

Only this government's distorted austerity agenda could lead to such contradictory policies – Debbie Abrahams

Debbie Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary,

responding to the Government's announcement of jobcentre closures, said:

"At a time when the Tories are cutting social security and introducing sanctions for low-paid workers, it's reckless at best and perverse at worst for the Government to close so many Jobcentres.

"Only this government's distorted austerity agenda could lead to such contradictory policies.

"This Tory Government's decision to close Jobcentres across the country shows they are not serious about helping people to find decent, secure and well-paid work'.

Charter flights to Sansha make trips easier



Passengers get off a charter flight at Yongxing Airport in Sansha city of south China's Hainan province on Thursday, January 26, 2017. [Photo: hinews.cn]

A charter flight linking China's southernmost cities of Haikou and Sansha is taking Chinese home to their loved ones in Sansha for the upcoming Chinese lunar New Year.

"Eventually I can see my daughter during Spring Festival," said Li Chang'an who arrived at Yongxing Airport, Sansha, Thursday morning, together with 112 other passengers.

He came to Haikou from his home in central China's Henan Province to catch the flight to Sansha. His daughter is a civil servant at Sansha's industry and commerce bureau.

The charter flights started five weeks ago from Haikou, capital of Hainan, to Yongxing Island, one of the Xisha Islands and the administrative base.

Li could have joined his daughter last Spring Festival by sea but never made it, fearful of a voyage of more than 10 hours.

An air ticket to Sansha might be the best gift that Jin Honglian has ever received. Wife of a soldier stationed in Sansha, Jin previously had to lay in bed for more than 10 hours because of seasickness when she visited her husband. With the charter flight, her trip is much shorter and more comfortable.

"I'm planning to spend more time here with my husband," said Jin, who also enjoyed a discount for military families.

Sansha City was officially established in 2012 to administer the Xisha, Zhongsha and Nansha Islands, and their surrounding waters in the South China Sea.

The daily charter flight has carried more than 3,300 passengers since Dec. 22.

China pledges enhanced livelihood for people in difficulties

Chinese government has pledged enhanced efforts to ensure the basic livelihoods for people in difficulties.

A circular issued by the General Office of the State Council and published on Thursday said the work to guarantee basic livelihoods for people in difficulties matters to fairness, morality and harmony in society, noting that there should be no decline or weakening in help.

The circular called for intensified efforts to identify people of such groups and streamline policies for assisting those affected by natural disasters.

The document said housing problems should be solved by the end of this year for those who were resettled in temporary residences last year due to floods and other disasters.

Also, program will be launched to help rural residents who are caught in difficulties by serious illnesses.

The assistance efforts for those who are in extreme need, disabled people, left-behind children, orphans and vagrants will also be strengthened, according to the circular.

Press release: UK and Japan strengthen defence ties

The UK and Japan have today (26 January 2017) signed the Defence Logistics Treaty to make it easier for our armed forces to work together on a range of activities, including UN peacekeeping operations and joint humanitarian aid and disaster relief missions.

This agreement follows the success of the first ever joint exercise in Japan between the Royal Air Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force during last year's historic [Asia-Pacific tour](#).

This was another example of our ever closer defence cooperation with Japan as the UK's closest security partner in Asia.

The agreement includes practical arrangements that will allow both countries' forces to share equipment, facilities and services in a simpler and more efficient way. It covers the exchange of supplies and services, removing the need for individual agreements on a case by case basis.

Signing the treaty at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

The UK is working together with Japan as our closest security partner in Asia to promote global security, stability and prosperity. As two leading supporters of the international rules based system, this close collaboration between our forces will help support collective efforts to tackle international and regional challenges and threats.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon welcomed the agreement and said:

Japan is an important British ally and this treaty will enable closer joint work on operations and exercises, including sharing equipment, supplies and services. As Global Britain steps up, we will continue to stand alongside our Japanese friends to meet shared interests and challenges. This agreement underlines our commitment to tackling international threats which makes Britain safer and more secure.

