

Ashgabat hosts Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee celebrations: speech by Ambassador

Good evening guests, friends and colleagues! Welcome to those observing Ramadan. And a special welcome to our Guest of Honour, Mr Muhammetgeldi Serdarov, Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan. You are very welcome.

A particular warm welcome to those in the room tonight who have made the effort to join us despite the humanitarian crisis affecting their families, friends and homes in Ukraine – our thoughts are with you and thank you for joining us. The UK will continue to stand with you against the violence and aggression you are facing and hold those responsible to account.

Thank you for joining us today as we celebrate three important events. First, we are celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's 96th birthday. Second, we are celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. And third, we are celebrating 30 years of diplomatic relations between the UK and Turkmenistan. This follows Turkmenistan's celebration of 30 years of independence last year.

I'm delighted to say that tonight we are all at the first Queen's Birthday Party event in Central Asia for almost three years and at one of the first, if not the first, Queen's Birthday Party events anywhere in the world in this Jubilee year.

I'd like to start by saying a few words in honour of Her Majesty the Queen. She was born in April 1926, meaning she turns 96 next week and she was crowned Queen in 1952, meaning this year she marks 70 years on the throne. These 70 years have brought many opportunities and many challenges. When she became Queen, the world had just emerged from a global conflict and was led by figures including Churchill, Truman and Stalin.

During her reign, 14 British Prime Ministers and 14 US Presidents have taken office. During her reign, the world has witnessed the birth of space travel, the fall of the Berlin wall, the invention of mobile phones and the internet, world population rising from 2.5 to 8 billion people, the ending of some global health threats and the emerging of new ones and the certainty that serious action is needed to eliminate the existential threat of climate change.

Throughout Her Majesty has been a symbol of stability and continuity in a changing world. She has lived and worked by principles of service, duty and hard work, principles which those of us in public service strive to emulate. She is, quite rightly, taking on lighter duties at almost 96, something which I think we would all agree she deserves! I am glad you have been able to join

us to mark both her birthday and her Jubilee.

We are also here tonight to celebrate 30 years of diplomatic relations between the UK and Turkmenistan.

The UK and Turkmenistan's business and economy links have been a major part of our relationship over these 30 years. Our relationship is always developing and innovating. These days our focus is on the green economy.

When I met His Excellency Foreign Minister Mr Meredov in January, he asked the UK to be 'practical and active'. And so we have been. We are working actively to build links in the green economy – in hydrogen, in solar, in wind, in emissions capture and in more efficient use of water resources.

Practical and active defines our relationship. Shared principles also define our relationship. Both countries are strong supporters of the UN system. Both countries regularly express support for the principles of sovereignty and the importance of international law. Both countries have set out how investment in women and girls and in education will help create a better future for everyone.

That better future for everyone depends on us tackling climate change – together. In the UK we are experiencing climate change in yes – even more rain and yes – even heatwaves. Here in Turkmenistan hotter and drier summers, are making life more difficult for people, plants and animals. The UK will remain a steadfast partner of Turkmenistan in its work to tackle the causes and effects of climate change. And of course the UK was pleased to host His Excellency Mr Serdar Berdimuhamedov, now President, at the Glasgow Climate Change summit last November.

I would now like to turn to some thanks.

Many people who have worked very hard to put this Birthday Party on for you today.

I would ask you to put your hands together at the end of my speech for them.

Thank you to the wonderful work of the British Embassy team, all of whom have worked together to make tonight happen. You have done us proud.

Thank you to our sponsors, JCB, for supporting us to hold this event.

Thank you to Hypervision for providing the holograms.

Thank you to the Yyldyz team for looking after us tonight.

And thank you to the orchestra, conducted by Mr Rasul Klychev with Maysa Niyazova who are playing a great selection of British – as well as international – music.

Finally, let me propose two toasts.

I propose a toast to the health and success of the President, Government and People of Turkmenistan!

I propose a toast to the health and happiness of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II!

Thank you for your attention and now I would like to invite our guest of honour, His Excellency Mr Muhammetgeldi Serdarov, Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan to say a few words.

[Offshore drilling merger raises competition concerns](#)

Press release

The CMA has found that the merger of Noble and Maersk Drilling could increase operating costs for oil and gas producers in the UK North Sea.



In February, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened an investigation into the approximately £2.6 billion anticipated merger between Maersk Drilling and Noble Corporation.

Noble and Maersk Drilling are both globally active offshore drilling contractors for the oil and gas industry. The CMA's investigation primarily focussed on the two businesses' overlapping activities in the supply of a certain type of platform, known as a 'jack-up' rig, commonly used for offshore drilling by UK customers in the North Sea.

