

Letter from Scotland

Humza Yousaf wore a traditional Pakistani coat, a shalwar kameez, as he took his oath of office as First Minister of Scotland.

He is the first Asian and the first Muslim to lead our country, where 96 per cent of the population class themselves as "white". And at 37, he is also the youngest person to hold the job.

That in itself is not a surprise. Mr Yousaf has been a government minister for more than 10 years, most recently as health secretary.

But the whole process of his election as first minister has been full of surprises. He won the SNP leadership race by a surprisingly small margin, 52% to Kate Forbes' 48%, exposing divisions in the party which we outsiders were not aware of under the glittering leadership of Nicola Sturgeon.



Humza Yousaf, a man of many firsts.

And the shocking news that Kate Forbes is not to serve in the Yousaf government, is evidence that the divisions may run deep. Ms Forbes was offered the job of minister for rural affairs but she turned it down. You would think if she was interested in pulling the party together, she would humbly accept any post she was offered. The third candidate in the race Ash Regan was not offered a job at all. And supporters of Kate Forbes are noticeably absent from the new cabinet.

So Humza Yousaf is striking out on his own, ignoring party divisions and sticking to his own agenda. This includes the novel concept of “welfare economics” – not yet defined but it appears to be supporting the poor by taxing the rich, or at least taxing them a little more.

He is also keen to have ministers with politically fashionable titles: Secretary for net-zero and just transition, Minister for local government empowerment, Minister for children and keeping the promise, Minister for victims and community safety, Minister for green skills, circular economy and

biodiversity, Minister for zero-carbon buildings and active travel and, of course, a Minister for “independence.”(Jamie Hepburn).

This led to some jolly knock-about at First Minister’s Question time. The Conservative leader Douglas Ross didn’t much care for a minister dedicated to independence while there was no discernible minister for social security or tourism. And where was the secretary for ferries and decent transport? Humza Yousaf was a “nationalist” not a “national” leader, said Mr Ross, and his large government (28 members) were simply his lackeys.

Mr Yousaf hit back saying Mr Ross was “a third rate leader of a third rate party”. And he made no apology for appointing a Minister for independence, “because we need it more than ever”. It was a combative performance. And that wasn’t the only surprise. Question time had to be halted five times as protestors from the public gallery shouted something about climate change.

So who is Humza Yousaf ? He was born in Glasgow, the son of Pakistani immigrants who settled in the city in the 1960s, his father eventually becoming an accountant. He was educated at one of the city’s top private schools (Hutcheson’s Grammar – same as Scottish Labour Leader, Anas Sarwar) and went on to Glasgow University. He entered politics almost straight away as a parliamentary assistant and was elected an MSP in 2011. He represents the Glasgow constituency of Pollok, but lives in Dundee where his wife Nadia is an SNP councillor. They have a young daughter.

Humza Yousaf appears to be an earnest fellow. He doesn’t do campaign stunts. We know nothing about his private interests or hobbies, except that he once injured a foot playing badminton and famously fell off the scooter he was using to get around The Scottish Parliament building. It’s been surprising how he has grown into the First Minister’s role,

even in this first week.

His first electoral test, outside the party, will be the likely Westminster by-election in Rutherglen later this year. Pressure is growing on the sitting MP, Margaret Ferrier, to resign after pleading guilty to travelling on a train while knowing she had Covid at the height of the pandemic in 2020. This week, the House of Commons standards committee recommended she be suspended for 30 days, a move which could trigger a by-election. She had a majority of just over 5,000 at the last general election when she was the SNP candidate.

As I may have mentioned, it's been a week of surprises.

Another was Scotland's 2-0 win over Spain in the men's European football championships. If the Hampden roar was heard in the First Minister's new home in Bute House, he could take it as an omen of great things to come for Scotland under his leadership. Unless...the goddess Fate has other plans.

*Stunning result, well done [@ScotlandNT](#) ![#SCOESP](#)
[#NoScotlandNoParty](#) <https://t.co/kpgiqEvWUq>*

– Humza Yousaf (@HumzaYousaf) [March 28, 2023](#)



First Minister Humza Yousaf appoints his first cabinet ©2023
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