

Speech: UK-Asia Tech Powerhouse

Conference: Minister for Asia speech

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It's a real pleasure to join you today.

Asia House and ABP have rightly focused on the sphere that will undoubtedly define how billions of lives are lived in the years ahead.

In my role as Minister of State at the FCO for Asia and the Pacific, one phrase has repeatedly come up in so many of my discussions with counterparts across the region, and that is 'the 4th Industrial Revolution'.

What is abundantly clear is that the world now stands at the threshold of a new age.

Technology is changing with bewildering speed how we live, work and trade. It will rapidly continue to reshape our economy and transform our society in the years ahead.

Clearly there are some challenges inherent in that, and I shall say more about those in a moment. But first I want to focus on the opportunities.

Specifically, from my perspective as a Minister who travels throughout the Asian continent, I should like to share how we in the UK are positioning ourselves to seize the opportunities of this new era, in short how we are working with our partners across the region to build partnerships for prosperity.

Global revolution

Britain is at the top of the world rankings for research into the defining technologies of the future, from genomics and synthetic biology, to robotics and satellites.

Despite hosting a little less than 1% of the world's population, the UK is home to 12 of the top 100 universities, and London is home to Europe's leading tech start-up cluster, attracting more venture capital investment than any other city on the continent.

We have ensured that enduring success by embracing change.

We use regulation wisely – not to stifle, but to stimulate a creative environment.

Britain's businesses can compete with the world's best – not only because they have access to a skilled workforce and modern infrastructure – but also because this Government is committed to ramping up our support for science and technology, providing £7 billion in new public funding over 5 years to 2022: the largest percentage increase in the science budget for some four

decades.

UK strategy

The UK's ambitious Industrial Strategy sets out an achievable, long-term plan to boost productivity and earning power across the UK. It identifies four areas where we can lead:

1. Artificial Intelligence and big data;
2. clean growth;
3. mobility;
4. meeting the needs of an ageing society

The first three are of particular relevance to your discussions today and tomorrow. We recognise that technology is an intrinsically global endeavour, and that we must collaborate if we are to maximise our success.

That not only means combining the ingenuity of the private sector with the catalytic and corraling power of government.

It also means building partnerships with countries across the vast Asian continent to make the most of our mutual strengths in science, technology and innovation.

For example, our new UK-India Technology Partnership is designed to pair up businesses, universities and start-ups in the UK with states in India.

Pilot schemes are underway: one links the Midlands with Maharashtra with a focus on Future Mobility, including autonomous vehicles and battery storage. Another pairs our Northern Powerhouse region with Karnataka, with a focus on AI and Data.

We are also working with the Indian Government on AI in healthcare. We have established the catchily-named "Healthcare Artificial Intelligence Catalyst", which will use new technologies to improve access to healthcare in India, particularly in rural areas.

Clean growth

We are also working with our international partners on spreading the benefits of clean energy.

Last year, we agreed with South Korea jointly to invest up to £6 million over three years in a competition amongst entrepreneurs and university researchers to find new, more cost effective, energy systems.

The global shift to clean energy will require significant investment and will create major markets in associated technologies, systems and services.

Our Industrial Strategy's Clean Growth Grand Challenge aims to put the UK at the forefront of the development, manufacture and use of low cost, low carbon technologies.

Future of mobility

We share ambitions in the future of mobility, where we are looking to build on our strong partnerships with Asian countries. We know that innovations in automation, electrification and demand-led transport will bring huge changes in how we move and how things move.

Here in the UK we are committed to ensuring all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040.

That is why we have led the way in encouraging the development of the global electric car market.

At the Zero Emission Vehicle summit last year, we achieved a big first step by getting governments, and states as well as industry to sign the Birmingham Declaration, promoting the deployment of zero emission vehicles worldwide.

FinTech

Collaboration on FinTech is something else that I have been working hard to promote across Asia, already with some tangible success.

The UK has signed FinTech Bridge agreements with Hong Kong, Singapore, China and South Korea.

In April, we launched a pilot with Hong Kong to provide bespoke support to 10 UK firms – through coaching, mentoring and arranging market introductions to Hong Kong's FinTech sector.

