

Most Scots agree Scotland's Referendum should be made in Scotland

Most Scots think Holyrood, not Westminster, should have the right to decide whether to hold a second independence referendum, according to a new poll.

National park to drive revival of China's wild pandas



China plans to build a Giant Panda National Park spanning three provinces to help the endangered animals mingle and enrich their gene pool.
[Photo/Xinhua]

China plans to build a Giant Panda National Park spanning three provinces to help the endangered animals mingle and enrich their gene pool.

Pandas isolated on six mountains in Gansu, Shaanxi and Sichuan will be able to come together in the proposed national park.

The park will cover 27,134 square kilometers, three times the area of America's Yellowstone National Park. It will have a core area, protecting pandas in 67 current reserves as well as another 8,000 endangered animals and plants.

Like many other endangered species, pandas are suffering habitat loss and fragmentation due to natural disasters, climate change and expanding human activity.

Multiple administrations in three provinces worsen the situation. When a panda crosses a provincial boundary, jurisdiction becomes blurred.

The park will resolve such troubles. When it is complete, pandas will roam freely between the current far-flung habitats. It also means a lot of people will have to move – at least 170,000 people in Sichuan will have to relocate to establish the core protection area.

“Unlike nature reserves, the park does not stand alone. China will formulate an overall plan for the national park system. It will be a haven for biodiversity and provide protection for the whole ecological system,” says Hou Rong, director of Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.

China’s national park system comprises the Giant Panda National Park and eight others devoted to endangered species and the headwaters of major rivers. The central authorities last year endorsed reform plans to “advance ecological progress,” which included the plan to establish national park system.

Hou says the park will offer residents new homes and work. It could, for example, hire them as guides for tourists and as workers to build infrastructure, so people and nature will benefit together.

People have lived in panda reserves for generations, but they cut bamboo shoots and grazed livestock on hills, eating into the pandas’ habitat and disrupting their lives.

Qubie Mazi, of the Yi ethnic minority, has lived in Sichuan’s Hei Hezi Village for 40 years, making a living by growing potatoes and collecting herbs. A panda reserve in the village is a key corridor connecting populations in Liangshan Mountain.

Poverty once drove the villagers to poach pandas, but after a penalty and bonus system was introduced, they learned to value national treasure and they now cherish them.

“I saw a panda in one of the village houses a month ago. I guess he came to look for food or company. I know when they need to mate, they will go to the other side of the mountain. When I find something unusual about the pandas, I report it to the reserve,” says Qubie.

Asked how he feels about making way for pandas, he says, “I will move, if I can have a new home and a new job.”

“We should lead locals to protect the environment, not to spoil it,” says Heng Yi, senior staff of China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda (CCRCGP). “The key measure is to help people live a sustainable life and to get them out of poverty.”

“Once they have access to electricity, they will stop cutting bamboos. If they have a decent job and steady income, they won’t risk to poach pandas,” he added.

RETURN TO THE WILD

The national park plan has had to address significant economic and practical challenges, Hou says. Panda conservation work has gone through three major stages: breeding, reintroduction to the wild and the national park.

“We had to start captive-breeding programs in the late 1990s, as the number of pandas dropped dramatically in the 1980s, partly because of a periodic natural die-off of bamboo,” says Hou.

Chinese scientists toiled to breed the reclusive animal in captivity, overcoming some early failures. Last year, 64 cubs were born and 54 survive in nature reserves and zoos, according to the State Forestry Administration.

Scientists are also troubled by the pandas’ inbreeding. For many years, they worked with international research teams to make pandas one of the most genetically diverse animals in captivity.

In order to enrich the gene pool, CCRCGP started the reintroduction program in 2003. It has reintroduced seven pandas into the wild, but two died.

Keeping them behind the bars is the last thing CCRCGP director Zhang Hemin wants. “The goal of breeding and reintroduction is to eventually put the animals back into bamboo forests and expect them to mate with their wild cousins.”

Thanks to these dogged conservation efforts, 1,864 pandas remain in the wild, 17 percent more than a decade ago, according to the most recent national survey in February 2015.

The aim is to raise the wild population to more than 2,000 by 2025. This requires a large protection area and an upgraded eco-system. “That’s why many scientists and conservation experts support the building of a national park,” says Hou, who made the suggestion in 2014.

Few people are aware of how pandas live in the wild, says Hou. Much of their range is fragmented, and only a few large continuous tracts remain where the animals can roam freely.

According to a report by WWF, roads and railroads are increasingly fragmenting the forest, which further isolates panda populations and prevents mating, while forest destruction reduces their access to the bamboo they need to survive.

