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Credit: Tom Courtney
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500 stranded melon-headed whales rescued in Philippine bay

Philippine fishermen, volunteers and authorities with dozens of fishing boats have joined hands in guiding back to sea about 500 disorientated melon-headed whales that were stranded in the shallow waters near the mouth of Manila Bay delta in the Bataan Peninsula.



Virgin Atlantic jet fire investigation finds faulty wiring in A340 fleet

Investigators in Ireland have found wiring problems in several Virgin Atlantic Airbus A340s as part of their



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investigation into a fire on board one such aircraft that was forced to divert to Shannon Airport. The Virgin jet was headed from London Heathrow Airport to Chicago with 143 passengers and thirteen crew on January 11 this year.

Wikipedia Current Events

Two missiles fired from American drone aircraft kill at least 25 people in South Waziristan, Pakistan.

- Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says Israel will not negotiate any long-term ceasefire in its conflict with Hamas unless prisoner-of-war Gilad Shalit is released.
- Japan's National Astronomical Observatory completes the first topographic map of the Moon.
- Somali pirates release the Japanese oil tanker Chemstar Venus and its 23 crew members.

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All six victims died at the scene of the crash, which involved four young adults in a Peugeot 206 and two elderly people, possibly a male and female, who police believe to be in their 60s, in the other car said to be a Ford Fiesta. Rescue workers fought to save the one of the elderly individuals, but were

unsuccessful. Both vehicles collided head-on and exploded upon colliding.

Two police officers on traffic patrol discovered the crash, which took place at 23:00 local time (UTC) yesterday. The officers involved were praised by Bruce Cameron, a superintendent for Nottinghamshire Police. "The bodies are very badly burnt and they will have to be identified using dental records. We want to make sure we are absolutely certain as to who was in both cars when the accident happened," he said.

Local residents say that the A614 has been the scene of a large number of accidents. One resident, Stuart Stonebridge, told The Daily Telegraph that "we only moved here three years ago and there have been a lot of accidents and some fatalities in that time," while another resident, Janice Gilbody said that "the people of Bilsthorpe will be in shock, horror and disbelief at the young lives lost."

Gilbody also said that this accident is "yet again another accident on this road." She then added that the road was dangerous, saying that "it's a wonder it doesn't happen more often."

The cause of the crash is still under investigation, but police say weather was not a contributing factor.

Germany's GUN Records closes
German rock and metal label GUN

Records (Great Unlimited Noises) announced Friday that they were to close. No explanation has been given for the move.

Formed as a joint venture between BMG and Wolfgang Funk in 1992, the label had seen its parent merge with Sony in 2005 to form Sony BMG and Funk quit as president in December 2008. In the nineties the label worked with German metal bands such as U.D.O., Sodom and Running Wild.

GUN's current international acts - including Wales' Bullet for My Valentine, Finland's Lordi and the Netherlands' Within Temptation - will now be handled out of Sony's Munich international division. National artists, such as Oomph! and The Donots, will also be Sony's direct responsibility via either Four Music or Columbia Germany in Berlin.

The label has also worked with Sturm und Drang, Apocalyptica and HIM. The closure will affect eight employees including Arno Hartfield, the managing director.

Australia's Queensland Roar through to first A-League football preliminary final

Brisbane, Queensland – Queensland Roar in Australia has advanced through to the 2008-9 A-League Preliminary Final, the teams first, after defeating the Central Coast Mariners in their 2-leg Semi Final. Queensland will now travel to Adelaide for the Preliminary Final. In a top four finals series, which the A-League uses, the Preliminary Final is a final played between the qualifying Semi Final (1st vs. 2nd) and the winner of the elimination Semi Final (3rd vs. 4th) for the remaining spot in the Grand Final.

Queensland lead one goal to zero

after a back and forth first half. The Mariners pressed early keeping Queensland to their own half in the first three minutes. Queensland created a number of opportunities down the other end to no avail. The Queenslanders missed from a corner and were unlucky to have an offside decision go against them. Michael Zullo fired off a shot from close range only for it to be saved.

The Mariners fired right back. They secured a free kick 20 metres out from goal. The kick went was saved and resulted in a corner. Queensland cleared the ball from their penalty area. The Mariners jumped on a number of Queensland mistakes, taking three shots on goal in the space of two minutes.

Queensland then applied pressure down the Mariners end resulting in a goal to Mitchell Nichols. This goal was Nichols third in three games and fifth for the season.

