

NATION BRIEFS

Aboriginals to ask Pope to acknowledge abuses

OTTAWA (Reuters)—Canada's aboriginal community hopes Pope Benedict will acknowledge the abuses inflicted on native children at residential schools run by the Catholic Church, a top official said on Wednesday.

Phil Fontaine, leader of the Association of First Nations, is due to meet the Pope at the Vatican on April 29 to discuss the schools.

Canada formally apologized last year for an assimilation policy that forced 150,000 native Indians into boarding schools far from home, where their languages and cultural traditions were banned, and where many said they were sexually and physically abused.

Catholic churches ran around 75 percent of the residential schools, which mainly operated from the 1870s to the 1970s.

"It is my fervent hope that this Papal audience will include a statement from Pope Benedict to all survivors of Indian residential schools," Fontaine told a news conference.

"We also hope the statement will reference the role that the Catholic Church played in the administration and operation of the schools, and the impact it had on our survivors and communities ... this is a moral issue for many of us."

Indian leaders say the abuses at the school help explain why many of Canada's one million aboriginals live in poverty and suffer high levels of crime, illness and unemployment.

Although individual Catholic dioceses have apologized for their role in running the schools, the top leadership of the church has not yet said it was sorry.

Cuba must meet rights norms to rejoin OAS, says Ottawa

OTTAWA (Reuters)—Cuba would have to meet minimum standards on human rights and democracy before Canada supported any reintegration of Havana into the Organization of American States, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

Several Latin American countries, including Brazil, have said Cuba should be allowed to rejoin the 35-member OAS. It was suspended in 1962 because the OAS judged Cuba's communist system to be incompatible with the group's principles.

"Cuba's return, or eventual return—if they're willing—will obviously depend on Cuba's will to address hemispheric norms of participation, including representative democracy and respect for human rights," Dimitri Soudas said.

Soudas is press secretary to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and was addressing reporters before Harper's participation this weekend in the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago.

The reference to whether Cuba was willing to rejoin the OAS alluded to a remark by former President Fidel Castro on Tuesday that his country had no desire to join the OAS and did not want to "hear the vile name of that institution."

Despite its position on Cuba rejoining the OAS, Canada has active diplomatic, travel and business ties with the Caribbean country.

Soudas welcomed the U.S. moves and encouraged Cuba to respond.

"It's important for Cuba to take stock of that openness that was demonstrated by the American administration, and obviously look at doing its fair share on making progress on their side as well," he told a news conference.

Opposition leader won't rule out tax hike

OTTAWA (Reuters)—Opposition leader Michael Ignatieff allowed on Wednesday for the possibility of raising taxes after the recession is over if all else fails to eliminate federal budget deficits.

"No honest politician faced with an \$80 billion deficit will take anything off the table because Canadians do not want—they're allergic to—long-term structural deficits," the Liberal Party leader told reporters in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

"But I will do anything I can, and any sensible politician will do anything they can, to avoid increasing the tax burden on Canadians, especially now, and hopefully later as well."

He said that if he became prime minister, he would first try to cut any waste he could find in government, and he would also rely on natural growth in tax revenues as stimulus entered the economy.

The Conservatives, reelected in October with a minority of seats in Parliament, have pledged to avoid tax hikes.



Alexandra Morton hauls in a net she uses to catch salmon fry. After testing the fry for sea lice, she releases them back into the ocean. (NIK WEST)

West coast wild salmon in troubled waters

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Another study by Raincoast Conservation Foundation and the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform links the decline in sockeye in the Fraser River—B.C.'s most important salmon river—to sea lice infestation from salmon farms in the Georgia Strait.

"The big decline that we're seeing in the Fraser sockeye—I have every reason to believe that that is related to salmon farms. Because there's no population of wild salmon anywhere in the world that is surviving with this industry," says Morton.

Fish farm operators argue that the use of the drug Slice, a pesticide that is mixed with fish feed to kill sea lice, greatly reduces the incidence of lice at the farms.