Following its Phase 1 investigation, the CMA has found the deal raises competition concerns in the supply of jack-up rigs for offshore drilling in North West Europe (the area comprising the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands). The merging business are two of the four main suppliers in this market and have frequently competed against each other for contracts in the past. The CMA is concerned that the combined businesses would not face sufficient

competition after the merger, which could lead to higher prices and lower quality services for oil and gas producers in the North Sea.

If the merging businesses are unable to address the CMA's concerns, the deal will be referred for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation, to be carried out by a group of independent CMA panel members.

Colin Raftery, Senior Director of Mergers at the CMA, said:

Offshore drilling services are critical for oil and gas producers. Our investigation showed that Noble and Maersk have competed closely in the past and face only limited competition.

We're therefore concerned that the loss of competition that this deal would bring about could result in higher prices or lower quality services, increasing operating costs for oil and gas producers in the UK North Sea.

Noble and Maersk Drilling have 5 working days to offer proposals to the CMA to address the competition concerns identified. The CMA would then have a further 5 working days to consider whether to accept these in principle instead of referring the case to a Phase 2 investigation.

For more information, visit the [Noble Corporation / Maersk Drilling merger inquiry page](#).

1. On 23 February, the CMA gave notice under section 96(2A) of the Enterprise Act 2002 that the merger notice provided by Noble Corporation (Noble) and The Drilling Company of 1972 A/S (Maersk Drilling) in relation to the anticipated merger between both companies meets the requirements of section 96(2) of the Act.
2. All media enquiries should be directed to the CMA press office by email on press@cma.gov.uk, or by phone on 020 3738 6460.

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[PM: UK-India partnership 'brings security and prosperity for our people'](#)

- PM will meet Narendra Modi in New Delhi today for high-level talks on defence, diplomacy and trade
- UK will work with India to boost security in the Indo-Pacific, including

new fighter jet technology, helicopters and collaboration in the undersea battlespace

- PM will also discuss new cooperation on clean and renewable energy

The Prime Minister Boris Johnson will reiterate the vital importance of the UK-India partnership for global peace and security, as he visits New Delhi today [Friday].

He is expected to discuss next-generation defence and security collaboration across the five domains – land, sea, air, space and cyber – in meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as our nations face complex new threats.

This includes support for new Indian-designed and built fighter jets, offering the best of British know-how on building battle-winning aircraft. The UK will also seek to support India's requirements for new technology to identify and respond to threats in the Indian Ocean.

To support greater defence and security collaboration with India over the coming decade, the UK will issue an Open General Export Licence (OGEL) to India, reducing bureaucracy and shortening delivery times for defence procurement. This is our first OGEL in the Indo-Pacific region.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The world faces growing threats from autocratic states which seek to undermine democracy, choke off free and fair trade and trample on sovereignty.

The UK's partnership with India is a beacon in these stormy seas. Our collaboration on the issues that matter to both our countries, from climate change to energy security and defence, is of vital importance as we look to the future.

I look forward to discussing these issues with Prime Minister Modi in New Delhi today and working together to deliver a more secure and prosperous future for both our peoples.

The Prime Minister will also discuss new cooperation on clean and renewable energy in his meetings in New Delhi today, aimed at supporting India's energy transition away from imported oil and increasing its resilience through secure and sustainable energy, and addressing climate change in both the UK and India.

The UK and India are launching a virtual Hydrogen Science and Innovation hub to accelerate affordable green hydrogen, as well as new funding for the Green Grids Initiative announced at COP26, and collaboration on joint work on the electrification of public transport across India.

As well as boosting our domestic energy and economic resilience, the UK and India are collaborating as a force for good globally. Our governments are

committing up to £75 million to roll out adaptable clean tech innovations from India to the wider Indo-Pacific and Africa, and working together on international development and girls education.

[Future homebuyers to be freed from expensive ground rent bills on 30 June](#)

- Ground rent charges will be banned on most new residential leases from 30 June 2022
- Ban will put an end to increasing annual costs
- First step in government reform package to create fairer housing system, levelling up opportunities for more people

Future homebuyers will see their prospective property bills reduce in just over two months, when the government's ban on charging ground rent on new leases in England and Wales comes into force.

The government is taking action to rid future homeowners of annual costs – known as ground rent. Sometimes worth hundreds of pounds a year, these charges provide no clear service in return and can be set to escalate regularly, with a significant financial burden for leaseholders.

From 30 June 2022, anyone buying a home on a new long lease will now be freed from these annual costs, helping homeowners manage their bills as they face cost of living increases.

Landlords will be banned from charging ground rent to future leaseholders, under a new law that will lead to fairer, more transparent homeownership for thousands of homebuyers, helping to level up opportunities for more people.

In preparation, many landlords have already reduced ground rent to zero for homebuyers starting a new lease with them. Anyone preparing to sign a new lease on a home in the next two months should speak to their landlord to ensure their ground rent rate reflects the upcoming changes.

