

How could the Chancellor help raise productivity?

The budget is billed as helping drive productivity higher. That would be a good idea. If we work smarter as a country then each person can earn more. The government seems to have in mind labour productivity in its plans, though making productive use of capital, energy and other inputs also matters and can help make a country richer if done well.

The way to encourage smarter working and higher earnings must begin with fair taxation with low rates of tax on enterprise and effort. Politicians of all parties regard work as a good, yet all agree it must be taxed. Given the volume of public service we want as a country, it is true there has to be some tax on work. It is also true that if you tax work too highly you send it abroad, you persuade higher earning people to value leisure time more, you encourage early retirement. I trust the leaks about higher National Insurance for the self employed are just Treasury officials greedy for revenue and not inspired briefing. Starting a productivity drive with a big increase in taxes on some of the most productive people in the economy is not a great idea. Small and new business offers us scope for major adjustments in our economy and improvements in its performance. It is the new fast moving smaller businesses that often pioneer the modern more productive techniques and technologies, offer the new goods and services, and use labour well. Cutting marginal rates of tax on enterprise, employment and business success will encourage more of what we need.

In both manufacturing and clerical work providing more machine power and computer power at the elbow of each employee raises productivity. UK productivity in factories in recent years has surged as elsewhere in the advanced world. What was done by hand and arm power in a sixties factory is now often done by robot or mechanical power. What was done in an office by people on typewriters, calculators and adding machines is now done by computers and electronic programmes with less human intervention. The full internet revolution has further to run to automate and take more of the routine out of office and factory working. The new jobs will be in machine minding, programming, managing and reviewing the output, and in designing and selling.

The waves of change that are often ascribed to imports and foreign competition also have been driven by automation. A more productive economy has to welcome these waves of technical progress and adopt more machine power to compete. It is then equally important that those who have lost their jobs as a result are helped and trained to undertake the many new roles a machine driven culture produce. What can a Chancellor do to bring this about?

He can and should concentrate on helping the public sector to adopt the new ways of doing things that will be smarter, higher quality and more efficient by using computer power. Productivity performance has been disappointing in the public sector this century. He can and should with the rest of

government to do more to ensure the casualties of such changes are also winners, by backing retraining and recruitment into the new more productive jobs investment can spawn.

[In Somalia, UN chief Guterres urges global support to avert famine, tackle cholera](#)

7 March 2017 – Visiting Somalia, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged international support to avoid a famine in the drought-hit African country and curb the spread of cholera while also highlighting some hopeful developments there.

“It is exactly because it is tragic and because it is hopeful that it makes sense to make a very strong appeal to the international community to support Somalia at the present moment,” Mr. Guterres told reporters in the country’s capital, Mogadishu.

With almost half of the Somali population in need of assistance, including 330,000 children who are acutely malnourished, the UN chief reiterated an appeal for \$825 million for the support of 5.5 million people for six months.

“There is a chance in Somalia to avoid a situation like the one we had in 2011,” he said, referring to the previous famine that killed many in that country.

He said that 3.3 million people are in need of health support and that cholera has been developing and making hunger even worse and more dangerous. In the last two months, there were 7,731 cases of cholera with 183 people dying. Just last week, there were 1,352 cases of cholera and 38 people dying. “It’s a process in acceleration,” he warned.

But now is also “a moment of hope” because Somalia is turning the page, with a new President elected and a new Prime Minister appointed, he said.

“There is a very strong commitment to enhance security and at the same time to enhance the capacity of the government to start to provide effective services to the population,” he said.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is doing a job that the world should be grateful for because it is not only protecting Somalis, but protecting all against terrorism, has not been effectively helped by the international community, he said.

[UN migration agency seeks \\$25 million to aid families in Eastern Ukraine](#)

7 March 2017 – To meet the emergency needs of 180,000 people in Eastern Ukraine, the United Nations migration agency today announced plans to provide aid ranging from blankets to money to cover electricity costs and psychological support at a cost of \$25 million.

“Many of the people who need urgent help are trapped in villages along the contact line without fuel for heating and cooking, hot water, food, or basic necessities,” said Manfred Profazi, the Chief of Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine.

