

A NEW CHAPTER: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SCOTLAND'S NEW FIRST MINISTER HUMZA YOUSAF

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Scotland has made history in [electing as its First Minister Humza Yousaf](#), 37, who is, as the son of Pakistani immigrants, the [first ever Muslim and person of Asian descent to take up the role](#), and also the youngest leader in that capacity. A career politician who studied politics at university, Mr. Yousaf has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament for 12 years and an insider of the Scottish National Party's politics, serving variously as Transport Minister, Justice Secretary and Health Secretary. In rising to the top, Mr. Yousaf is stepping into the shoes of his predecessor, Nicola Sturgeon, who set the tenor of Scottish politics for nearly a decade, especially in the context of Scotland's role in the United Kingdom and on the complex question of Brexit. Mr. Yousaf won 52% of the votes in the SNP leadership contest for running a campaign that committed to delivering Scottish independence from the U.K. and re-joining the European Union. Scots will now be watching to see whether Mr. Yousaf will live up to his reputation as a "continuity candidate" in the context of these big political questions, and equally, whether he steers their country through the choppy waters of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the challenging transition to renewable energy, and the long-promised reform of the National Health Service and other vital public services.

Yet, the very nature of the task facing the current First Minister is different from what it has been in the past. According to recent polling, Scottish support for independence from the U.K. dropped to 39%, less than the 44.7% who voted for the campaign in the 2014 referendum, and significantly less compared to the 58% that it received in 2020 in the wake of the Scotland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Mr. Yousaf has vowed to reinvigorate the independence campaign by speaking to ordinary Scottish people across the land, and that his would be "... the generation that delivers independence for Scotland", U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is already reported to have rejected Mr. Yousaf's call for independence. Further, London has sent a clear signal that a referendum cannot lead to the breakup of the U.K. unless Westminster approves it — and that is unlikely. To make things worse, the SNP, in the words of its President, Michael Russell, is in a "tremendous mess", and the scars of infighting are yet to heal. Between the apparently insurmountable barriers to a successful referendum for Scottish independence, the tantalising but distant prize of EU reintegration, and the very real dangers of uncontrolled inflation and energy price rises, Mr. Yousaf certainly has his work cut out.

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