Leasehold Minister, Lord Stephen Greenhalgh said:

This is an important milestone in our work to fix the leasehold system and to level up home ownership.

Abolishing these unreasonable costs will make the dream of home ownership a more affordable reality for the next generation of home buyers.

I welcome the move from many landlords who have already set ground

rent on their new leases to zero and I urge others to follow suit ahead of this becoming law.

The move forms the first part of the government's reform package that will make homeownership cheaper, fairer and more secure.

Future measures, [announced last year](#), include a new right for leaseholders to extend their leases to 990 years at zero ground rent and an online calculator to help leaseholders find out how much it would cost to buy their freehold or extend their lease.

In addition, thousands of existing leaseholders have also already seen a reduction in their inflated ground rent costs. In a government crackdown, the Competition Market Authority (CMA) secured commitments with major homebuilders to stop doubling ground charges every year for leaseholders.

Those who own properties with Aviva, Persimmon, Countryside Properties, Taylor Wimpey and others will see their ground rent returned to the rate it was when they first bought their home. The CMA's investigation is continuing into Barratt Developments, Brigante Properties and the investment group Abacus Land and Adriatic Land.

The ban on landlords charging ground rent on new residential leases, announced today, will also apply to retirement homes. This will come into force no earlier than 1 April 2023 and more details will be confirmed in due course.

See more information on the [Leasehold Reform \(Ground Rent\) Act](#).

The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act is the first of a two-part programme of legislation to reform the leasehold system in this Parliament.

Leasehold is a form of home ownership that gives a leaseholder the exclusive right to live in a property for a fixed number of years. The lease is an agreement between the leaseholder and their landlord/ freeholder, listing the number of years and any other obligations and responsibilities upon both parties.

Ground rent is a charge that leaseholders pay to their freeholder – usually paid annually for long leases.

The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act means that if any ground rent is demanded as part of a new residential long lease, it cannot be charged at more than the cost of one peppercorn per year. This is known as 'peppercorn ground rent' and effectively sets the rate to zero.

The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act will also restrict ground rent to zero on retirement properties, to ensure that those who live in retirement housing benefit from the same reform as other leaseholders. The changes to ground rent for retirement properties will come into force no sooner than 1 April 2023.

There will only be selected exceptions from this Act. These are tightly defined and include applicable community-led housing, certain financial products and business leases. Statutory lease extensions for both houses and flats remain unchanged and are therefore exempt from the provisions of the Act.

For existing leaseholders (of both houses and flats) who choose to extend their leases through the non-statutory ('voluntary') route, the ground rent will now be restricted to zero ('a peppercorn') on that newly extended term, under the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act.

Last year, the [government announced a package of reforms](#) to make it cheaper and easier for leaseholders to buy their freehold or extend their lease. The [government recently consulted on further changes](#) that could help leaseholders buy or extend their lease and it will respond in due course.

[Food insecurity and the global cost of Russia's war on Ukraine: UK statement at the UN](#)

Thank you to Ireland for convening this meeting, and to our speakers for so clearly setting out the scale of food insecurity, its relationship to conflict, and the precariousness of the situation.

But today's discussion is particularly timely because Russia's invasion of Ukraine has disrupted the export of one third of the world's wheat. So, Russia's actions directly result in 1.7 billion people, in 107 economies, being severely exposed to at least one of rising food, or energy prices, or tighter finance conditions.

In short, Russia has violated a sovereign nation, killed civilians and destabilised the global economy.

As a result, countries on the Security Council's peace and security agenda are increasingly fragile. The risk of famine in Yemen is exacerbated as nearly 50% of its wheat is imported from Ukraine and Russia, so seven million Yemeni people are expected to be one step away from famine by June 2022. And that can only put the recent truce under pressure.

We know that Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan are likely to be hardest hit – wheat prices there have already tripled in the last 8 weeks. But many other countries will feel the impacts too. And worldwide, it's harder for the world food programme and OCHA to deliver food aid.

The UK is working with the international community to take action, including

at this week's spring meetings.

First, we want the World Bank to prioritise support for Ukraine and other countries hardest hit. This includes expanded social safety nets, finance for agricultural trade, advocating against export bans, and ensuring the Crisis Response Window and Early Response Financing is sufficiently resourced and flexible. The \$93 billion International Development Association replenishment should be deployed quickly and effectively to help countries most in need.

Second, the UK is providing bilateral funding and technical advice to countries to support their transition to renewable energy, helping Small Island Developing States access concessional finance, and providing funding to support the livelihoods of farmers and vulnerable populations.

Third, we are supporting the better use of data and technology for early warning, as Amina so eloquently recommended.

In conclusion, today we join resounding calls for Russia to end their attack on Ukraine. The war must stop now – so we can help Ukraine and the world recover.

Thank you.