animal parts seized by Thai customs, and visited a transport development to highlight opportunities for UK businesses in the infrastructure sector.

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Further information

[Press release: Experience the UK at](#)

the Great British Festival

Experience the best of British culture and innovation at the #GreatBritishFestival launch event on 23 February as the British Embassy Manila brings together different UK brands to create a fun-filled day with great British music, fashion, food, and arts at Glorietta 2 Palm Drive Activity Center, Makati City.

Daniel Pruce, British Ambassador to the Philippines said:

In this year's festival, our goal is to showcase the very best of what Great Britain as a whole nation has to offer. We are gathering a broad spectrum of British companies that represent not only world-class British culture and creativity but also the core values of the nation.

Among the participating companies are: M&S, Speedo, The Body Shop, Lush, Clarks, Shell, STI Limited, Digital Barriers, Diageo, Quorn, Costa Coffee, Union Jack Tavern, Shakeaway, Norton Motorcycles and HSBC.

Different fun activities await everyone in Glorietta Mall on February 23. There will be interactive exhibits, multiple raffles, a great trivia challenge, British film screenings, book reading for children, a whisky pavilion, and the much-anticipated Rockaoke Contest (with a first prize of two tickets to London on Etihad Airways).

Admission to this Great British Festival event is free.

This year's Festival will be a celebration of UK culture and innovation and will reach out across the Philippines. It will run for two weeks, with activities in Metro Manila, Iloilo, Cebu, Dumaguete, and Baguio.

Organised by the British Embassy and its partners, the Great British Festival 2018 will be a great showcase of the creativity, innovation, culture, heritage and knowledge that spell Britain's success in fashion, music, food, education and design.

Watch what we're up to and join in the conversation on our social media channels.

For more information, like and follow the British Embassy Manila on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Press release: New 'Share the joy' campaign promotes shared parental leave rights for parents

- new campaign shows parents that they can both share childcare in their baby's first year, and maintain their careers, with Shared Parental Leave
- around 285,000 couples every year qualify for Shared Parental Leave, but take up could be as low as 2%
- the campaign is part of the government's commitment to raise awareness of employment rights, in a drive to boost job satisfaction and productivity as part of the modern Industrial Strategy and Good Work plan

More parents are today encouraged to take up the offer of Shared Parental Leave in their baby's first year, as the government launches a new advertising campaign to raise awareness of the opportunity.

The workplace right for eligible parents allows them to share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay after having a baby. They can take time off separately or they can be at home together for up to 6 months. Around 285,000 couples every year are eligible but take up could be as low as 2% and around half of the general public are unaware that the option exists for parents.

The campaign encourages parents to 'Share the joy' and will aim to reach them through digital website advertising, social media, adverts in train stations and on commuter routes. A new website will provide detailed information and guidance.

It launches days after the government set out its [Good Work Plan](#) to deliver the pledge to not just protect but build on workers' rights. This is a vital part of the government's [Industrial Strategy](#) – a long-term plan to build a Britain fit for the future by helping businesses create better, higher-paying jobs in every part of the UK.

Business Minister Andrew Griffiths said:

Shared Parental Leave gives choice to families. Dads and partners don't have to miss out on their baby's first step, word or giggle – they can share the childcare, and share the joy.

Employers can reap the benefits too. We know that flexibility in work is proven to create happier, more loyal and more productive workforces.

Providing truly flexible employment options is a key part of the Industrial Strategy, the government's long-term plan to build a

Britain fit for the future by helping businesses create better, higher-paying jobs in every part of the UK.

Shared Parental Leave was introduced in 2015 to offer choice to eligible parents when it comes to childcare, and allow mothers to return to work sooner if they wish to. The policy benefits employers who can retain talent in their workforce and can contribute to closing their gender pay gap.

Minister for Women Victoria Atkins, said:

Providing parents with choice and flexibility in how they balance childcare responsibilities is a key step towards achieving equality in the workplace and beyond.

Shared parental leave is good for parents, children and employers. I am very pleased that this campaign will raise awareness of its benefits and, as a result, give more parents the chance to make informed decisions about what's best for their families.

This government is determined to tackle and ultimately close the gender pay gap. To do this, we need to support women to fulfil their potential in the workplace – and giving women the choice to share childcare with their partners is crucial to that effort.

Employment rights have been placed firmly at the centre of government policy, with Greg Clark, Business Secretary, taking responsibility for promoting the delivery of better quality jobs as part of a drive to boost productivity in the modern Industrial Strategy.

As part of the campaign, parents who have taken Shared Parental Leave have shared their experience of how the policy has benefitted their families.

Leila Reyburn and Tom Markwell work for charities Mind and St Mungo's in London. They had a baby girl, Pearl, in 2016 and decided to take Shared Parental Leave with Leila taking the first 10 months, and Tom taking the final 2 months.

Leila said:

Shared Parental Leave meant that I could say yes when the opportunity came for me to take a promotion at work. I could go back to work early to cover for my line manager while he was on secondment.

But it was also nice that I didn't have to put Pearl in nursery at the same time and know that she was bonding with her dad. It means she now has a strong connection with us both and is equally attached to us both.