The two teams then trade shots at goal with neither team scoring. Mariners midfielder Nigel Boogard was booked by referee Peter Green on 38 minutes. Paul O'Grady was booked on forty five minutes.

At half time, the Mariners substituted Andrew Clark with Sasho Patrovski.

Not dissimilar to the start of the first half, the second began with Queensland pushing forward. The pressure, however did not last as long as the Mariners did in the first half. Queensland reneged the Mariners pressure, resulting in a goal in the forty ninth minute to Matthew McKay.

The Mariners hit back with a late consolation goal to Nik Mrdja in the sixty fifth minute. Two

Mariners players were booked in the space of about five minutes nearing the end of the game. Dean Heffernan on eighty minutes and John Hutchinson on eighty five.

Queensland won the game two goals to one and the semi final four goals to one.

Virgin Atlantic jet fire investigation finds faulty wiring in A340 fleet

Investigators in Ireland have found wiring problems in several Virgin Atlantic Airbus A340s as part of their investigation into a fire on board one such aircraft that was forced to divert to Shannon Airport.

The Virgin jet was headed from London Heathrow Airport to Chicago with 143 passengers and thirteen crew on January 11 this year. A small fire was noticed in a waste bin storage area in the first class section's bar unit.

A damaged wiring loom could be seen sticking out of a hole in the compartments floor, and there was visible electrical arcing in the area. An attempt was made to control the situation by switching of electrical circuits, but both the fire and the arcing continued unchecked.

The aircraft's captain declared an emergency and diverted to Shannon, which the airliner reached thirty minutes later. During that time, the crew used five 1kg fire extinguishers upon the fire, but each time the arcing continued and after about five minutes the fire reignited. Witnesses described the fire as consisting of "licks of flame".

After performing a safe emergency landing the airport's Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting

department tackled the fire with a 5kg extinguisher but met with similar results. After consulting with the crew the jet's power was completely shut down, after which the fire was finally put out. Virgin initially claimed the fire had never occurred.

Investigators with Ireland's Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU) inspected the loom and found it to be "completely severed" and exhibiting "strong evidence of burning/arcng" according to a preliminary report released on Friday. The loom was identified as providing power and dimming circuits for mood lighting in the bar.

The AAIU says that it seems the loom had contacted the metal waste bin in the compartment above. There should have been rails to hold up the bin and a protective metal cover, but "no evidence" of these was found and the report notes that "Initial inspection indicated the possibility that they were never fitted."

The bar unit is a modification exclusive to Virgin. The AAIU ordered all 36 of the airline's A340s worldwide inspected, with both France and the United Kingdom assisting with this. The UK has identified four other aircraft with faulty wiring, it has now been revealed. Virgin says that "A few minor issues were found and were immediately rectified," and adds that "The installation of the bar was carried out in accordance with all relevant regulations. Virgin Atlantic continues to assist the AAIU in their investigation and looks forward to the full report with interest."

The AAIU says that "significant other issues are being examined

by the investigation" in addition to the wiring defects. "These include the difficulties faced by the crew in isolating the damaged circuits, the emergency checklist, the design of the modification and the standards relating to such modifications," said the report.

Virgin's Boeing 747-400 fleet also has a similar bar installed on it, but there was not considered to be a risk to the aircraft's wiring on that model. The fire involved a bar added three years ago, with the aircraft manufactured in 1998.

British Airways jet makes rough landing at London City Airport

A BA CityFlyer Avro 146-RJ100 passenger jet with 71 people onboard made a crash-landing at London City Airport on Friday evening, after part of its gear failed upon landing. One passenger was hospitalised after the incident.

According to witnesses, the aeroplane's front landing gear collapsed into the runway after the aircraft made a rough landing. The plane stopped on the runway, after which the 67 passengers and four crew members were evacuated by the use of emergency chutes.

Following the incident, the airport's only runway was shut down and incoming flights diverted to other airports in the vicinity.

"Unfortunately, one passenger sustained a minor injury and is currently on the way to hospital. There was one other minor injury," British Airways said in a statement. "We don't know the nature of the injury or how it was caused yet. Our priority at the moment is to ensure all the passengers involved in the incident are well cared for by our ground

staff."

Justin Fletcher, a passenger onboard the aeroplane, described what happened in an interview with the BBC: "There was obviously quite a loud bang as the plane scratched in, the stewards and stewardesses were quick to evacuate everyone off, there was a few scrapes and cuts due to hitting the asphalt, all in all everyone seems to be doing quite well now."