Since April 2014, nearly 10,000 people have been killed in fighting in Eastern Ukraine and nearly 23,000 injured.

In addition, an estimated 3.8 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, according to IOM figures. More than half of those people are displaced across the country – jobless, struggling to pay their utility bills and lacking funds for food and medical expenses, according to information released today.

One of the worries is that mass displacement elevates the risk of human trafficking. In addition to humanitarian concerns, the UN agency is aiming to help the displaced communities come together to strengthen mutual trust.

“Traffickers know the market and cynically move in to exploit vulnerable people who are desperate to provide for their families. We will work with communities both to prevent it happening and to assist victims,” Mr. Profazi said.

[China to develop satellite-delivery rockets released from airplanes](#)

China will develop a new generation of rockets launched from aircraft that can put satellites into space, according to Li Tongyu, the head of carrier rocket development at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology.

Air-launched rockets can rapidly replace dysfunctional satellites or, in cases of disaster relief, quickly send up Earth observation satellites to assist in the effort, Li said.

Designers at the academy, which is the main developer of Chinese carrier rockets, have designed a model capable of sending a payload of about 100 kilograms into low Earth orbit and are ready to produce one if the government asks, he said. They plan to design a larger rocket that could carry 200 kg into orbit.

“The Y-20 strategic transport plane will be the carrier of these rockets. The jet will hold a rocket within its fuselage and release it at a certain altitude. The rocket will be ignited after it leaves the plane,” Li said.

Large satellites will still have to be put into orbit with conventional rockets, experts said.

Delivery of the Y-20 to the Chinese Air Force began in July. It is China’s first domestically developed heavy-lift transport plane and has a maximum takeoff weight of more than 200 metric tons and a maximum payload of about 66 tons, aviation experts said.

Solid-fuel rockets can be launched from planes much faster than land-based, liquid-fueled rockets, where preparation can take days, weeks or longer, in part because it takes so much time to pump in the fuel, experts said.

Each mission involving a solid-fuel rocket launched by a Y-20 would take only 12 hours of preparation to place a 200 kg satellite into a sun-synchronous orbit 700 km above Earth, according to estimates by Long Lehao, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and other researchers at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology. The estimates were in an article published in October in the Journal of Deep-Space Exploration.

Other advantages of such rockets are that they are flexible in deployment and use and do not need ground infrastructure, said Pang Zhihao, executive editor-in-chief of Space International magazine. They also are less susceptible to bad weather and launch costs are lower than those of ground-launched rockets, he added.

The United States undertook the world’s first air-launched space mission in 1990, in which a Pegasus rocket developed by the former Orbital Sciences Corp was launched from a refitted B-52 strategic bomber to send two small satellites into orbit. Since then, 43 Pegasus missions have been carried out, with the most recent in December.

Several US space companies, including Virgin Galactic and Generation Orbit Launch Services, are developing air-launched rockets.

Chinese designers have been quietly working on the concept for years. China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, parent of Li’s academy, displayed a scale model of a winged, solid-propellant, air-launched rocket in 2006 at the Sixth China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition in Zhuhai, Guangdong province.

Water level of nation's largest salt lake rises



A tourist practices Yoga on the bank of Qinghai Lake as a shepherd watches in Qinghai province in October. [Photo/Xinhua]

The water level of China's largest inland saltwater lake has risen over the past decade due to abundant rainfall and rising temperatures, according to a recent survey.

The average annual water level at Qinghai Lake's hydrological station in Northwest China's Qinghai province rose 1.66 meters over the past 10 years.

The rising water level is the result of increased precipitation and meltwater from nearby glaciers and highland snow, according to Dai Sheng, an engineer with the provincial climate center.

Average annual precipitation increased to 421.8 millimeters between 2005 and last year, from 358.8 millimeters between 1961 and 2004, Dai said, adding that an improved ecosystem and vegetation also helped maintain water in the Qinghai Lake basin.

The surface area of Qinghai Lake also expanded to 4,429.3 square kilometers in September, an increase of 169.7 sq km from the same period in 2004,

according to a geographical survey in the province.

Qinghai Lake plays an important role in the ecological security of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The lake had been shrinking since the 1950s, but the combined effects of conservation and changes in the regional climate helped turn things around from 2005 onward.