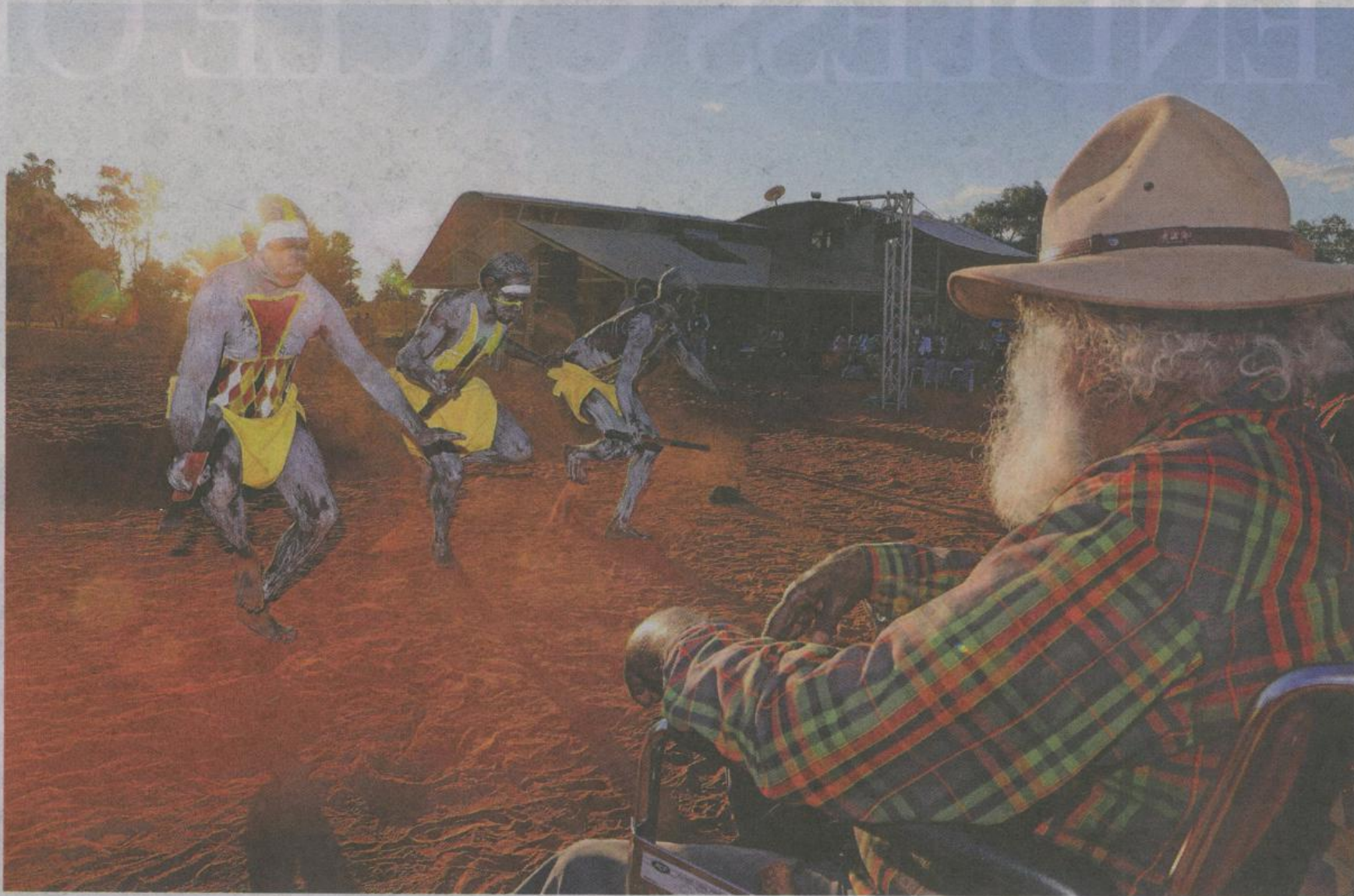


Indigenous destiny dances to united beat



JAMES CROUCHER

Yolgnu dancers from northeast Arnhem Land perform their Gurtha fire dance at the opening of the Mutitjulu indigenous constitutional convention

STEPHEN FITZPATRICK
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS EDITOR

Yolgnu dancers from East Arnhem Land brought their Gurtha fire ceremony and Torres Strait Islanders their Baidam shark dance, as a constitutional reform agenda began to be laid out last night in the sunset glow of Uluru.