London City Airport is located in the eastern part of London, and is mainly used for domestic and European flights. It handles 80 000 flights and three million passengers a year.

Israel elects 18th Knesset

The centrist Kadima Party won a plurality of the seats in Knesset, the Israel parliament, in Tuesday's election beating out the right-wing Likud Party by a single seat.

The ninth and current Israel President Shimon Peres will call on Tzipora Malka "Tzipi" Livni, Kadima party leader to attempt to form a government through a coalition. This will be difficult for Livni as Hard line parties including Likud won a majority of the seats in the Knesset. Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu might be tapped to form a coalition government if Livni fails. 65.2% percent of the voting population voted on Tuesday.

The key issue which has faced some 5.3 million registered voters, in 9,000 polling stations nationwide is which leader can best assure the security of the state while chances of a peace deal seem remote amid a campaign that generated little enthusiasm.

Political analysts are predicting

that Mr. Netanyahu, not Ms. Livni, will be asked by Israel's president to form the next government.

Both Ms. Livni and Mr. Netanyahu are courting the third-place Yisrael Beiteinu Party, headed by Avigdor Lieberman. Yisrael Beiteinu party which won 15 seats is seen as critical in securing the 61 seats required in the country's 120-seat parliament.

Another possible political scenario would be a power-sharing government between Ms. Livni and Mr. Netanyahu, in which each leader would serve as prime minister for two years, rotating midway through the four year term.

"Netanyahu and Livni complement one another. You have the common sense of Livni and the broader strategic vision of Netanyahu. Bibi needs her and she needs him," said Daniel Schueftan, a senior Israeli academic and deputy director of the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, where he also serves as a senior lecturer in the School of Political Sciences.

The Knesset (כנסת) is the legislature of Israel, located in Givat Ram, Jerusalem. It was first convened on February 14, 1949, following the elections held on January 20th 1949. As the legislative branch of the Israeli government, it enacts laws, elects the president and prime minister (although s/he is ceremonially appointed by the President), supervises the work of the government, reserves the power to remove the President of the State and the State Comptroller from office and to dissolve itself and call new elections.

"I believe in the right of the Jewish

people to the entire land of Israel. But I was also raised to preserve democratic values." —Tzipora Malka "Tzipi" Livni in 2006

The composition of the current Knesset was determined by the 2006 election, the Seventeenth Knesset. Though it has not yet happened in the current session, in every Knesset to date (save the remarkably stable 1955 Third), parties have split up during the Knesset's term, leading to the creation of new parties or resulting in MKs sitting as independents.

Last December, a record 43 parties had registered with the parties registrar, compared to 31 for the 2006 elections, although in the end, only 34 parties submitted a list of candidates. On 12 January 2009, Balad and the United Arab List-Ta'al alliance were disqualified by the Central Elections Committee on the grounds that they failed to recognise Israel as a Jewish state and called for armed conflict against it. Balad and Ta'al were also disqualified from the 2003 election, but won a Supreme Court case which allowed them to run. On January 21, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 8 to 1, again revoked the ban.

Every 4 years (or sooner if an early election is called, as is often the case), 120 members of the Knesset (MKs) are elected by Israeli citizens who must be at least 18 years old to vote. The Government of Israel must be approved by a majority vote of the Knesset. 120 seats are allocated by party-list proportional representation, using the d'Hondt method. The election threshold for the 2006 election was set at 2% (up from 1.5% in previous elections), which is a little over two seats.

Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu (בִּנְיָמִין בִּיבִי נֶתַנְיָהוּ) was the 9th Prime Minister of Israel and is Chairman of the Likud Party.

After official results are published (on February 18, in this election), the President of Israel delegates the task of forming a government to the Member of Knesset with the best chance of assembling a majority coalition (usually the leader of the largest party.) That designee has up to 42 days to negotiate with the different parties, and then present his government to the Knesset for a vote of confidence. Once the government is approved (by a vote of at least 61 members), he/she becomes Prime Minister.

Kadima leaders believe that Livni can form a coalition with at least Labor, Meretz and Israel Beiteinu. Livni and Netanyahu have started meeting with potential government coalition partners, Livni with Avigdor Lieberman of ultranational party, Yisrael Beiteinu and Netanyahu with Eli Yishai of the Shas, an ultra-Orthodox party.

Netanyahu was Finance Minister of Israel until 9 August 2005, having resigned in protest at the Gaza Disengagement Plan advocated by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He retook the Likud leadership on 20 December 2005.

