

## NATION BRIEFS

## Oil sands on agenda for Obama's Canada visit: Harper

TORONTO (Reuters)—The Alberta oil sands, a vast potential oil source that critics say comes at a big environmental cost, will be on the agenda when Barack Obama visits Canada on his first foreign trip as U.S. president, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on Tuesday.

Harper told a Calgary radio station that he has been in touch with officials from Obama's administration even as the president-elect prepares for his inauguration next Tuesday.

In the interview with CHQR, Harper said environmental concerns and the need for clean, secure energy will be top priorities when Obama visits.

"We will be making the point ... of saying we want to work together with the United States on environmental and energy issues," he said.

"To be frank on the oil sands, we've got to do a better job environmentally. We hear a lot of pressure on that," Harper said. "At the same time, the development of these things is pretty important, in our judgment, to North American energy security."

No date has been set for Obama's visit to Canada. Alberta's oil sands represent the biggest oil reserves outside of Saudi Arabia.

Oil sands production averaged 1.25 million barrels per day in 2006. Canada accounts for about 20 percent of U.S. imports of crude and oil products.

Critics point to the large amount of natural gas burned to process the sands into synthetic oil, resulting in major greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the production of waste water and the destruction of boreal forests that are habitats for migrating birds.

## EnCana sets reward to help bombing investigation

CALGARY (Reuters)—EnCana Corp is offering a \$500,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for blowing up its British Columbia natural gas facilities, it said on Tuesday.

EnCana, Canada's biggest energy company, posted the reward as police have been stymied in their investigation into four separate incidents of sabotage near Dawson Creek, in northeastern British Columbia, since October.

No one has been injured in the explosions, the most recent of which occurred near the town of Tomslake last week.

"We hope this reward will encourage anyone who has knowledge of those responsible for the bombings to come forward and help put an end to these dangerous attacks that threaten the well-being of our staff, those who work for us and the residents and communities in the Dawson Creek area," EnCana Vice-President Mike Graham said.

The RCMP said last week they had cleared eight people they had identified earlier as possible suspects in the bombings.

## Harper doesn't see Obama push to rework NAFTA

CALGARY (Reuters)—Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on Monday he does not expect the new U.S. administration to push for a major reworking of the North American Free Trade Agreement, despite President-elect Barack Obama's campaign pledge to renegotiate the deal.

Harper said it would be a big mistake to tear up the 14-year-old agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico and put up new barriers to trade at a time when the world economy is in crisis.

"It could be characterized that, while President Obama has expressed some concerns about some aspects of the working of NAFTA, I don't think his administration will question NAFTA in any fundamental way," he told reporters at a televised media conference in Vancouver.

The two governments should be able to find common ground on promoting North American trade and keeping world markets open, he said.

"One of the great dangers in a global recession is that people start erecting trade walls or tariff walls. That is one of the things that turned the stock market crash of 1929 into a depression," he said.

Meanwhile, Harper said his government has no intention of funding cost overruns that have hit construction of the athletes' village for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

## Telecom network boosts development, support among Aboriginals

By CINDY CHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

When a group of remote First Nations communities in northern Ontario launched an electronic bulletin board in 1994, it was the seed that would become Canada's largest Aboriginal broadband network and a model network for Indigenous telecommunications of interest worldwide.

The Bulletin Board System (BBS) was meant to meet the critical need of maintaining contact with the communities' children and help support them to stay in school while living away from home. These fly-in communities had no high schools and many children supposed to be continuing their education at boarding schools were dropping out.

At the time a number of the communities' approximately 2,800 residents did not even have a home phone — a public payphone had to be shared among several hundred people.

In less than a decade, residents were able to access broadband services from their homes as well as public places such as community centres and libraries.

The telecommunications network is called "K-Net," a system vastly expanded from its BBS days. K-Net's full name is Kuhnkenah Network. Kuhnkenah is the Ojji-Cree word meaning "everyone, everywhere."

Today, through a terrestrial network linked to a satellite network, K-Net connects about 70 Aboriginal communities and a number of non-Aboriginal communities in northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec, linking them to each other and the world.

K-Net also interconnects to other regional networks to form a national broadband network providing videoconferencing and other applications at Aboriginal and urban sites across Canada.