The B.C. Salmon Farmers Association has questioned the scientific modeling used by Morton and Krkošek. What muddies the waters is that wild salmon populations are known to fluctuate, and stocks are also impacted by such factors as logging, commercial fishing, habitat loss, and fish hatcheries.

"The wild salmon are in decline in most places for a variety of reasons, but where there are salmon farms they just head straight to the bottom," counters Morton.

More than 40 percent of the world's seafood is farm-raised, and B.C. is home to the fourth largest aquaculture industry in the world, the majority of it controlled by the Norwegian companies Marine Harvest Canada, Cermaq, and Greig Seafoods.

Based in Campbell River, Marine Harvest is the largest salmon farming company in the province, employing 500 staff who raise and process 40,000 tonnes of farmed salmon annually, most of which is exported to the United States.

Marine Harvest has said that the aquaculture industry "is committed to stringent standards and

sustainability on the British Columbia coast."

Chief Bob Chamberlin of the Kwiksutaineuk-ah-kwa-mish First Nation says that since the farms started operating in the Broughton, not only pink salmon but also chum stocks, various species of clam, herring, and bouligan have all declined.

"Right now there's not one species that's doing well, and the only thing new in our territory is the aquaculture industry," he says.

Chamberlin is representing eight native tribes in a class action lawsuit launched in February against the provincial government for damages by salmon farms on wild stocks, for which the tribes have constitutionally protected rights.

He says the lawsuit was not a decision arrived at lightly, but negotiations with the provincial government and "impassioned pleas and presentations" to the boards of directors of the Norwegian companies fell on deaf ears.

As well as travelling to Norway several times, Chamberlin sent a letter to Harald V, the King of Norway, asking him to visit the Broughton and see the "devastating effects" Norwegian-owned salmon farms are having on B.C. wild salmon.

Tourism operators are also concerned as wild salmon, which provide food for bears, whales, and eagles, fuel B.C.'s \$1.5-billion wilderness tourism industry.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands said in an email to The Epoch Times that the government has engaged in discussions with area First Nations, industry and NGO's regarding a "falling and production plan" for the Broughton Archipelago that would leave migrating corridors free of farmed fish in alternate years.

"Following and treatment when necessary is proven to be an ef-

fective method to ensure sea lice from farms is not an issue for migrating salmon fry. This spring, the Tribune/Fife Channel will essentially be free of farmed fish. This government recognizes that implementation of a Coordinated Area Management Plan on an ongoing basis is key for this area," the ministry said.

"The wild salmon are in decline in most places for a variety of reasons, but where there are salmon farms they just head straight to the bottom."

A court challenge by Morton and three groups resulted in a ruling in February that salmon farms are actually not farms but fisheries and therefore lie under federal jurisdiction—a landmark decision seen as positive for the wellbeing of the wild salmon. Marine Harvest has appealed the ruling.

Morton has since repeatedly sent a letter—along with over 12,000 signatures gathered online—to federal Fisheries Minister Gail Shea asking her to apply the Fisheries Act to the aquaculture industry. As of this writing, Morton has not received a reply.

"The Fisheries Act is a powerful piece of Canadian legislation written to protect the extremely valuable wild fish populations of Canada. It is the law, not an optional course of action," she says.

A recent comprehensive study by the B.C. Pacific Salmon Forum found "strong indirect evidence" that sea lice are having a detrimental effect on wild juvenile pink and chum salmon. The

forum recommended sweeping changes, including that the provincial government fund a commercial-scale closed containment project for farming salmon.

However, the study concluded that aquaculture and wild salmon can coexist, and that current production levels—which critics say are far too high—can be maintained.

A global assessment of the impacts of aquaculture on wild salmon published in February 2008 found that in multiple locations in Canada and Europe, in many cases the presence of salmon farms reduced wild salmon survival by more than 50 percent per generation.

The assessment also found that because salmon farming uses large volumes of processed wild fish for feed, it results in a net loss of fish rather than a net gain.

