

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER



WORLDS APART

## FROM THE ARCTIC



## TO THE SAHARA:



## AN INUIT ADVENTURE IN TIMBUKTU

A troupe of performers from Igloolik has replaced snow with sand, venturing to the Festival au Desert near the fabled Tuareg city. Starkly different, there's also a familiarity – indigenous peoples who share the threat of global warming to their lives and cultures



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ESSEKANE, MALI

When Terence Leonard Uyarak looks up at the star-cluttered night sky over the Sahara, the four people running – *ulaktut* in the language of the Inuit – are there. *Tuktugurjuk*, the caribou toward which they head, is

there. So is *nunurjuk*, the polar bear from which they flee. But they aren't where they're supposed to be. It's as if they have all stumbled, and slipped half way down the sky. *Nunurjuk*, the north star and all of the other stars by which Mr. Uyarak tells his way in the snow of the Canadian Arctic are laid out above the desert night. But they are skewed, down near the equator. He cannot tell his way by them, not here in this desert. Mr. Uyarak could hardly be farther from home – six flights, thousands of kilometres, in a place the polar opposite from the pole on

### TRAIL TO TIMBUKTU



Read Stephanie Nolen's blog from the Festival au Desert in Timbuktu, Mali.  
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which he lives. His jutting cheekbones are sunburned; there is sand in his nose and his hair and his clothes – he's ankle-deep in it all the time. Yet for all of that, Mr. Uyarak said, this place is not so different from his hometown, Igloolik. "The people are very calm, that's one thing. And the *nuna*, the land – the sand is shaped in the ways that snow shapes when there is a strong wind." The land and the way they live in it are threatened too, by climate change, by the lure of consumer culture. » SEE 'SAHARA' PAGE 15

FIRST MINISTERS MEET

## Premiers cite job losses to pressure PM

Worst employment figures since 2003 add urgency to demands on economy

BY BRIAN LAGHI AND STEVEN CHASE  
OTTAWA

Premiers emerged from a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper last night with little more than a pledge to keep talking about how to shelter a Canadian economy that has just experienced its heaviest job losses in almost five years.

A disappointed Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said the federal government provided no tangible help to his government as it tries to aid the manufacturing sector. "We could do more if we had a strong, committed and willing partner in the federal government," Mr. McGuinty said after the four-hour working dinner at 24 Sussex Dr. "I did not find that partner here today."

The Prime Minister did pledge to write to the premiers with a summary of the meeting and some ideas on how to push issues forward, Alberta's Ed Stelmach said.

In a news release after the meeting, Mr. Harper acknowledged some weaknesses in

the economy, but was generally upbeat.

"While the economy is performing well, it was recognized that some sectors and communities remain vulnerable to circumstances resulting from changes in the global economy," the statement said.

The premiers entered the meeting with the disconcerting news that the economy suffered a net loss of 18,700 jobs last month, the largest drop since May of 2003, when the SARS outbreak sidestepped the nation. Mr. McGuinty and Quebec's Jean Charest led the charge by asking for help for their manufacturing and forestry sectors, which have been particularly hard hit. » SEE 'PREMIERS' PAGE 4

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR CANADA?

With Wall Street on high alert about the possibility of an impending U.S. recession, how much pain is coming our way? Small cracks are starting to appear – a drop in housing starts, building permits and jobs. REPORT ON BUSINESS »

THE MULRONEY-SCHREIBER SAGA

## PM stalls public inquiry until MPs finish probe

BY CAMPBELL CLARK  
AND DANIEL LEBLANC OTTAWA

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will delay a public inquiry into the Mulroney-Schreiber affair until after parliamentary hearings on the matter are over, prompting opposition accusations of stonewalling.

In a report released yesterday, special adviser David Johnston recommended a relatively narrow inquiry into cash payments that German-Canadian businessman Karlheinz Schreiber made to former prime minister Brian Mulroney in 1993 and 1994 – but not into the "well-tilled" terrain of government deals such as the 1988 sale of Air

bus planes to Air Canada.

Mr. Johnston, president of the University of Waterloo, left open the option of waiting until after the Commons ethics committee hearings, and possibly shrinking the inquiry's mandate then. » SEE 'INQUIRY' PAGE 4

JEFFREY SIMPSON: [Mr. Schreiber] has exposed the law and the courts that administer it to be asses. PAGE 19 »

EDITORIAL: Prime Minister Stephen Harper should put the inquiry on the fast track. PAGE 18 »

THE JOHNSTON REPORT: Read the entire report tabled yesterday at GLOBEANDMAIL.COM »



FROM PAGE 1 » SAHARA



Crowds gather in the desert yesterday on the outskirts of Timbuktu, Mali, at the Festival au Desert, an annual world music festival in one of the world's most exotic locales. STEPHANIE NOLEN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Inuit, Tuareg share threat to their traditions

And it is a desire to draw international attention to those threats that has led a group of Inuit performers to a quirky arts festival near Timbuktu in Mali.