Key facts

- the government is spending £1.5 million on a campaign to make sure parents know they can take leave to share the special moments with their child in their baby's first year
- 285,000 couples are eligible to take shared parental leave every year
- according to BEIS research around 49% have heard of shared parental leave, but only 8% claim to know a lot about the policy
- government estimated that between 2% and 8% of eligible parents would take shared parental leave in its first few years and take up is estimated to be in line with those initial expectations
- parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave, taking it in up to three separate blocks, or sharing the time to have up to six months off together
- parents can also share up to 37 weeks of Statutory Shared Parental Pay, this is paid at £140.98 per week – the same as the last 33 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay
- as well as Shared Parental Leave which was introduced in 2015, the government introduced a right to request flexible working (2014) which applies to around 20 million people
- parents can benefit from up to £2,000-a-year of tax-free childcare per year

Notes to editors

1. The government introduced Shared Parental Leave in 2015 to give greater childcare flexibility for parents in the first year after their baby is born.
2. To take Shared Parental Leave you must be an employee who has worked continuously for the same employer for around 40 weeks (ie from around the time you or your partner became pregnant).
3. Shared Parental Pay is paid at the rate of £140.98 a week or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.
4. The Good Work Plan was published on 7 February 2018 in response to [Matthew Taylor's independent review of modern working practices](#).
5. The reforms are a vital part of the Industrial Strategy, the government's long-term plan to build a Britain fit for the future by helping businesses create better, higher-paying jobs in every part of the UK.

6. According to BEIS research around 49% have heard of shared parental leave, but only 8% claim to know a lot about the policy.
7. Shared parental leave campaign is jointly funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Government Equalities Office.

[News story: Food and drink export sales soar in Brexit boost](#)

Overseas sales of UK food and drink continued to soar last year, with record exports of over £22 billion demonstrating a clear desire for British taste, quality and high standards around the world.

UK food and drink businesses are now selling their products to 217 markets – with sales of milk & cream increasing by 61%, salmon by 23% and pork by 14%.

An increasing thirst for British tipples has also seen bottles of UK beer appearing on shelves as far as Japan and New Zealand, while gin continues to go through a 'ginaissance' with international sales of UK brands reaching over £500 million. From January to December 2017 we also sent £85 million worth of cheese to France, £21 million of chocolate to Belgium and even £2 million of tea to China.

Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove said:

Farmers, fisherman and our food producers are all helping to deliver a Brexit bonus – with more exports of British food and drink than ever.

Contrary to the constant negativity of the doom-mongers, the British economy is going from strength to strength showing that a Green Brexit can deliver for the whole country.

This growing hunger for UK produce reveals the huge opportunities for producers and manufacturers as the UK prepares to leave the European Union. The US remains the largest market outside of the EU – worth £2.3 billion last year and rising 3% from the previous year.

[As the Prime Minister demonstrated during her recent trip to China](#), the UK's mouth-watering food and drink continues to grow in popularity across the globe with China now the 8th largest export market for UK food and drink.

Over £560 million worth of food and drink was bought by Chinese consumers last year, who showed a particular preference for UK salmon, whisky and pork.

Food and Drink Federation Director General Ian Wright CBE said:

UK food and drink is known across the globe for its provenance and quality. We are a proud home to many of the world's most beloved brands.

We must now build upon this platform in order to take advantage of new opportunities and the growing global appetite for great British and Northern Irish manufacturing as we leave the EU.

The Government, and its team of trade experts, continues to encourage and support UK business as they consider launching into overseas markets or expanding their current global customer base.

This is complemented by the government's [Food is GREAT campaign](#), which highlights the success of current exporters and showcases the UK's top quality food and drink.

In addition, last month, industry representatives and government officials [held the first meeting of the newly created Food and Drink Sector Council](#). The Council will work together to boost productivity, meaning industry will be better placed to take advantage of emerging opportunities to access more markets and boost exports as we leave the European Union.

Major UK exports include:

- Whisky (£4.5 billion)
- Salmon (£720 million)
- Chocolate (£680 million)
- Cheese (£623 million)
- Beer (£603 million)
- Shellfish (£600 million)

Top 5 countries we export to:

- Irish Republic (£3.7 billion)
 - France (£2.3 billion)
 - USA (£2.3 billion)
 - Netherlands (£1.5 billion)
 - Germany (£1.4 billion)
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Press release: Boris Johnson meets Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has today (10 February) visited Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where over a million Rohingya Muslim refugees are living in crowded and unsafe refugee camps

Over 688,000 people have fled from their homes in Burma's Rakhine State into Bangladesh since August 2017, joining around 340,000 Rohingya who had previously fled.

The Foreign Secretary toured a camp which is home to 500,000 refugees – equivalent to a city the size of Leicester.

He met Rohingya families and community leaders to learn about the persecution they have suffered, and hear first-hand about the challenges that life in the camps presents. He listened to their views, heard about their hopes for the future, and the conditions they believed needed to be put in place for any return to take place.

Mr Johnson visited a UNICEF child-friendly site where he saw the efforts being made to keep young people safe. He sat down with some children on the site to talk about their drawings. He was also briefed on gender-based violence by caseworkers.

Tomorrow (11 February) Mr Johnson will hold talks with Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the crisis and press for the end to the suffering in Rakhine and the safe and voluntary return of the refugees.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

I have seen for my own eyes the horrendous living conditions the Rohingya people are having to endure and it has only further strengthened my commitment to working with international partners to improve the lives of these people in 2018.

I pay tribute to the hospitality and compassion shown by the government of Bangladesh, who are facing an enormous challenge in providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya community.

While I welcome steps by both the Burmese and Bangladeshi governments towards ensuring that these people can return home, it is vital that the Rohingya refugees must be allowed to their homes

in Rakhine voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, under international oversight, and when the conditions in Burma are right.

Notes to editors

All the latest news is available on the Foreign Office page of the gov.uk website at: www.gov.uk/fco

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