As of December 2006, he became the official leader of the Opposition in the Knesset and Chairman of the Likud Party. In August 2007 he retained the Likud leadership by beating Moshe Feiglin in party elections.

On May 4, 2006, Ehud Olmert (אהוד אולמרט) became the 12th and current Prime Minister of Israel. He was the mayor of Jerusalem from 1993 to 2003, was elected to the

Knesset and became a minister and an Acting Prime Minister in the government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

On January 4, 2006, after Sharon suffered a severe hemorrhagic stroke, Olmert began exercising the powers of the office of Prime Minister. He led Kadima to a victory in the March 2006 elections (just two months after Sharon had suffered his stroke) and continued on as Acting Prime Minister.

On April 14, 2006, Sharon was declared permanently incapacitated, allowing Olmert to legally become Interim Prime Minister. On 4 May, 2006, Olmert and his new, post-election government were approved by the Knesset, thus Olmert officially became Prime Minister of Israel.

Olmert faced corruption charges amid a challenge for leadership from Kadima by Foreign Minister Tzipora Malka "Tzipi" Livni (ציפורה לבני, מלכה "ציפי", age 50, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel. Livni is a lawyer, mother-of-two and former agent for Mossad Israel's foreign intelligence agency who has moved from a strongly Zionist nationalist background to become a leading Israeli advocate of a two-state solution with Palestinians.

On July 30, 2008, Olmert announced that he would not seek re-election as party leader and that he would resign from his position as Prime Minister immediately after a new Kadima leader was named. On September 17, 2008, Livni won the election and became the new leader of the Kadima party. She sought to form a new government that would gain support from a majority of the Knesset.

After failing to reach agreement with various parties, Livni's attempts at forming a new government were unsuccessful and instead an election was scheduled for February 10, 2009. Aside from Livni and Netanyahu, the other candidates were Ehud Barak, the 10th Prime Minister of Israel, and current Minister of Defense, deputy prime minister and leader of Israel's centre-left Labor Party, and Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the far-right party Yisrael Beiteinu.

The hiatus allowed Olmert to cling to his Prime Minister post for at least a further five months as head of a caretaker government. On December, 2008, Operation Cast Lead was launched on Gaza. The February 10 election came three weeks after a 22-day Israel–Gaza conflict, where Israeli military offensive in the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip killed more than 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis.

Meanwhile, Avigdor Lieberman, whose Yisrael Beiteinu faction received 15 Knesset seats, thereby holding the key to the makeup of the 18th Knesset, has on Thursday unexpectedly departed for vacation abroad, leaving his suitors from Kadima and Likud -- as well as the Israeli public -- in the dark about his intentions.

"Our position is already clear and I know exactly what I am going to tell President Shimon Peres. [But] in order to know whom we are going to recommend, we will wait six more days," Lieberman said. "I think it is too early and there is no point saying whom we support. I have met with both Livni and Netanyahu and with additional people in the political system but my position is already clear and solid. When we go to the President we will say very clear things," he

added.

The Israeli Central Elections Committee, charged under the 1969 Knesset Elections Law to carry out the elections for the Knesset has planned to release the final results on February 18 after tallying more than 150,000 ballots, consisting mainly of votes of absentees (those from abroad - soldiers in military camps and foreign service staff, overseas diplomat missions, prisoners, hospital staff, and surplus votes that are calculated to move to other parties to form the final results within 48 hours of the closing of the polls).

These remaining votes could tip the balance in the gridlocked election and determine the leadership. The elections officials have also released the List of Knesset members. *The Knesset Board of Elections on Thursday states on their site that results are "final but not official."

The unofficial election results (based on 99.7% of votes) has raised one question - whether Netanyahu might be chosen to serve as Prime Minister, given Likud's possible political ability to form a coalition with Yisrael Beiteinu. Another alternative was for Kadima to form a national unity government. But this has seemed unlikely given that it would probably require Tzipi Livni to win Likud's support for any such unity coalition.

The real resolution of the electoral deadlock has hinged on the actions of President Shimon Peres, age, 85, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, as the official in charge of deciding which party should be chosen to form a governing coalition. Observers have pointed to his personal political similarities with

Livni as one possible reason for choosing Kadima. On the other hand, Netanyahu's ability to form a true coalition also seemed like one significant consideration.

However, the stability of a right-wing/religious coalition is questionable. The six right wing parties control just 65 seats, leaving such a coalition vulnerable to internal dissention. In any case, President Peres has announced that he will not entertain any attempts to form a government until February 18, when the final results will be certified.