Some sub-populations number fewer than 10 members. This makes them vulnerable to disease and reproductive problems, and less able to adapt to a changing environment.

While the park paints a wonderful picture for the conservation of pandas and

the restoration of the ecological system, it also faces challenges and risks.

Restoring effective corridors for panda migration is no easy job. Twenty corridor plans across the six mountains have been proposed since 1988, but few came to reality.

“China still needs to do more empirical studies and to carry out conservation activities to put these corridors into real use,” says Melissa Songer, a conservation biologist from the Smithsonian’s National Zoological Park.

In 2015, China’s National Development and Reform Commission and the Chicago-based Paulson Institute signed a cooperation framework protocol to carry out pilot programs and case studies.

“Past experience has told us how much a national park can do for a country’s environment and ecology,” says David Wildt, a senior scientist from the Smithsonian’s Conservation Biology Institute.

“I am delighted to see China’s breakthrough in panda breeding and reintroduction programs. But it’s time to test if these measures work out in the new system of national parks.”

British Furniture Manufacturers



British Furniture Manufacturers (BFM) is a trade association, employers’ organisation and member of the European Furniture Manufacturers’ Association. BFM has been representing the interests of the furniture industry for more than 60 years. BFM has a broad based membership covering, domestic, contract, office and kitchen manufacturers as well as a number of suppliers to the industry and retailers. In addition to its representational role, BFM offers an extensive membership services portfolio focused on providing ‘value for money’.

Mission statement: “To represent the membership, safeguarding the interests and promoting the standards and competitiveness, both nationally and internationally, in conjunction with the provision of services which have an impact on members’ businesses”

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To fulfil this mission, BFM aims:

- To be recognised by government, the media and the industry as the effective voice in furniture
- To serve the interest of the industry
- To work with the membership in the creation of a strong and integrated sector
- To provide a continuously developing and first class range of services to assist members to compete successfully at home and overseas
- To expand the membership through the excellence of the services offered.
- To continue to strengthen the financial position and thereby enable further investment in services
- To encourage co-operation and convergence with other trade bodies whilst remaining an organisation independently owned by the membership

[Plan confirms that May's Government has broken its promise by failing to give the NHS the funding it needs – Jonathan Ashworth](#)

Jonathan

Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, responding to the publication of

***NHS England's Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View* said:**

"NHS

England's Five Year Forward View update contains welcome ambitions around mental health and cancer care that Labour endorses. However reading between the lines this plan confirms that Theresa May's Government has broken its promise by failing to give the NHS the funding it needs. The plan admits the public are 'concerned' for the future of the NHS and that the health service is under 'real pressure' to cope with rising demand within the current spending envelope.

"Labour has warned repeatedly that the NHS funding squeeze imposed by the Government is damaging standards of patient care. Now the Forward View confirms

that the main 4 hour A&E target won't be met for at least the next year.

Waiting lists are growing as a direct result of the financial crisis. The collapse in standards in the past year has been nothing short of astonishing.

“What’s more the plan confirms more and more rationing of treatments is taking place across the NHS.

“One of the biggest problems laid out by the new NHS plan is the massive workforce challenge for the health service. We welcome NHS England reinforcing Labour’s calls for the Government to guarantee the status of European health staff as soon as possible. Sadly Jeremy Hunt has no plan whatsoever to help the NHS through the challenge of Brexit and is being enormously complacent about the impact for the NHS. The Government need to be much clearer about how they will guarantee there are enough staff in place in the health service to keep patients safe for the years to come.”

[Newslinks for Friday 31st March 2017](#)

Brexit: Davis says Britain will scrap EU ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights’...



“EU rules blamed for making it harder to keep out foreign criminals and terror suspects are to be axed as part of a bid to restore sovereignty to the UK. David Davis told MPs that the vast majority of EU laws would be transferred on to the statute book in a Great Repeal Bill designed to ensure a ‘smooth and orderly’ Brexit. But he said ministers would take the opportunity to ditch the controversial Charter of Fundamental Rights, which

has been blamed for hampering the fight against crime and terrorism.” – [Daily Mail](#)

- Brexit Secretary accused of ‘power grab’ over EU law – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Ministers and businesses line up against ‘bonfire’ of rules – [FT](#)
- Top judge warns that Government may get dragged back to the Supreme Court – [The Independent](#)

Opposition:

- Remainers plan ‘legislative warfare’ and fresh legal challenge to Repeal Bill – [Daily Mail](#)
- May faces battle with Remoaners over fate of EU legislation – [The Sun](#)
- Sturgeon threatens to block Bill if powers aren’t devolved – [Daily Telegraph](#)