Japan's Ambassador to the UK, Koji Tsuruoka, who signed the treaty on behalf of the Government of Japan, said:

This treaty marks a significant moment in Japan's security and defence relationship with the UK, Japan's close partner that shares fundamental values such as the rule of law and democracy. The two countries will work together on security cooperation, as well as other global issues in this changing world.

Further information

Photographs of the signing are available at [Foreign and Commonwealth Office Flickr](#)

The Defence Logistics Treaty is also referred to as an Acquisition and Cross

Servicing Agreement (ACSA). It was a commitment of the [second 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' meeting](#) in January 2016, when Japan also agreed to host RAF Typhoons in October 2016 in an historic joint air force exercise – the country's first ever with a military partner other than the USA.

UK-Japan defence and security cooperation is going from strength to strength. The UK and Japan continue to develop new defence technologies, with a particular focus on missile technology. 2016 also saw our cooperation in third countries expand from South East Asia to Africa.

As Japan prepares to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, our cooperation on cyber security is also expanding. Japan's Olympics Minister, Tamayo Marukawa visited the UK in January to discuss the UK's cyber expertise from London 2012 and the UK's experience of crisis preparedness in managing large sporting events.

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Nicola Sturgeon has been told to take responsibility for the nurse staffing crisis which has led to cancelled operations and empty theatres – instead of agitating for another referendum.

As health secretary, she cut student nursing numbers in two successive years, a decision she today said she stood by.

However, this week it has emerged hospitals have had to cancel procedures because of a lack of workers, and desperate health boards are forking out up to £1500 for agency nurse shifts.

And even after announcing a modest increase in student numbers for next year, the Royal College of Nursing said yesterday this still wouldn't meet demand, adding: "It is not enough to say that there are more nurses or that today's intake figures are the highest in years."

At First Minister's Questions, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said Ms Sturgeon should "confront the failings of 10 years" rather than obsessing about independence.

Ruth asked, were the First Minister to have her time again, would she still have cut those nursing numbers in 2010 and 2011.

Instead of admitting that error, she said: "We took decisions on the data available at the time."

This is despite both nursing bodies and opposition parties warning the cuts would come back to haunt the NHS.

Ruth also raised the example of north east patient Hugh Falconer, who was put on an urgent referral for treatment and told he would receive surgery within 12 weeks.

However, he's since been informed that the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary can't perform the surgery, and patients are no longer being referred to the waiting times back-up facility in Glasgow.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said: "We have a Scottish Government which puts its failing independence obsession before an NHS crisis of its own making.

"The First Minister asks what sort of country we want to be: I want a country run by a government that does the job we pay it to do – to look after Scotland's public services.

"Instead, we have one obsessed with a narrow nationalist project that has had its day.

"Six years ago, as health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon embarked on catastrophic cuts to student nursing places.

"She was warned by nursing leaders and opposition parties of the short-sightedness of this approach, and the impact it would have on patient care.

"Now, as predicted, patients are paying the price as routine operations are cancelled and treatment waiting times grow – all because of staff shortages.

"People want a country run by a Scottish Government that spends its every waking hour sorting out public services like the NHS – not obsessing about another referendum, or stoking up Brexit divisions.

"It's time for her to confront the failings of the last decade of this SNP government, and set out clear plans on how she intends to tackle them."

RCN Scotland said the SNP was "failing to futureproof" Scotland's nursing workforce:

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/student-nurse-intake-numbers-25-jan-2017>

Student nursing numbers have fallen under the SNP:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2014/12/student-nursing-numbers-hit-new-low/>

Earlier this week, the Scottish Conservatives revealed desperate health boards are paying up to £1500 per shift to agencies to cover staff shortages:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/01/agency-nurses-paid-more-than-1500-a-shift/>

It has been reported that operations are being cancelled as a result of staff shortages:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/operations-cancelled-over-staff-shortage-2qtbvv8lw>