

Hammond can't hide from disability cuts in the Budget

The Shadow Chancellor has today called on Philip Hammond not to go ahead with the £3.7bn worth of cuts to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) which will hit 160,000 disabled people.

The announcement, which was sneaked out last week, will mean 160,000 disabled people could see a loss in their income as a direct effect of the changes made by the government to how PIP is awarded.

John McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, said:

"Theresa May has used the cover of the by-elections to sneak out this announcement hurting so many vulnerable disabled people.

"This is a return to the worst politics of spin that so tarnished our politics for so long. It is an act of immense bad faith. She is degrading politics and demeaning the role of Prime Minister.

"Next week the Tories will make out that the economy and the public finances are doing better, however, they are planning to go ahead with a £3.7 billion cut to the disabled.

"This time last year when the economy and public finances were not doing as well, and the then Chancellor George Osborne tried to cut PIP, Labour stopped him. And in his u-turn he claimed that he could "absorb" the cost of reversing this cut.

"Hammond can't hide from these PIP cuts in his Budget. He needs to explain why he can't absorb them like his predecessor while he is still going ahead with tax giveaways to the very wealthiest in our country."

Over 800 seized for crimes related to underground banks

Chinese police seized more than 800 suspects in 380 major cases worth 900 billion yuan (US\$131 billion) related to underground banks in 2016, said the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) on Sunday.

A campaign against underground banks to maintain financial order and security is helping the country's anti-corruption drive recover the assets of fugitive officials, said the ministry.

In 2016, the ministry worked with the central bank and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange to crack down on the transfer of illicit money via offshore companies and underground banks.

Officials with the MPS said that the ministry will continue action against illegal private banks in cooperation with the central bank and the foreign exchanges regulator in 2017.

“For a long time, underground banks have become a fast channel to transfer money, for they are anonymous and hidden. Many criminals have taken advantage of the channel to transfer their illegal gains to the overseas,” said Zhang Niannian, an official with the central bank.

Underground banks have also offered a quick passageway for corrupt officials to transfer their properties, Zhang added.

The central bank will track and analyze new methods of crimes, especially in special non-financial institutions and sector, and improve measures of anti-money laundering, Zhang said.

Shu Jianping, head of the anti-money laundering office of the economic crime investigation division of the MPS, said that cases related to underground banks covered several industries, including foreign trade and real estates.

Harms of underground banks are increasing, Shu said, adding that local public security organs were urged to continue the campaign against underground banks.

NITI Aayog to organize high level workshop for advancing Innovation in Passenger Mobility and Transportation

NITI Aayog has organized a two day long high level workshop on advancing passenger mobility and transportation on February 27-28, 2017 in the national capital.

China steps up air pollution

inspections

China's environmental inspectors named and shamed more cities on Sunday for poor air quality control as the fight against smog continues.

Inspections of 18 cities in north China's Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (BTH) region and nearby areas used unannounced checks at night and undercover methods, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said.

Handan city of Hebei Province continues to illegally operate coal-fired boilers though officials had ordered them closed. After the inspections, the boilers were dismantled and a police investigation opened.

In Cangzhou, also in Hebei, an oil pipe maker, a major source of emissions, was not included in the list of companies to halt production on heavily polluted days.

A cement producer in Beijing used more electricity than usual in December, when it should have suspended production. Two other cement firms were wrongly exempted from production suspensions.

On Friday, the MEP criticized several cities in Hebei, Shanxi and Henan for not doing enough in curbing the use of "scattered coal," coal burned by households or small factories for heating and is much more dirty than that used by thermal plants, which have the equipment to reduce emissions.

China is intensifying efforts to fight pollution and environmental degradation after decades of growth left the country saddled with problems such as smog and contaminated soil.

A total of 720 people were detained and 6,454 held accountable in China for environment-related wrongdoing in 2016, according to earlier official information.

Chinese cities suffered from more days of air pollution in January, with northern areas being the worst affected.

The share of days with good air quality in BTH were a mere 36.2 percent in January, a year-on-year drop of 19.6 percentage points.

Press release: £17 million boost for the UK's booming artificial

intelligence sector

New measures to support Britain's world-leading AI sector are set to be announced as part of a bold Digital Strategy to boost growth and deliver a thriving, outward-looking digital economy that works for everyone.