Law:

- Legal battles will rise after ‘copy and paste’ of statutes – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- European Court of Justice rulings will still carry weight – [FT](#)

Analysis:

- The Repeal Bill white paper is not bad, but flimsy – David Allen Green, [FT](#)

Editorial:

>Yesterday:

...as Fox ‘seething’ at exclusion from inner circle

“Liam Fox has been locked out of Theresa May’s inner circle on Brexit negotiations, No10 announced last night. The International Trade Secretary has not been asked to join the PM’s new Cabinet committee on how to carry out the high stakes ‘Article 50’ exit talks over the next two years. Dr Fox was said by one Whitehall insider to be “seething” about the decision last night. The prominent Leave campaigner is the only one of the Three Brexiteer Cabinet ministers with specific EU exit-related jobs to be excluded. The PM will chair meetings of the ultra-tight group of five, officially known as the EU Exit and Trade (Negotiations) sub-committee.” – [The Sun](#)

- May celebrated Article 50 by dining with Johnson – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Prime Minister writes in EU newspapers – [The Sun](#)
- Britain calms nerves over security cooperation – [The Guardian](#)

Europe:

- Hollande backs Merkel’s snub to trade talks – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- EU blasted for failing to deal with worsening migrant crisis – [Daily Express](#)

Analysis:

- Wishful thinking won't deliver the deal there is to be done – Tim Harford, [FT](#)
- If May pays the EU £50bn, the backlash will drown out the deal – Asa Bennett, [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Tough EU line undermined by 'neighbourliness' rule – Patrick Christys, [Daily Express](#)
- London will remain Europe's financial capital despite Brexit – Nils Pratley, [The Guardian](#)

>Today:

>Yesterday:

...and Soubry says to 'get on' with setting up a new party



"A pro-Remain Tory MP has indicated she may be open to joining a "moderate, sensible, forward-thinking" new party. Anna Soubry, a former business minister, has been a vocal opponent of the government's handling of Brexit and its decision not to keep Britain inside the EU's single market. Asked about the prospect of a political realignment by the *New Statesman*, she said: "If it could somehow be the voice of a moderate, sensible, forward-thinking, visionary middle way, with open minds – actually things which I've believed in all my life – better get on with it." Nick Clegg, who was seen chatting on the Labour frontbench yesterday, also declined to rule out a new party." – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- UK customs risks being swamped by Brexit surge – [FT](#)
- Former senior UK diplomat to EU takes lobbying role – [The Guardian](#)
- Adams urges Irish government to publish 'negotiating position' – [Belfast Telegraph](#)
- Argentina tries to use Brexit to threaten Falklands – [Daily Express](#)

Comment:

- May offers a lifeline to we Remainers who forgot how ordinary people live – Tina Stowell, [Daily Telegraph](#)

Julian Jessop: The ‘Great Repeal Bill’ won’t repeal anything without sunset clauses

“In this case, British laws based on EU directives could simply cease to apply after, say, five or ten years, unless they are specifically reaffirmed through the UK legislative process. This would put the burden of proof firmly on the shoulders of those who wish to retain regulation. It would allow parliament to debate and change legislation later if desired, addressing the concerns about sovereignty. And it should still provide the reassurance to households and business that worthwhile regulations will be maintained.” – [Daily Telegraph](#)

- Now is not the time to cut the number of MPs – Tom Harris, [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Six ways Britain leaving the EU will affect you – John Rentoul, [The Independent](#)

Sketch:

- MPs set to work... but what was Clegg whispering about? – Quentin Letts, [Daily Mail](#)
- Watch out Davis, or the backbench Brexiteers will get you – Michael Deacon, [Daily Telegraph](#)

Ministers 1) Tech companies agree to get tougher on terror after Rudd summit



“Technology giants have pledged to join forces in efforts to tackle terrorist content online following a summit with the Home Secretary. Facebook, Google, Twitter and Microsoft committed to explore options for a cross-industry forum and step up collaboration on technical tools that aim to identify and remove extremist propaganda. The plans were announced after a meeting between senior executives from the four firms, as well as figures from other companies, and Amber Rudd.” – [Daily Mail](#)

- The Home Secretary's tough talk to tech firms is a PR win for both – Alex Hern, [The Guardian](#)
- Israel can teach us how to counter the new terrorism – Will Quince, [Times Red Box](#)

Ministers 2) Greening insists that new grammars will help bright, poorer children catch up