Talking to the nomads who invited him here, Mr. Yarak is learning about camels, and they are not that different, in many ways, from the dog teams his father used to keep. He rode one yesterday, and concluded it was a lot like being in a kayak: You can't stiffen up, but have to roll with the waves.

People here wear layers and layers of clothes, to keep cool instead of hot; they live in tents, just like the few people back home who still live out on the land. Even his language, Inuktitut, sounds a bit like the Tamashak spoken by his Tuareg hosts. Their language and traditions are both oral; like the Inuit, their written language is an innovation of recent generations. Both groups navigate by the stars.

Then there are other, darker similarities: Many young Tuareg want out of here, the same way many of Mr. Yarak's friends want out of Igloolik. They want to live in the city and watch DVDs and listen to 50 Cent. Few have interests like his — Mr. Yarak has sought out people in his community to teach him the old ways, including that trick of nighttime navigation. He despairs of young people who can't even speak Inuktitut. "My girlfriend wants to watch The O.C. all the time and I always tell her, there are so many things that are more important than some stupid TV show from America."

Mr. Yarak, an acrobat and actor, and seven other members of a troupe called Artcirq were invited here by one of the world's other great desert peoples, the Tuareg nomads whose camel trains have carried salt and gold across the Sahara since the 1900s, since Timbuktu was a thriving centre of learning and trade rather than the dusty, half-deserted museum it is today.

Two years ago, a slight, curly Tuareg man named Manny Ansar saw Artcirq perform in Mexico and decided, right then, that he had to find away to bring them to his festival. Mr. Ansar (who has a day job

### A bond of snow and sand

Inuit performers came to the Sahara to call attention to how their Arctic home and the African desert face similar threats.



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doing communications for the electric company) runs what must be the world's quirkiest, most inaccessible and magical arts festival — a gathering of more than 40 disparate acts, thousands of Tuareg, vast herds of camels and a few hundred hardy, wide-eyed tourists, at an oasis 70 kilometres northwest of Timbuktu.

As a griot, a story teller, explained at the start of the festival on Thursday, the Tuareg are "les enfants de grande tente," who live a solitary, nomadic life much of the time, but gather, once or twice a year, "to share the news, resolve disputes and plan the way forward."

Such gatherings, held at oases such as Essekane, were traditionally accompanied by music and dance, camel-racing and storytelling. For the past eight years, the Festival au Desert has revived that tradition for three days in January. Hundreds of square, white cotton tents are pitched between the dunes, enterprising Malians set up to sell everything from bananas to whisky to heated buckets of water; and lights and speakers are rigged on a wide, concrete stage on the last dune before the Sahara begins its earnest.

It took a lot of finagling and fundraising (a plane ticket from Igloolik to Montreal alone is \$3,000, never mind all the way to Timbuktu) to get Artcirq here, accompanied by two throat singers from Igloolik. The troupe was founded in 1998 after Igloolik was

rocked by the suicides of two young people.

Guillaume Ittukssarjuak Saladin, who had grown up in Igloolik but moved away to tour the world as an acrobat with circus troupes, started teaching young people, with the support of Igloolik's great cultural force, the filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk, whose *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* was screened here last night to a crowd of mesmerized Malians. Soon dozens of young people were training in the old town pool, drained of water and filled with junkyard mattresses for crash landings. "Okay, as Inuit we don't have 'circuses,'" said Solomon Uyarasuk, 21, "but if you talk about Inuit games, we have all those things — clowns, juggling, jumping contests."

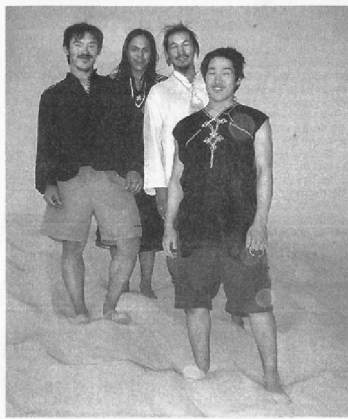
Mr. Saladin, 35, is glad to be preserving these traditional skills, but he believes Artcirq gives Igloolik kids something more. "Our biggest achievement is to create dreams, to make things possible — right now there are kids at home who know there are Inuit in the desert in Africa."