## "The community needs to be respected"

Throughout the network's evolution, addressing local needs

has remained the prime objective, along with taking local ownership and supporting local development.

**K-Net is a success story of how Aboriginal communities have sought out partnerships, leveraged support, harnessed funding opportunities, and used information and communications technologies (ICT) to address their people's critical health, education, and economic needs.**

"The community should be in charge, and that's an important ingredient. The community needs to be respected and the people need to have the opportunity to build that capacity," said Brian Beaton, coordinator of K-Net Services, in an interview from Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

Mr. Beaton coordinates the computer services department of Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO), a tribal council directed by the chiefs of the six First Nations communities that launched the BBS.

His department offers services such as e-mail, personal homepages, website and server hosting, videoconferencing, computer training, website design, and support for developing locally owned community-based networks.

K-Net achieved its rapid growth through extensive consultations,

outreach, lobbying, and relationship building with communities, telecommunications companies, and government.

KO coordinates with different agencies and universities to deliver services such as telehealth, tele-education, tele-justice, and webcasts of education and training events via K-Net.

Telehealth uses videoconferencing, digital X-rays, specialized stethoscopes and other equipment to allow patients to be seen by health professionals in larger centres without the expense and inconvenience of flying out of their communities.

The federal First Nations SchoolNet program provides online grade 7 and 8 supplementary courses. Keewaytinook Internet High School offers full grade 9 and 10 programs and compulsory grade 11 and 12 courses. It shares teachers among communities and is allowing students to stay home longer and maintain their support while studying toward their diploma.

Local products and services are now more accessible to the wider market through the Internet. And new jobs for teachers, telehealth coordinators, network managers, and others have been created.

"We can then train other people, and these people then start using these tools to build their own capacity," said Mr. Beaton. "We don't have to be taken care of. You become self-sufficient once you have the infrastructure in place and you have the skills."

## Building partnerships, sharing knowledge

K-Net is a success story of how Aboriginal communities have sought out partnerships, leveraged support, harnessed funding opportunities, and used information and communications technologies (ICT) to address their people's critical health, education, and economic needs.

It is the kind of story that an Indigenous commission launched at the United Nations wants more people to know about.

The Indigenous Commission for Communications Technologies in the Americas (ICCTA) was borne as a result of Indigenous People's growing interest in ICT following the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva.

The commission was formed by the Indigenous peoples of South, Central, and North America.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) recently awarded a \$100,000 grant to support the development of ICCTA.

"ICT are critically important for many, many reasons, whether it's for health, education, commerce, or governance," said President Tony Belcourt from ICCTA's head office in Ottawa.

Mr. Belcourt noted that Aboriginal people in Canada are among the leaders in the use of ICT for telehealth and tele-education. ICT is also important to Indigenous people worldwide for building economies through e-commerce, managing their own governance, protecting rights, participating in society, and preserving their culture and language.

The CIDA grant will help ICCTA build capacity to move forward. It is currently in the process of building a multi-lingual portal to allow knowledge sharing.

## Stimulating economic growth with 'e-readiness'

Greater access to ICT, such as providing broadband infrastructure, is a vital catalyst for fighting poverty and strengthening economies in Aboriginal communities. However, Mr. Belcourt emphasized "it's not enough to just provide support for telecom companies to bring technology to the doorstep of our communities."

While many Aboriginal communities have developed successful applications, it is not the case for the vast majority, he said.

He has written to Finance Minister Jim Flaherty urging him to set aside funds for an "e-readiness" program for Aborigi-

nal communities in the upcoming federal budget.

"Our people need to be prepared in the use and application of appropriate communications technologies if the infrastructure is to be of value to them," he wrote.

Bruce Hardy is president of Function Four, a Winnipeg-based Aboriginal research and development company that has been helping Aboriginal communities in the Prairies do e-readiness assessments.

In conjunction with universities, governments, and the private sector, Function Four has developed an assessment model, called the E-index, to measure the current role of ICT for providing essential data, knowledge, and direction for organizations.

For communities, Function Four conducts extensive consultations with the leadership and residents, including door-to-door assessments. It creates E-indices for the community based on factors such as infrastructure, skills, affordability, and utilization.

Taking into consideration the community's goals, objectives, and plans for economic development, it provides a "knowledge plan" to show where specific investments should best be made to have the most economic impact.