President Barack Obama has phoned Peres Wednesday and wished him well in overseeing the formation of a new government. "You have only two political parties -- we have 12," Peres told Obama. The new coalition government that emerges after February 18, whether it is led by hard-line Netanyahu or his moderate rival, Tzipi Livni, is likely to find common ground on two burning issues: Hamas and Iran.

Two dire scenarios emerged Wednesday as President Obama faces double dilemmas in Mideast: a narrow coalition of hawks who would stall peacemaking with the Palestinians and a power-sharing arrangement that would give Israel a more moderate face and greater international support.

"We want to do things differently in the region. That would involve accelerating efforts to promote Mideast peace talks as well as having discourse with Iran in an environment of mutual respect," Obama said at his White House news conference Monday. "We certainly hope that a new (Israeli) government will continue to pursue a path to peace. I see no reason to think a new government

would do something otherwise," US State Department spokesman Robert Wood said.

"Divisions in the Israeli electorate are likely to create 'paralysis in the political process' during the period of coalition building and perhaps beyond. This could lead to an extended "hiatus" in peacemaking while the Palestinians confront their own deep political divisions. Nevertheless, the United States should work hard to firm up the Gaza cease-fire and not to give up on the longer-term goal of a two-state solution," said Daniel C. Kurtzer, a former top U.S. diplomat in the Mideast and a recent adviser to Barack Obama.

"The Israeli political system has been fractured and at odds with itself for many years, so having an outcome in which the two big blocs--the center-right and moderate-right blocs--split the vote was not at all unexpected. There will be a paralysis in the political process, certainly during the period of coalition building and perhaps even beyond, depending on what kind of coalition emerges. The hiatus in peacemaking could be rather extended," he explained.

Queensland Premier denies March 28 election

Despite fuelling speculation of a March 28 election, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh has indicated that she will serve a full term. The Courier Mail reported that the premier was moving to "tie off issues that could hurt Labor's prospects" in the election.

However, Anthony Chisholm, Australian Labor Party state secretary, has indicated that it does not mean an early election would be called.

"I've got no idea on timing - the

Premier has indicated she intends on going full term," he said.

The government move to set up a lobbyist register, a 1998 election promise, and to reined-in judicial entitlements that involved magistrate Di Fingleton.

An inquiry has also been set up to address continuing concerns at Bundeberg Base Hospital. The inquiry was announce by health minister Stephen Robertson a day after he said that the issue was dated.

The quick actions to quell these issues encouraged fresh conjecture from the opposition Liberal Nation Party that the election would be held next month, possibly on the 28th. This would be legal as the Queensland Electoral Act (1992) requires the election campaign to last between 26 and 56 days.

Early election or not, several minor parties have already nominated candidates for a number of electorates. Notably, The Greens will run environmental lawyer Larissa Waters in Mt Coonamberrah against treasurer Andrew Fraser, the Socialist Alliance will run Sam Watson in the premiers South Brisbane electorate and Daylight Saving for South East Queensland will run candidates in South East Queensland electorates only.

500 stranded melon-headed whales rescued in Philippine bay

Philippine fishermen, volunteers and authorities with dozens of fishing boats have joined hands in guiding back to sea about 500 disorientated melon-headed whales that were stranded in the shallow waters near the mouth of Manila Bay delta in the Bataan Peninsula.

The gentle mammals were first spotted swimming back and forth and straying very dangerously close (about a mile or 1.6 kilometers) to the shores of the coastal towns of Pilar, Orion and Abucay 135 kilometers northwest of Manila at around at around 4:00 am on Tuesday, said Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Commodore Luis Tuazon and Bataan Governor Enrique Garcia Jr.

The Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said its has responded to the reported mass "stranding" of whales off Pilar coastal waters in the province of Bataan where the famous and historic Corregidor Island is located.

Using dozens of fishing boats with machines shut down and bare hands, more than 100 village fishermen and volunteers along with BFAR, local police and Philippine Coast Guard personnel have joined the massive rescue. With great difficulty, the emergency team has waded into the chest-deep water, clapping their hands and hitting the surface to guide and drive the whales farther away from the coastal shore to deeper waters.

"The mammals were at first thought to have been dolphins, but experts then identified them as melon-headed whales," local veterinarian Mariel Flores said. "This type of whale can be easily mistaken for dolphins because of their size and their teeth, which resemble those of dolphins. The mammals have ears that are sensitive to large changes in pressure underwater," she added.