Welcomed by the local Anangu of Mutitjulu, who performed their own Warrmala story in the gathering dusk, indigenous Australia's largest and perhaps most consequential gathering began with a plea for unity.

Yolgnu elder Djunga Djunga Yunupingu said he had been asked by his uncle, Galarrruy

Yunupingu, to bring to central Australia a fire "that gives us the power and identity of who we are" and that "tells us that no matter what happens to us, we are strong and unbreakable".

"Our fire was lit by our ancestors and lives through our songs and our dance; all of us are linked throughout the country by songlines and kinship and friendship and a common history in this land," Mr Yunupingu said.

The flame he invoked was painted on the bodies of his countrymen: red and yellow on their torsos symbolising its heart and tongue, the black the charcoal it creates, and a series of white dots, or nilng-nilng, the shower of sparks that can spread its power.

"We are coming here to light a fire, and have them take the strength of that fire into their discussions," he told *The Australian*.

The next three days will see intense discussion among delegates from 12 indigenous dialogues held around the nation over the past six months, with a proposal being hammered out to deliver to Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten.

A range of views will be canvassed, from the so-called "minimalist" model of constitutional change, said to be preferred by politicians, to substantive reform that could see indigenous Australians having a direct political say in matters that affect them.

Significantly, last night's opening ceremony involved the first

champions of land rights law (the Yolgnu) and of native title law (Torres Strait Islanders) joining with other indigenous Australians at an Anangu sacred site widely regarded as the symbolic heart of the nation.

For the Yolgnu and Anangu, there are deep historical connections, often involving the fire with the assistance of which the continent was once closely managed.

For visitors from the Torres Strait and elsewhere, there were similarities on display, despite the apparent differences.

Margaret Bosun, from Moa Island, said her group's Baidam dance marked the seven-star constellation of an ancient shark whose movement across the sky

helped keep track of 12 seasons. "When the shark's head is facing down, we know it's going to be windy; when it's sitting up straight, it's going to be good weather," Ms Bosun said. Those same seven stars reach far beyond the seafarers of Torres Strait; the Anangu have their own seven sisters, defined by the same constellation, in ancient etchings on Uluru.

Mutitjulu man Craig Woods said the Warrmala dance told a creation story from his people's Tjukurpa — the Anangu's simultaneous concept of the world's creation, its present and its future.

"Non-indigenous people understand this as the Dreaming but Anangu don't use that word; Tjukurpa isn't a dream, it's real."

Emotional PM says 'sorry' to Stolen Generations

ROSIE LEWIS

Malcolm Turnbull has said "sorry" to members of the Stolen Generations as federal parliament marked the 20th anniversary of the landmark Bringing Them Home report.

The Prime Minister became emotional when he recalled a lullaby — which he spoke in the Ngunawal language — sung by an Aboriginal mother to her daughter.

"I am rocking you slowly skyward, singing," he recited.

"It is heartbreaking to read those words, to speak them, knowing that a little baby was rocked to sleep by a mother who wanted no more than that her baby should be safe, comforted with a lullaby in her own tongue," Mr Turnbull said.

"But that little baby was far



KYM SMITH

Mr Turnbull at the Bringing Them Home commemoration

from safe, nor was her mother, nor was the language in which she sang. Yes, loss, but this is also a story of survival. And over the

years, many of you here have bravely told your stories."

Mr Turnbull said this week the country would honour three mile-

stones that guided the nation along a course towards reconciliation: the 50th anniversary of the 1967 recognition referendum, 25 years since the Mabo High Court decision, and 20 years since Bringing Them Home was tabled in the federal parliament in 1997.

"Today, we again acknowledge the Stolen Generations, those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their parents simply because they were Aboriginal and, again, we say sorry," Mr Turnbull said.

"We acknowledge that this removal separated you from your families, lands, languages, cultures of 50,000 years your ancestors had protected and cared for and we acknowledge the continuing deep personal pain that affects your lives and those of your families.

"This is a period of our history

where loss and grief almost consumed a people."

Bill Shorten said the Bringing Them Home report spoke of the trauma inflicted on three and four generations of children who had been stolen from their communities.

The Opposition Leader said it was time Australia "talked of reconnection, recovery and reparations".

"Let us call the Stolen Generations for what they were: a gross violation of human rights. And we need to guarantee that it can never happen again.

"This is the question and we should be smart enough as a parliament and as a nation to make that guarantee ... The happy morning that mothers no longer wake with the fear and the anxiety of their children being taken for them, then we will have brought justice and reconciliation home."