Accenture has estimated AI could add in the region of £654 billion (\$814 billion) to the UK economy by 2035. So the Strategy, due to be published by Culture Secretary Karen Bradley MP on Wednesday (March 1), builds on the plan set out in the Government's Industrial Strategy to capitalise on Britain's existing strengths and back new technologies where the UK can take a lead.

Britain already has a competitive advantage in Artificial Intelligence, with some of the world's most innovative AI companies based here and a rich ecosystem of investors, employers, developers and clients. It is a fast-growing area for research and commercial investment, including by major global digital companies, and was identified as one of the technologies that could be supported through the Government's new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and the Challenger Business Programme.

AI is already making a huge positive difference in people's lives – every day. This ranges from the obvious uses, such as smartphone voice and touch recognition technology and virtual digital assistants like Siri, to less well-known benefits such as online customer services which make it easier to get help when things go wrong and fraud detection tools used by banks to protect against theft. It is also the bedrock of video games and music and movie recommendation services.

The Digital Strategy's proposals are expected to include:

- A major AI review led by Wendy Hall and Jérôme Pesenti to identify the critical elements for the exciting technology to thrive and grow in the UK. It will consider how Government and industry could work together to back this technology, which could inform a sector deal. The UK is already a world-leader in the science underpinning this technology and the sector has the potential to grow further, from early research to commercialisation.
- Government is also expected to confirm a funding boost of £17.3m from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to support the development of new Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (RAI) technologies in universities across the UK.

The moves are part of the strategy's ambition for Britain to build on areas of strength and develop a global lead in technologies, including cyber security, connected and smart devices, autonomous vehicles as well as AI. These technologies will drive future economic growth and productivity across the economy.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said:

Britain has a proud history of digital innovation – from the earliest days of computing to Sir Tim Berners-Lee’s development of the World Wide Web.

We are already pioneers in today’s artificial intelligence revolution and the Digital Strategy will build on our strengths to make sure UK-based scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs continue to be at the forefront.

Technologies like AI have the potential to transform how we live, work, travel and learn, and I am pleased that Professor Dame Wendy Hall and Jérôme Pesenti will be leading this review. It’s great that Government and industry will be working together to drive growth in the sector, to realise all the economic and social benefits for the UK.

Backing our thriving digital economy to expand and grow by putting the best foundations in place to develop new technology is a vital part of this Government’s plan to build a modern, dynamic and global trading nation.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

Investment in robotics and artificial intelligence will help make our economy more competitive, build on our world-leading reputation in these cutting-edge sectors and help us create new products, develop more innovative services and establish better ways of doing business.

Innovation is at the heart of our Industrial Strategy and the launch of the Government’s Digital Strategy underlines our commitment to this vital sector. By supporting British businesses and investing in dynamic fields such as robotics and AI, we will help put the UK at the forefront of global innovation.

Dame Wendy Hall, Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton, said:

Our scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs are at the forefront of the development of artificial intelligence and I’m looking forward to exploring how industry and government can work together to support the technology in the UK.

Media enquiries and interview requests – please contact the DCMS News and Communications team on 020 7211 2210.

Notes to editors

- Professor Dame Wendy Hall FRS FREng is Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton. Wendy is an entrepreneur, and one of the world's leading computer scientists. She was a founding director of the Web Science Research Initiative, now the Web Science Trust, and is the Executive Director of the Web Science Institute at Southampton . She was president of the British Computer Society from 2003-04 and was the first person from outside North America to be elected President of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) from 2008-10. Since 2014, she has served as a commissioner for the Global Commission on Internet Governance and is a non-executive director of Dstl and the Digital Catapult.
- Jérôme Pesenti is the CEO of BenevolentTech, the technology division of BenevolentAI, a British technology company using artificial intelligence to accelerate scientific discovery. He is a world-leading pioneer in the commercialisation of AI. He co-founded Vivisimo, a tech firm specialising in text mining and enterprise search engines, which was acquired by IBM. At IBM he became chief scientist of big data, and created and led the development of the Watson Platform – the first comprehensive cloud platform for artificial intelligence.
- The funding boost from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) will support pioneering research including a project by the University of Manchester to develop robots capable of operating autonomously and effectively within hazardous environments such as nuclear facilities, while researchers at Imperial College London will use funds to make major advances in the field of surgical micro-robotics.
- AI refers to computers and software that support behaviour comparable in some ways to human capabilities. It can interpret complex data to enable better decision making, and can work with large amounts of information to improve its own performance.
- Source:
<https://www.accenture.com/gb-en/insight-artificial-intelligence-future-growth>