"This type of [melon-headed] whale can be easily mistaken for dolphins because of their size and their teeth, which resemble those

of dolphins. If their eardrums are damaged they become disorientated and they float up to the surface." -Philippine Veterinarian Mariel Flores

"It looked like they never wanted to leave. They looked sad," said Rodolfo Joson, a village councilor. Joson and his son, Joey, a fisherman like him, have rushed home at about 4 a.m. to report the pod sighting. "It was still dark when we waded into the water. The whales were about 200 meters from the shore. The water was up to my neck. We first checked their conditions by playing with them. They did not repel us or leave. They were making hooting sounds," Joson explained the mass beaching. "It seemed they were running away from waters that they didn't like. Dolphins are happy and strong creatures. They raced with ships," he added.

A post-mortem examination has revealed that four dead whales found beached farther up north in Abucay, Bataan, include two adult females, one of which was pregnant, while the other gave birth to a calf that also died, said Dr. Lemnuel Aragones of Ocean Adventure in Subic Freeport who did the necropsy at the Bataan fisheries office in Balanga City.

This is the first time that such large numbers of dolphins had been stranded in the Philippines. "We are trying to come up with a possible explanation to this unusual occurrence. It could be that the dolphins had lost their bearings and inadvertently ended up on the shallow portion of the coast unable to extricate themselves," said Dr Lemuel Aragones, Associate Professor at the UP Institute of Environmental Science and Meteorology.

Dr Aragones, who holds a PhD on Tropical Environmental Studies (Marine Ecology) from Australia's James Cook University, explained that "the melon-headed whales of the dolphin family have sophisticated navigation systems that operate on a principle similar to sonar instruments used in submarines. Like humans, dolphins also follow a 'leader' of their pod. It is possible that the leader of this dolphin [pod] had somehow lost its way. In turn, the leader's acoustic system, which serves as its guidance system, might have been impaired," the marine expert elaborated.

Dr Aragones said "BFAR, UPIESM, and the Ocean Adventure Marine Park in Subic started the Philippine Marine Mammals Stranding Network (PMMSN) in 2005 as a response to cetacean strandings or beachings." She cited the PMMSN training received by BFAR officers in Bataan during Tuesday's mass beaching. She has asked the government to release funds for marine mammal studies.

The two adults had damaged eardrums, Alberto Venturina, the provincial veterinarian, said. "Dolphins with injured eardrums become disoriented, cannot dive for food and are too weak to swim and just flow with the current. If it's a sick leader, the animal needs to be identified and taken out of sight of the rest of the pod so the healthy dolphins could be prodded back to sea," he added. "The two animals were identified as melon-headed dolphins, weighing about 250 to 300 kilograms (550 to 660 pounds)," explained Venturina, adding "the third dolphin was only a month old and measured barely a meter long. Its gender had not yet been determined."

According to Nelson Bien, head of

the Fisheries Resource and Management Division of BFAR Region III, a necropsy by BFAR, the provincial veterinarian, and veterinarians from the Ocean Adventure in Subic Freeport has traced the cause of their death to drowning.

The marine doctors have determined that the marine mammals might have drowned after failing to extricate themselves from the fishing nets or "baklad," explained Dr. Mundita Lim, director of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). "There were no injuries to their ears, like visible lesions, but the possibility of an acoustic problem or trauma is still there," Dr Lim explained, saying, "more tests, like analysis of tissue samples and MRI tests will have to be done to see if there were other injuries to the animals not visible externally."

They are sending tissue samples to the University of Philippines in Los Baños, Laguna for analysis. "If it was something like climate change, then it would be a bigger environmental problem," Lim added.

A fourth and pregnant one was also found dead in the village of Tortugas in the town of Balanga, Bataan, said Bien, saying they were investigating the incident and would conduct a "water quality and water parameter test" to determine why the dolphins beached to shallow waters. The condition of melon-headed whale found at Talisay River and taken to Ocean Adventure in Subic Freeport has improved amid forced feeding and treatment of its 2 wounds, said Nilo Ramoso, Biologist III, Pawikan Conservation Project.

Dr. Westly Rosario, BFAR Center chief in Dagupan City, has reported that BFAR personnel were also investigating a "problem in the water, probably chemical pollution," to explain why the dolphins beached and sought shelter in the shallow waters. The dolphins have faced the same direction and their blowholes above water, they seemed to be avoiding something. "The dolphins were behaving in the same way, they have the same action. People were trying to drive them back into the sea but they refused. There could be chemical pollution somewhere which they were avoiding," Rosario explained.

