

Lords pass Brexit Bill unanimously

Parliament has now spoken. A large majority for Brexit in the Commons is now matched by a unanimous vote in the Lords.

The Supreme Court has succeeded in delaying the letter but not in stopping it. As I thought at the time of the discussions on the Supreme Court decision it is the view of Parliament we should send the letter. If it had not been Parliament would have said so and voted accordingly prior to the Court decision.

I expect the Lords to approve the Bill at third reading in a similar way. It would be odd indeed if they changed their minds after yesterday's important vote.

Tank adapted into snow blower in N. China

A tank-shaped snow blower on the streets of Baotou in northern China has really "blown" people away and quickly gone viral.



By adapting a jet plane engine to the tank, it can produce high heat to efficiently blow away snow at great distances. [Photo: youth.cn]

The armored fighting vehicle, which features an aircraft engine, came in handy when an unexpected spring snow hit the city today, and proven to be quite efficient in dealing with snow.

Called a turbojet snow blower, the machine was invented by the Inner Mongolia First Machinery Group, an affiliation of China North Industries Group Corporation (NORINCO GROUP).

By adapting a jet plane engine to the tank, it can produce high heat to efficiently blow away snow at great distances, according to an introduction of the machine.

The machine can achieve an average speed of 20 to 30 kilometers per hour, and a maximum speed at 50 kilometers per hour.

"It's really awesome to see an armored vehicle being used to remove the snow," said an internet user. "It's a little bit noisy but proves to be very efficient."

Design and use of UK airspace consultation

The Government is currently consulting on proposals to:

- Support the reform of airspace, thereby maximising the economic and social benefits of aviation
- Minimise the negative local impacts of aviation

Ministers are seeking comment on proposals to update policy on the management of UK airspace including:

- The role of an Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise to ensure noise impacts are openly considered
- Providing industry with the ability to assess noise impacts and guidance to help them manage change more effectively
- Bringing compensation policy for airspace changes in line with policy on changes to aviation infrastructure
- Greater flexibility for London's major airports, so they can adapt noise management to the needs of their local communities

The consultation can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2m3y2Hj>. It closes on 25 May 2017.

China commissions new naval training ship

The Chinese navy on Tuesday commissioned a new training ship at a military port in Lyushun, northeast China's Liaoning Province, the PLA Daily reported Wednesday.

With hull number 83, the Qijiguang naval training ship is 163 meters long and 22 meters wide, with a full load displacement of 9,000 tonnes and maximum speed of 22 knots, making it the largest and most advanced training ship in the Chinese navy.

Designed and built by China, the training ship can accommodate over 400 navy cadets or officers for training in offshore waters and high seas. It can also be used in foreign exchanges, natural disaster rescue and other non-military operations.

Qi Jiguang was an ancient Chinese national hero in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) best known for leading Ming forces to defend China's eastern coastal regions from raids by Japanese pirates in the 16th century.

The training ship is affiliated with Dalian Naval Academy.

UK public finances are OK

The latest figures for public spending, tax revenue and borrowing published yesterday showed more progress in reducing the running deficit. Total state borrowing adjusted for the bonds the Bank of England has bought in remains at a moderate level, around 65% of GDP.

The main reason new borrowing is reducing is the continued good growth in tax receipts. In the period April 2016 to January 2017 tax revenues were 5% higher than in the same period of the previous financial year. This reflects the continued growth of the UK economy. Self assessment income tax receipts and corporation tax receipts showed especially strong growth based on improved business activity and investment prospects.

This increase in tax allowed an increase of 2% in public spending and a reduction in the rate of new borrowing. In the financial year to date central government current spending is up by 1.4% and local government current spending up by 10.2%. Central government net investment rose by 6%. (ONS official figures). There are some areas where it may be necessary to spend more.

It is still a good idea to spend money wisely. Ending our EU contributions is an obvious improvement to make. There are issues with poor value for money in parts of the overseas aid budget. There are more opportunities to help people into work, to cut the benefit bill by substituting earnings from work. There are many efficiency improvements to be made in areas like railway spending, which is running at high levels.

The government also needs to be careful over tax rates. Taxing income may be a necessity, but it is not wise to tax working and investing too heavily as it can do considerable economic damage and prove self defeating. The budget is an ideal time to review current rates and ask which taxes should be lower in order to raise more revenue as and when economic growth delivers more cash.