

Letter from Scotland

We may think Scotland is a backwater when it comes to issues like climate change, war and political upheaval. And so we are. But occasionally we feel the ripples of a backwash, as we did this week.

It began with a month's rain falling in just two days across parts of Scotland last weekend. The River Tay flooded a caravan park in Aberfeldy. Further downriver, a man was washed away as he tried to unblock a hydro power plant on the riverbank. The River Spey flooded parts of Aviemore. There were more landslides on the A83 "Rest and Be Thankful" in Argyll. Parts of Falkirk were left under water when the Polmont Burn overflowed. Football grounds and golf courses across the country had to be closed. In all, there were 55 flood alerts.



Quiet flows the Tay, or so it seems. Wade Bridge, Aberfeldy. It's insignificant compared with what's happened in Libya or India but it's a reminder that there is a climate change emergency. Not that we are doing much about it.

Then there is war in Ukraine and now in the Middle East. It takes our breath away to think of the horrors going on just a plane flight away. There are not many Israelis or Palestinians living in Scotland, but there is known to be one Scot among the 10 Britons killed or missing in the Hamas attack in Israel. And our First Minister Humza Yousaf has revealed that his wife's parents have been caught up in the siege of Gaza while on a visit to relatives there. He has today tweeted a video filmed by his mother in law who is stuck in Gaza.

This is Elizabeth El-Nakla. She is my mother-in-law. A retired nurse from Dundee, Scotland. She, like the vast majority of people in Gaza, has nothing to do with Hamas. She has been told to leave Gaza but, like the rest of the

population, is trapped with nowhere to go.
pic.twitter.com/D3ZUtnEmy0

– Humza Yousaf (@HumzaYousaf) [October 13, 2023](#)

Then there is the political seismology going on around us. Last weekend's mighty landslide to Labour in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election set the ground shaking at the UK party's annual conference in Liverpool this week. Sir Keir Starmer declared that his road to Downing Street begins in Scotland. And he thanked us with an announcement that, if elected, Labour will site its new Great British Energy agency in Scotland "creating thousands of green jobs."

Meanwhile the SNP is holding its most difficult conference for years in Aberdeen this weekend. It begins with a defection of one of its MPs to the Conservatives, yes unbelievably, to the "Conservative and Unionist Party". The East Kilbride MP was apparently facing deselection and she's been complaining of a "toxic" atmosphere among her SNP colleagues at Westminster. But to change her mind on independence, the central pillar of her SNP membership, must be unsettling. I just hope when her head stops spinning, it's facing the front.

Another woman making the headlines in Scotland this week is Jo Farrell, our new chief constable, who will need to be level-headed. She's the first woman to lead the national police force. She takes over from Sir Iain Livingstone who admitted that Police Scotland is "racist and discriminatory" and when the government has cut 200 from the thin blue line of 16,600 police officers.

But she's been in tricky situations before. She was Chief Constable of Durham during the Dominic Cummings' affair and the "beergate" allegations against Sir Keir Starmer. Her list of priorities, however, is unusual – "prevention, problem solving and productivity." I hope she succeeds.

There's been a certain amount of rejoicing at Scotland playing its part in hosting the men's European football finals in 2028. But it comes with a slippery ball, because we may not take to the pitch ourselves. Scotland is part of a bid by the five home nations – England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Games will be played at 10 stadiums, including Hampden, but it's highly unlikely that the organisers will allow five nations to qualify automatically as hosts. We will have to play for a place.

And thereby hangs a tale, because we are having trouble qualifying for next year's European finals, despite a string of good results. On Thursday evening in Seville, we lost 2-0 to Spain, exactly the reverse of the result back in March at Hampden. But all is not lost, we may yet qualify, if results go our way as other teams in our group play their final games.

In football, as in life, things are never easy.



Jo Farrell Chief Constable of Police Scotland