

Letter from Scotland

The latest happiness survey from the United Nations has found that Britain is the 15th happiest country in the world. And so it should be, despite the turmoil over Brexit.

However, the Scottish Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop couldn't help pointing out that the countries which top the league are small independent countries like Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland.



And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils."

It's good to see that someone is measuring "the pursuit of happiness", the real goal of society, rather than the usual materialistic GDP, gross domestic product. It's little noted that the Office of National Statistics has been collecting peoples' thoughts on happiness since 2011. The last time it reported, in June last year, it found that Britons gave themselves 7.5 out of 10. A Bank of Scotland survey at the end of last year confirmed a similar result for Scotland, though there were marked regional differences. Central Scotland was the happiest spot, Glasgow was a less happy land.

Certainly, this week the weather has cheered us up, with mild west winds, the odd patch of blue sky, temperatures 10-13 degrees C. There are daffodils everywhere and the first blossom appearing on the cheery trees. On Wednesday we reached the spring equinox, with a splendid super-moon.....the first time that's happened since 1905.



Westminster

But there are reasons not to be cheerful. The dark cloud of Brexit hangs over us. The 13 Scottish Conservative MPs at Westminster appear to be hiding under a tarpaulin waiting for the storm to break over their heads as coach-loads of Scots "Remainers" head down to London to join Saturday's march for a "Peoples

Vote.”

Nicola Sturgeon told MSPs at First Minister’s Questions that Theresa May “must change course on Brexit before it’s too late.” She accused the Prime Minister of blaming everyone else for the mess except herself.

Brexit uncertainty has caused economists to be even more uncheerful than usual, with one guesstimate this week, from the accountants PwC, revising their growth prediction down to 1.1 per cent in 2019. Scotland’s unemployment rate is still low, at 3.4 per cent, but the Labour Party has pointed out that the number of people claiming benefits is up and 22 per cent of working age Scots are “not economically active.” They’ve given up looking for paid work.

It has come as some relief to the people of Dumfriesshire this week that a Europe-wide food company Bhagat Holdings is to re-open part of the Pinney seafood factory in Annan and create 120 jobs. Pinney’s closed last year, laying off 450 workers. The Scottish government is contributing £1.7m, as part of the £10m project. Jobs do not come cheap.



Holyrood

When they were not discussing Brexit, MSPs in the Scottish Parliament were discussing beavers. A last-minute attempt by the Conservative John Scott, an Ayrshire farmer, to oppose the long awaited re-introduction of beavers was defeated. It means that, from 1 May, the beaver will be a protected species in Scotland and cannot be killed without a government licence. It follows an official, but experimental, re-introduction programme involving a small number of beavers in Argyll and a rather more controversial unofficial release of beavers on the River Tay. But now the beaver is back officially, after an absence of 400 years.

And while on the subject of wildlife. Rangers at the Loch of Lowes nature reserve in Perthshire are watching the skies for the arrival of Lassie the Osprey, known to the scientific community as LF15. She's due to fly in from Africa any day now to join her mate, LM12 who arrived last Friday, and has been busy preparing the nest for yet another breeding season. The pair have raised 10 chicks over the last few years and this year the Scottish Wildlife Trust is celebrating 50 years since the first pair of ospreys came to the loch to breed.

Finally, we are still celebrating Scotland's miraculous comeback in the second half of last Saturday's ruby match against England at Twickenham. From 31-0 our boys fought back to a [draw](#) at 38-38, only failing to win by a scrambled English try in the final moments of the game. But come Thursday, we were brought down to earth when our national football team were beaten 3-0 away in Kazakhstan, ranked 117th in the world.

How quickly our fortunes

change. We have dropped from being the 5th happiest country on the

planet to 118th.