In building these FinTech bridges we are not just trying to develop stronger international connections.

We are also looking to ease regulatory barriers – for example, by creating a referral mechanism that allows firms already licensed in one market to seek authorisation to operate in another.

Cyber security

As I mentioned earlier, where there is opportunity, there is also inherently risk, we must be clear-sighted that our increasing dependence on technology makes us all more vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

As a consequence the UK has fast developed expertise as a global leader in cyber security and a champion of the rules-based international system in cyberspace.

We are working tirelessly with our partners in Asia and around the world, and through multilateral organisations such as the UN, to ensure that cyberspace is free, open, peaceful, fair and secure.

We are supporting Japan's G20 policy commitment to increased data sharing.

And we are putting into action the Memorandum of Cooperation we signed at the

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting last year to build cyber security capacity in the Commonwealth and amongst the ten-strong ASEAN confederation.

Over the next three years, our Prosperity Fund's Digital Access Programme will boost Indonesia's cybersecurity resilience and capacity, which – among other things – will make it safer for local and international firms to do business.

I am delighted to confirm that Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner to the Asia Pacific region, Natalie Black, will be speaking in more detail tomorrow about our cyber security expertise and how we are partnering with our allies to tackle this shared threat.

Conclusion

I hope you find that session, and indeed the entire two day conference, both informative and productive. I look forward to hearing the outcome.

To sum up – the UK has real expertise in the technologies of the future and our Government is determined to seize the opportunities ahead.

We are not just on the front foot in terms of research and strategy. We are also leading the way in building partnerships with other countries at the cutting edge of technological innovation, most particularly and urgently in Asia.

I look forward to strengthening these worthwhile partnerships, with governments and with industry, in the exciting years ahead.

[Press release: Blooming lovely display to support wildlife on A38](#)

As well as improving roads, Highways England is committed to a national Biodiversity Plan which is supported by a £30 million investment programme over five years. The plan recognises road verges and adjoining land can be managed to provide areas of wildlife habitat, relatively free from human access. These road verges can also be used to connect fragmented areas of habitats, enabling plant and animal populations to move and interact, and so become stronger and more resilient.

The wild flower scheme on the A38 was started last year when seeds from over 20 variety of flowers, including cornflowers, oxeye daisies, yellow rattle and poppies were sown over five hectares of roadside verge between Ashburton and Ivybridge, adding to the ten hectares that have recently been created along the A38 and A30 in Devon and Cornwall.

Wildflower verge along the A38

Highways England senior ecologist Leonardo Gubert said:

This is the third wild flower scheme we have delivered in the South West and we're delighted it's proving so successful.

The scheme will add to the diverse mosaic of habitats along the A38 and will support a number of pollinators and other invertebrates, including five rare species of beetles and a whole host of other wildlife we recorded at the site before the work was undertaken.

We're already looking forward to carrying out a full survey next year to see just how many benefits have been brought to our verges and we're proud to be delivering such an important programme on roadside land.

We are also planning more wild flower areas and a number of schemes are being designed for verges on the M5 and M4 in the future.

Common corn cockle

Over the last year a number of other biodiversity schemes have been undertaken by Highways England including extensive habitat connectivity planting, grassland management and a scheme to protect and promote the habitat of England's rarest ant, the narrow-headed ant, on the A38 in Devon. Further afield Highways England has been working with Cumbria Wildlife Trust, to boost pollinator habitats alongside key A roads in the county, including the A590 and A66.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[**News story: Scottish Secretary David Mundell responds to Labour Market**](#)

Statistics

For the three months to April, Scotland's overall labour market provides a strong and stable picture: employment increased robustly (+26,000); unemployment fell marginally (-3,000) and activity increased robustly too (+23,000). In addition, monthly claimant count numbers are worsening over the month of May, as there are 106,500 people in Scotland claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and out-of-work Universal Credit (seasonally adjusted); this is up 1,300 on the month of May (provisional) and 18,500 up on the year before.