"We're finding that in rural areas in general we haven't done a good job of finding ways to align technology and skills to actually have a significant economic impact," said Mr. Hardy.

"We're really good at setting up computers and at training, but not really good at finding entrepreneurial, innovative ways to stimulate economic development for Aboriginal communities."

He is calling for a national project to do E-indexing and e-readiness assessments, not only for communities but also organizations of all kinds.

"The quicker we can get enough organizations, the quicker we can assess a community based on the types of organizations in it," he said.

## Divine show gains acclaim and following

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Vanessa Harwood, one of Canada's most celebrated ballet dancers, is also among the growing number returning to Divine Performing Arts shows. She's attended three times.

"It's very beautiful, well-rehearsed," she said after watching the show Tuesday night. She said she and her fellow dancers would "love to see a ballet company with male dancers as well rehearsed as these dancers, because they were wonderful, and they do it with such passion and technique too."

Ms. Harwood attended with Nadia Potts, another former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, now director of the dance program at Ryerson University.

"It's just the whole performance," she said. "What always hits me about it is the freshness — the dancers dance as though it's the first time, and the joy with which they dance, and the commitment . . . There is something beautiful and transporting about it, it takes you to another world," she said.

Liberal and Conservative legislators are not known to agree on much, but members of parliament from both sides of the aisle left the show in Toronto Friday night agreeing on the quality of the Divine Performing Arts production.

Peter Kent, the Conservative minister of state for foreign affairs (Americas) was joined by his provincial colleague Peter Shurman. He described the show as "a highly professional combination of drama, dance, and music."

"The individual performances were spectacular. The company performance was physical, eloquent, delicate, and powerful," he said. "I found it a very powerful show—wonderful costumes, wonderful colours, spectacular dancing, magnificent music, and an inspirational message."

Meanwhile Liberal MP Boris Wyzeneskiy said debate-battered members of parliament could benefit from watching the show.

"This is more than just attending an event . . . it's actually something that is inspiring and I wish

that more of our colleagues could come because, as was pointed out during the performance, music and art can have quite a recuperative effect on a person, and we certainly get battered around in the House of Commons," he said.

The Divine Performing Arts emcees explain during the show that the Chinese character for medicine (pronounced "Yao") actually originates from the Chinese character for music ("Yue"), and that traditional music is believed to have a healing effect on the body.

Mr. Wyzeneskiy's comments were echoed by Liberal MP Rob Oliphant who called the show "very soothing."

The music was not only calming, but highly skillful, according to Mr. Wilkins, one of Canada's most acclaimed musical arrangers, one of more than half a dozen members of the Order of Canada. The Epoch Times interviewed after watching the Divine Performing Arts Canadian shows the last two weeks. The Order of Canada is Canada's highest civilian honour.

"I think [the music] really captures the spirit of the dances and the spirit of what they are trying to portray," said Mr. Wilkins, who has worked with the likes of Celine Dion and Michael Jackson.

"I see there were different composers who have written all pieces for this, and I think they really captured what they were trying to convey very well into music."

The success of the show has added meaning for recent Chinese immigrants like Mr. Liu who attended the show Saturday afternoon. Mr. Liu has watched Divine Performing Arts shows each year since coming to Canada a little over three years ago.

"I have found my pride as a Chinese after seeing such a show in the Western society," he said. "I am very proud."

The show also earned praise from John Fraser, former editor of Saturday Night magazine and dance and theatre critic for the Globe and Mail. He is now master of the elite Massey College, affiliated with the University of Toronto.



In its celebration of traditional Chinese culture, New York-based Divine Performing Arts is the only company in the world that performs strictly authentic Chinese classical dance as part of its repertoire.

DIVINE PERFORMING ARTS

"Amazing, spectacular, isn't it?" Mr. Fraser said after emerging from the John Bassett Theatre Tuesday night. "So many dancers, and so many different styles. It's sort of overwhelming."

Mr. Fraser says he recommends the show.

"I don't think it needs my recommendation, though. It looked to me like there were no spare seats in the theatre."

Divine Performing Arts will come to Western Canada in the spring. The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Divine Performing Arts 2009 World Tour. For more information, visit [www.DivinePerformingArts.org](http://www.DivinePerformingArts.org).




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