This, says Morton, is one of the many reasons why salmon farming in the ocean is not viable. She suggests offering incentives to Canadian fish farmers to build tanks on land where they can work on farming a range of fish species, creating an industry with lasting infrastructure that doesn't endanger wild stocks or create pollution in the ocean.

"Raising fish is a successful endeavour—people have been doing it for thousands of years," she says.

She's convinced that wild stocks can bounce back if given the chance.

"These farms are cutting off the blood flow. The wild salmon are going out to the open ocean, picking up energy, and bringing it back. We need that influx of nutrients or the whole province is going to go dim. I'm very certain that if we pull these farms out we'd be amazed at what would happen. We'd be absolutely astonished at how good our ocean really is at raising salmon."

BC Vote Could Decide Carbon Tax's Future

(Reuters)—VANCOUVER, British Columbia—Politicians on Canada's Pacific Coast hit the campaign trail on Tuesday for the start of a provincial election that could decide the fate of North America's first comprehensive carbon tax.

British Columbia is the first province to hold an election since Canada slid into recession, although polls indicate the governing Liberal Party is headed for another victory over the New Democratic Party when voters cast their ballots on May 12.

"British Columbia has had the worst job losses in the country. We need a change"

NDP leader Carole James called on voters to punish Premier Gordon Campbell's Liberals for mishandling the economic downturn, which has pushed unemployment in the province's largely resource-based economy to 7.4 percent.

"British Columbia has had the worst job losses in the country. We need a change," James told a rally near Vancouver.

The Liberals, who have governed the province since 2001, say the New Democrats mismanaged British Columbia's finances when the economy was doing well in the 1990s and cannot be trusted to handle it now when times are tough.

"British Columbians know this election is critical to their future and that the progress we have made could all be lost in a heartbeat if they make the wrong choice on May 12," Campbell said in a written statement.

A survey released by research firm Mustel Group showed the right-of-center Liberals with 52 percent support among decided voters, compared with 35 percent for the left-leaning NDP and 12 percent for the Green Party.

The campaign has created an unusual dilemma for the province's environmental activists. They have traditionally sided with the New Democrats but now object to the NDP's plans to scrap the carbon tax launched by the Liberals last year.

The tax applies to nearly all fossil fuels, including gasoline and home heating fuel, starting at \$10 per tonne of carbon emissions in 2008 and increasing by \$5 a tonne annually for four years.

The tax became a lightning rod for criticism when it was launched in July, when energy prices were already at record highs and drivers began paying an additional 2.41 Canadian cents on a liter of gasoline (about 9.13 cents per U.S. gallon).

The NDP's "Axe the Tax" campaign coincided with a rise in the polls that briefly had them neck and neck with the Liberals in November, garnering particular support in rural areas of the province.

The NDP plans to replace the carbon tax with other caps on emissions aimed at industrial sources, but environmental groups complain that will do little to reduce greenhouse gasses and could end up costing jobs.

British Columbia is already part of the Western Climate Initiative, a coalition of U.S. states and Canadian provinces that have agreed to adopt a cap and trade system for carbon emissions starting in 2012.

Candidates from both main parties will also have to compete for voters attention with a high-profile, non-political distraction: the Vancouver Canucks begin their National Hockey League playoffs this week in a quest for the Stanley Cup.

Shen Yun Dance Company nears end of world tour

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"I've watched the Shen Yun show every year for the past three years.... Every year it gives me a new sensation," he said.

"Nowadays, traditional values are being destroyed by the

Chinese Communist Party. So, it is even more important for us to construct and revive these beliefs and culture again. I think Shen Yun dedicated a lot to this cause. I think reconstructing the culture and belief of Chinese is very

meaningful for all mankind."

Wherever it plays, the Shen Yun performers receive greetings from many elected officials and VIPs. Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach said in a welcoming letter that the performance company's

20-country world tour is "truly a wonder to behold.

"I am proud that our province is part of this dynamic renewal of Chinese cultural traditions, and I wish all participants the very best during each performance," he wrote.