As a result, Scotland's unemployment rate at 3.3% is the close to the recent record low and remains below that of the UK as a whole at 3.8%. Furthermore, the number of people employed in Scotland is at a new record high at 2,702,000. Although, Scotland's employment rate, at 75.9%, remains just below the UK's rate at 76.1%.

Responding to the figures the Scottish Secretary said:

It is encouraging to see that the number of people employed in Scotland is at a record high, while unemployment continues to fall.

The UK Government is investing in Scotland's economy including more than £1.35 billion in city and growth deals, creating opportunities, jobs and long-term growth.

Our investment is having a real impact and I urge the Scottish Government to work with us to ensure this continues.

Press release: Response to Charity Commission report on Oxfam

The revelations of last year were horrifying and shone a light on fundamental problems. DFID agrees that we must always put people first.

DFID has driven reform and our priority remains delivering for the world's poorest and most vulnerable, while keeping people safe from harm.

Oxfam is an important British institution that saves lives in some of the world's toughest places. This is a long-term process, in which there are no easy answers or room for complacency. We will be working closely with both Oxfam and the Charity Commission in the coming weeks.

Last year it came to light that organisations in the aid sector had failed to do enough to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment. These revelations rightly shook public trust.

DFID has been at the forefront of driving up standards across the aid sector and our priority remains delivering for the world's poorest and most vulnerable. We have been clear that change must happen and the entire sector must work together to deliver it.

Progress has been made, but no one can be complacent. Protecting the world's poorest and most vulnerable requires consistent leadership and culture change, and we will continue to drive this. We welcome the publication of the Charity Commission's statutory inquiry into Oxfam. DFID agrees that we must all always put people first. These are very serious findings, rightly resulting in significant regulatory action by the Charity Commission. We also thank the courageous whistleblowers who voiced their concerns.

We also await the publication of Oxfam's Independent Commission's report and we will carefully review the reports and their recommendations. The International Development Secretary will shortly meet Oxfam's Chair of Trustees to discuss Oxfam's actions.

Oxfam plays a crucial role in saving lives and reducing poverty in some of the world's toughest places, and they are an important British institution. In February 2018, Oxfam agreed to withdraw from bidding for any new UK Government funding until DFID is satisfied that they can meet the high standards we expect of all our partners.

We made our expectations clear at the time and will be working closely with both Oxfam and the Charity Commission in the coming weeks. Decisions on Oxfam's funding relationship with the UK Government will be made in due course.

Press release: End to Metro Bank "no DSS" mortgages

Thousands of families could benefit from changes to mortgage rules announced by Metro Bank today which currently prevent landlords renting to tenants on housing support, following a roundtable at Downing Street led by Housing Minister Heather Wheeler MP.

Today's announcement (11 June 2019) is the latest pledge from industry to end potentially discriminatory practices which deny good quality accommodation to those on benefits – such as 'No DSS' adverts – and follows similar moves in recent weeks from big names such as Rightmove and Zoopla.

As part of the government's work against the stigma experienced by tenants on benefits, Minister for Housing and Homelessness Heather Wheeler MP met with leading industry bodies and companies at Downing Street today to work on a solution.

Whilst the vast majority of the private rental sector provide a fair and professional service, the government has been clear that 'No DSS' has no place in a modern housing market and is determined to introduce a blanket ban on this practice.

Leading companies in the industry, including Rightmove and Zoopla joined Metro Bank and government at the event, coming together to improve access to the private rented sector.

Minister for Housing and Homelessness Heather Wheeler MP said:

Regardless of financial circumstances, everyone should have the same opportunity when looking for a home and I have been determined to end the discrimination those on benefits face.

Today's meeting was yet another step forward; marking an important shift in making the private rented sector fairer for all – and I am thrilled that Metro Bank have decided to join us in ending the stigma surrounding tenants on housing benefit.

I am grateful to those companies for taking the time to discuss this issue, and look forward to us continuing to work together.

Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance, Will Quince said:

We are working to bring the sector together to tackle this issue, ensuring everyone has the same opportunity to access safe and secure housing.

It's encouraging that we're already seeing positive changes being made in the industry, and we continue to encourage landlords and agents to consider tenants on an individual basis.