While Artcirq members were rehearsing in the sand yesterday evening, Aliba Mohamed Najim, the mayor of Essekane, was watching young men speed their ancient pickup trucks around the edge of the festival and shaking his head in disgust. "Kids today," he muttered, in Tamashak.

Mr. Najim, 64, despairs for the Tuareg future sometimes. "Young people today don't want to be nomad — to be a nomad is back-breaking. You haul water for your animals from the start of the morning until late into the night. It's not like swish, swish, you turn on a tap and fill a glass."

They all want to go live in the towns, he said — once Essekane was made up of people who travelled all the time, but now at least half of them stay put most of the year. "But this has serious repercussions for your character. Your life drains away until you forget who you are."

The lure of plumbing and less toil may be taking some young people into the towns, but there are greater forces at work as well: The traditional Tuareg way of life, like the Inuit, is imperilled by global



Inuit performers, from left, Terence Leonard Uyarak, Solomon Uyarasuk, Derek Agqiauk and Jimmy Awa Qamukaq stand in the sand at the Festival au Desert. STEPHANIE NOLEN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

warming.

"There is less and less rain, and more and more sun, and so less grass," explained Mammat Ag Dahmane, deputy director of the festival. "A nomad relies on his animals, and when there is less grass, we have no choice but to become semi-nomadic, to stay in areas where there is water — and then, of course, the culture changes."

The Sahara grows steadily to the south, devouring five to 10 kilometres of farmland each year, but even within the desert, pastoral life is becoming nearly impossible, he said.

Mr. Uyarak said he is a skeptic about the idea of permanent climate change — his grandparents tell him there have always been cycles on the land, that sometimes the caribou herds are huge and close, and sometimes they are small and many hundreds of kilometres away.

But he, too, said he sees changes in the weather changing his culture. Last year, there were many serious accidents in Nunavut when people on snowmobiles fell through ice that should not have been

thin, he said; when he went hunting seal pups with his family last spring, the bay was full of loose ice and there were few seals.

When Artcirq goes on stage tonight, they will place a block of ice at the edge of the platform and perform for as long as it takes to melt.

The Inuit have struggled to explain to the Tuareg who they are — they haven't heard of Inuit, or even Eskimo; sometimes, "from the North Pole" will do it. Nomads look disbelieving at pictures that show the now bare-chested Inuit in sealskin back home where it was —55 degrees the day they left for this trip. Tonight, Artcirq will find out how well the stories they act out and sing carry into this different-but-the-same place.

Already, they have won the affection of many Tuareg. Yesterday, a tribal elder gave Mr. Uyarak a piece of heavy silver jewellery that is the traditional symbol of his family after the two had talked for some time about their lives. Etched into its face are the stars, the ones that guide them at night across the desert.

### MUSICIANS JAM TILL THE SUN COMES UP

The vehicle for cultural exchange at the Festival au Desert in Essekane is performance: International artists play on the main stage until 2 a.m. The focus is West African music, and especially the "desert blues" style made famous by the late Ali Farka Toure, who played here often in the early years of the festival.

Yossou N'Dour has played here several times, and Robert Plant turned up last year. The best music, however, is often to be heard around the campfires that flicker between the rows of tents until the sun comes up, where impromptu jam sessions come together, then dissipate back into the sand.

On Thursday night, the Artcirq troupe taught the reggae band from Ivory Coast, who are staying in the tent next door, how to throat sing. Soon the most unlikely harmony was rising in the dark. The next day, the Inuit group was still wide-eyed about the experience. "It was the first time I ever heard real reggae music," said Jimmy Awa Qamukaq, 19. "And it was their first time ever hearing throat-singing. They were really good."

The biggest stars in Essekane are a band called Tinariwen. At full strength, the band has a half-dozen electric guitar players, three female singers and a drummer.

Tinariwen was formed more than 25 years ago by a young Tuareg man who had fled the dictatorship that then ruled Mali to refugee camps in southern Libya, financed by Colonel Moammar Gadhafi, and there he encountered his first electric guitar. He formed a band, which sang about their stateless people; their music was banned in Mali but spread through the Sahara by illicit cassette.

In the early 1990s, that band put down their guitars to join the Tuareg rebellion. Kaddou, one of the legendary guitarists, was shot and wounded 17 different times. After peace in 1996, Tinariwen came home to Mali. They have a growing international following these days, and retain godlike status here. ■ Stephanie Nolen