Dolphins' disorientation is sometimes caused by the changes in earth's magnetic field "that cause the dolphins' navigational mechanisms to go haywire," Dr. Edgardo Gomez, professor emeritus of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, said, adding that "it could also be chemicals in the water that affected the dolphins, although this should be proven by water tests." Philippine marine biologist Rizza Salinas said a possible cause for the stranding of large pods of distressed whales is that there could have been illegal dynamite fishing in the area.

"This is very strange. What is also unusual is they appeared disoriented. I am on my way to Bataan on board BFAR's patrol vessel. We will look into the situation. Our patrol boats are also on their way to the area. We are also getting experts on stranding," said BFAR director Malcolm Sarmiento Jr. Sarmiento, explaining that the highest number of stranded dolphins recorded by the BFAR was only 20 to 30. "It's something unusual. It's the first time that such a large pod has

entered Manila Bay, and is acting strangely," Sarmiento added.

"Most strandings are caused by seaquakes, heat wave or disturbances at sea. Such disturbances affect the pressure underwater, which subsequently affects the dolphins' eardrums and sense of balance, leading to their "disorientation." The creatures then will avoid diving in deeper parts of the ocean and will swim to shallow areas. They came from the north and were headed towards the South China Sea," Sarmiento explained, adding that the unusual occurrence may have also been caused when the pod could have been following a sick or injured leader.

Sarmiento has appealed to the public not to inflict harm on the dolphins, which are considered threatened species. "Please do not harm the dolphins because they are already endangered. The authorities should also prevent the people who want to inflict harm on the creatures. They should be arrested, if needed." Melon-head dolphins are considered threatened species — meaning they are likely to become endangered in the future.

"At around 12 noon, the dolphins were finally guided to the open seas, but residents in Hermosa near Mariveles were surprised to see the dolphins near their shoreline, but around 4:30 pm, all the dolphins have left the shoreline and swam towards into deeper waters," said Governor Garcia.

"The dolphins swam parallel back to Abucay, Hermosa, and Manila Bay before they were eventually herded farther offshore. There are theories that this phenomenon was a result of the Monday night lunar eclipse. The Fisheries Bureau will

know after their tests," Garcia added.

Having suspected the dolphins' habitat must have been disrupted, forcing them to flee and seek refuge in shallow waters, Senate of the Philippines Majority Leader, Juan Miguel Zubiri on Tuesday asked experts to probe the cause of the sudden appearance of more than 300 electra dolphins near the shores of Pilar town in Bataan province Tuesday morning.

Senator Zubiri wanted the experts to examine the possibility that an earthquake study, involving an undersea experiment using blasting in the South China Sea by the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (L-DEO) - a collaborator of Columbia University - caused the abnormal behavior of the small whales.

Citing an International Union for Conservation of Nature research concluding that the melon-headed whales may have been distracted by the South China Sea study, forcing the dolphins to wander in the shallow waters, Senator Zubiri said that "the earthquake study is a sea floor investigation project in the exclusive economic zone that includes Taiwan, China, Japan and the Philippines for its earthquake research. On top of saving stranded dolphins, we should find the cause for the tragedy in order to avoid them in the future and to be prepared when it occurs again," he explained.

But according to Erlinton Olavare, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) science research specialist, "no significant event was recorded by their stations in Bolinao, Sta. Cruz and Lubag, near Pilar at the time the dolphins were stranded Tuesday."

Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Jose L. Atienza, Jr. said Bataan Gov. Enrique "Tet" Garcia on Wednesday confirmed there was dynamite fishing in his province. "I asked him [Garcia] and he confirmed it. He also said he was battling this illegal activity," said Atienza. "The causes of the acoustic trauma could have been sound waves caused by dynamite fishing or sounds emitted by passing ships or seaquakes," Gov. Garcia said.

"Dolphins are a 'cohesive' group and that they follow where their leader takes them. If the leader of the dolphins was sick, then the animal could have committed a "navigational error" and led the rest of the group to shore," said the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS).

"The pod of melon-headed whales (dolphins) on Manila Bay were injured by a rather nasty group of more than 120 undersea earthquakes. The swarm started with a small magnitude-4.5 event on December 21, 2008. Things got red-hot on January 3, 2009 when a magnitude-7.6 event erupted near the water's edge on Papua Island in Indonesia, 700 miles southeast of Davao City in Mindanao. The 7.6 magnitude quake was followed by more than 120 major aftershocks each one capable by itself of inflicting injury on a pod of dolphins," said Capt. David Williams, a retired marine mammal researcher, a commercial sea captain for 40 years and active whale conservationist.