“A wave of new grammars will help stop bright poor children going on to earn less than dimmer wealthier classmates, Justine Greening said yesterday. The Education Secretary added that more selective schools could transform the lives of deprived pupils by giving them the same access to academic excellence. In a speech on social mobility, she spoke of the unfairness that clever deprived students are around a third less likely to earn a high wage than less intelligent richer peers. Ministers plan to overturn a ban on opening grammars imposed by Labour in 1998.” – [Daily Mail](#)

- Pupils from wealthy homes tend to earn more – [FT](#)

More education:

- SATs for seven-year-olds to be scrapped after u-turn by ministers – [Daily Mail](#)

>Yesterday: Local Government: [Restoring order to the classroom](#)

Ministers 3) Grayling has ‘absolute confidence’ in HS2 as project ‘plunges into chaos’



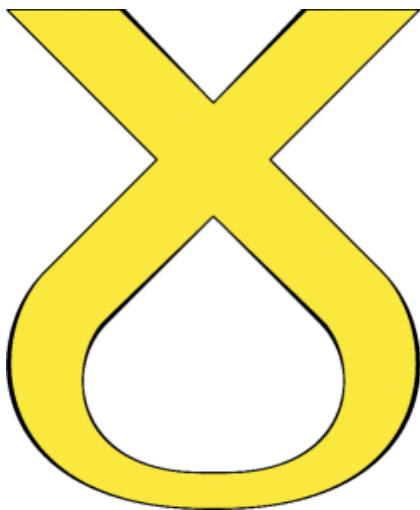
“High Speed 2 was plunged into chaos today as its top boss walked out amid a sleaze scandal and furious MPs demanded a public inquiry into the Government's £55 billion project. Director General David Prout quit just hours after a dodgy £170 million contract to build part of the track was pulled because it had been awarded to a company with close ties to senior HS2 execs. Furious MPs demanded a public inquiry into the mess, but Transport Secretary Chris Grayling hit back claiming it was “not a massive issue” and claimed to have “absolute confidence in the project.” Tonight snubbed engineering firm Mace threatened to Judicially Review the decision.” – [The Sun](#)

Ministers 4) Truss launches review of new car insurance rules

“A major review was launched yesterday into a controversial personal injury compensation scheme after anger that it is penalising millions of drivers. Liz Truss unveiled an urgent consultation following a backlash over a new formula for calculating payouts for victims that added up £300 to the premiums of older drivers. Despite insisting she will not reverse the shake-up in the short-term, the Justice Secretary unveiled a wide-ranging review of the rate for deciding cash claims in future. She suggested the current system was ‘not fit for purpose’.” – [Daily Mail](#)

>Yesterday: Profile: [Elizabeth Truss, who does not quite know how to talk to the judges, and vice-versa](#)

Sturgeon formally requests a second referendum



“A letter formally requesting a second Scottish independence referendum signed by Nicola Sturgeon and dispatched to Theresa May is expected to arrive at Downing Street later. The Scottish Government tweeted a picture of the First Minister with her feet on a couch in her Bute House residence writing the Section 30 letter on Thursday evening. MSPs voted by 69 to 59 this week in favour of seeking permission for an independence referendum to take place between autumn 2018 and spring 2019. Ms Sturgeon said her mandate for another vote was “beyond question”, and warned it would be “democratically indefensible and utterly unsustainable” to attempt to stand in the way.” – [The Scotsman](#)

- A permanent cacophony of grievance from the SNP – Brian Wilson, [The Scotsman](#)

Philip Collins: May needs to distribute power around the country

“It is no wonder that regional inequality in Britain is vastly greater than it is in any other European nation. All the big decisions in politics, economics, law and the media are made in one place. A poorly located city in the country’s southeast corner is the entry point for most visitors. When

Disraeli was extolling the virtues of Manchester, the economic powerhouse was in the north and the political powerhouse was in the south. Theresa May has been accused of wanting to turn the clock back to the Fifties. As long as she means the 1850s there is nothing wrong with that.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

News in Brief:

- Armed Forces face £10bn shortfall after costs soar – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- NHS plans weekend GPs for everyone by 2019 – [Daily Mail](#)
- Trump’s fired national security adviser seeks immunity to testify – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Ofcom to introduce price controls on fibre products – [FT](#)
- Low-income worker priced out of property market in most of England – [The Sun](#)
- Anti-Semitism allegations putting almost a third of voters off Labour – [The Independent](#)
- Dozens of alleged hacking victims join action against Sun publisher – [The Guardian](#)
- Royal Marines may be sacrificed to keep struggling Navy afloat – [The Times \(£\)](#)

[Newslinks March 2017](#)