Capt. Williams explaiend that whales and dolphins have small air sacs (pterygoid sinuses) that surround each inner ear and help then sense sound direction underwater. A damaged pterygoid

air sac results in the loosing of echonavigation and echolocation. "In summary, my Seaquake Theory indicates that barotrauma, as a result of exposure to potent earthquake-induced changes in ambient pressure, solves the centuries-old mystery of why whales and dolphins mass-strand on beaches around the world," Capt. Williams concluded.

An explosive blast and explosive decompression create a pressure wave that can induce barotrauma. The difference in pressure between internal organs and the outer surface of the body causes injuries to internal organs that contain gas, such as the lungs, gastrointestinal tract, and ear.

According to the Natural History Museum experts, whale and dolphins can become confused, mis-read the earth's magnetic fields, fear certain sounds and get lost. Since 1913, it has investigated all strandings, more than 11,000 so far, and it runs the UK Whale and Dolphin Stranding Scheme.

New Zealand's Project Jonah has claimed that the largest recorded beach stranding was in 1918 when 1,000 pilot whales were stranded on New Zealand's Chatham Islands.

The last mass beaching in the Philippines was in 1956 when around 12 sperm whales were stranded in a coastal area in Capiz, amid at least 10 yearly strandings that happened in the country involving only one or two animals that were either sick or dying.

Last January this year, Filipino fishermen have also rescued an endangered sea cow. The fishermen aided the beached sea cow to the deep sea, according to

the Worldwide Fund for Nature.

The Melon-headed whale (Peponocephala electra; many-toothed blackfish and electra dolphin) is a cetacean of the oceanic dolphin family (Delphinidae). As small members of the dolphin group, it is closely related to the Pygmy Killer Whale and Pilot Whale, and collectively these dolphin species are known by the common name blackfish.

The tender mammal can grow up to 2.7 meters (9 feet) and weigh as much as 210 kilograms (460 pounds). With black triangular "mask" on its face, it appears dark gray to black in color, has no discernable beak and its head is shaped like a rounded melon, thus the name. Its primary diet is squid and fish. The Melon-headed whale lives well off-shore in all the world's tropical and sub-tropical oceans.

At the northern fringes of its range it may also be found in the warm currents of temperate waters. Ordinarily, however, it is found beyond the continental shelf between 20° S and 20° N. The Melon-headed whale is widespread throughout the world's tropical waters, although not often seen by humans on account of its preference for deep water. It has been found in Ireland, Hawaii and Cebu, in the Philippines.

As social species, they are covered by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 in the United States. In July 2004, between 150 and 200 melon-headed whales occupied the shallow waters of Kauai island in Hawaii for over 28 hours, after which, they were rescued and guided to deeper water. This incident may have been related to nearby United States Navy sonar exercise.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which includes the melon-headed whales in its Red List of threatened species said that the number of whales involved in mass stranding had increased in the last 30 years.

"The melon-headed whales are likely to be "vulnerable" to loud sounds, such as those generated by navy sonar and seismic exploration. Evidence from stranded whales also has indicated that they may have died after swallowing plastic items. It has been predicted that the whales will be affected by global climate change, but the impact is still unclear," the IUCN explained.

Today in History

1898 – The United States Navy battleship USS Maine exploded and sank in Havana, Cuba, killing more than 260 people and precipitating the Spanish-American War.

1942 – World War II: Japanese forces led by General Tomoyuki Yamashita captured Singapore, the largest surrender of British-led military personnel in British history.

1971 – The British pound sterling and the Irish pound were decimalised on what is called Decimal Day.

1989 – The Soviet Union officially announced that all of its troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan after a nine-year conflict.

2003 – In one of the largest anti-war rallies in history, millions around the world in approximately 800 cities took part in protests against the impending invasion of Iraq.

February 15 is Candlemas in Eastern Christianity; Flag Day in Canada; National Day in Serbia

Quote of the Day

Morning has broken,
Like the first morning,

Blackbird has spoken

Like the first bird.

Praise for the singing!

Praise for the morning!

Praise for them springing

Fresh from the Word!

~ Eleanor Farjeon ~

Word of the Day

exuviate *v*

- To shed or cast off a covering, especially a skin; to slough; to moult.

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