



# WIKINEWS

## PRINT EDITION

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### Whaling activist arrested by Japan

The Japanese Coast Guard has arrested an anti-whaling activist of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society for "vessel invasion" after he boarded a Japanese whaling ship last month in the Southern Ocean.

The activist, Peter Bethune, from New Zealand, boarded the Japanese ship, the Shonan Maru 2, on February 15, and presented the captain of the ship a bill for \$3 million in damages incurred when the Japanese vessel collided with and sank the Sea Shepherd trimaran Ady Gil. Immediately after boarding the vessel, Bethune was detained by the Japanese crew and held on board the ship for a month before it returned to Japan, where he was arrested by a waiting Coast Guard delegation and placed into custody in Tokyo.

The arrest has generated great publicity in Japan, where public opinion is generally in favor of whaling, and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is consistently criticized. Japan's whaling program, which the government says is a part of Japanese culture, results in the killings of around a thousand whales annually in hunts that the

government claims are for scientific research. Activist groups such as Sea Shepherd, however, say that the program is a cover for commercial whaling, banned worldwide in 1986.

A member of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, Paul Watson, captain of another anti-whaling vessel, said that he thought the arrest of Bethune would provide greater support for their actions. He said that although the group has not been in contact with Bethune, he expected that his actions would make him an "international hero", particularly in his home country of New Zealand.

### Fearing protests, Israel seals off West Bank

Fearing fresh protests from Palestinians, Israeli forces have moved to close the West Bank for 48 hours, preventing Palestinians from entering.

The protests have been sparked by a recent decision to include the Al-Aqsa mosque as an Israeli heritage site, as well as a plan by Israel to add up to 1,600 settlement homes in the West Bank.

The Al-Aqsa mosque is a holy site for both Muslims and Jews, however Muslims fear that along with the rest of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa is to be annexed and claimed by Israel. It has been a flash point for conflict during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sparking the Second Intifada in 2000. Only worshipers with an Israeli identity card and age 50 or over were allowed to pray today at the mosque. In response, Palestinian youths have reportedly thrown rocks at Israeli soldiers, and several Palestinians have been badly wounded.

Some 3,000 Israeli soldiers and policemen are patrolling East Jerusalem, checking ID cards and positioning themselves on rooftops.

### Magnitude 6.9 aftershock hits Chile as president is sworn in

A magnitude 6.9 aftershock earthquake

struck Chile on Thursday, just 21 minutes before the country's new president, Sebastián Piñera, was due to be sworn in. The temblor comes several days after a heavy 8.8 magnitude earthquake shook the country, the strongest one in almost half a century.

According to the US Geological Survey, the quake's epicentre was 135 kilometres (85 miles) south of Valparaiso, where the presidential inauguration took place, and 145 kilometres (90 miles) southwest of capital Santiago.

The Miami Herald reports that the temblor was among seven aftershocks. There were no reports of damage, injuries, or deaths, although some residents rushed outside after the tremors.

According to reports by the Associated Press, the Chilean navy called for a tsunami alert and encouraged residents living along shorelines to move to higher ground; however, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center commented that a *destructive Pacific-wide tsunami is not expected*.

### Agency: New York City taxi cab drivers overcharged riders by \$8.3 million

According to the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), the city's taxi cab drivers overcharged their riders by more than US\$8.3 million over the past two years, by setting their meters to illegally high settings.

The agency reported that some taxi drivers set their meters so they would charge at the suburban fare, which is twice as high as the urban fare — within city limits, fare is 40 cents per 1/5 mile, outside city limits, 80 cents. 48,300 licensed cab drivers work in the city; according to data, 35,558 of them charged a rider inappropriately at least once, the city noted. The statistics also say that 3,000 of drivers had doubled the rates 100 times or more.

Riders who overpaid spent about \$4.45 more per trip than they were supposed to,

the commission said. 0.5% of all 361 million taxi trips taken in the past 26 were affected by inappropriate charging, the TLC reported.

New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, commented about the findings in his radio show, saying: "Some of these people could face serious charges. Now, how we would ever recoup the money and get it back to the individual payers, no, but we can stop the practice and we can make sure there's penalties."

The New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a taxi driver advocacy group, however, commented that the overcharging could have been due to technology problems, and not because drivers were intentionally raising fare. Bhairavi Desai, who is with the group, noted that "[t]here should be a thorough investigation before judgment is cast on an entire work force."

### **US appeals court rejects bid from expelled New York Senator convicted of assault**

A United States appeals court ruling upheld the expulsion of former New York State Senator Hiram Monserrate from the New York State Senate in a ruling on Friday. Monserrate had been found guilty in October of misdemeanor assault, in the criminal trial involving an alleged attack on his girlfriend Karla Giraldo. A U.S. federal judge had previously upheld the expulsion, in a ruling issued in February. Monserrate was expelled from the New York State Senate on February 9 by a majority vote of his fellow senators. The result of the vote was 53 to 8 in favor of expulsion.

In the lower U.S. District court decision, federal judge William H. Pauley III denied a request to temporarily block the expulsion. A lawsuit had been filed by Monserrate, which had asked for a reversal of the former Senator's expulsion and in addition sought a block on a March 16 special election for a replacement. The New York Civil Liberties Union supported Monserrate in the case. The former Senator argued that the act of being expelled from the Senate was not appropriate, as he claimed it violated due process.

Judge Pauley ruled, "the question of who should represent the 13th Senatorial District is one for the voters, not for this court." The judge explained that the voting

rights of the citizens of the district formerly represented by Monserrate would not be significantly negatively impacted, due to the proximity of the upcoming special election – scheduled for March 16. Monserrate has stated that he will run in the special election, and he is not prohibited from doing so.

Monserrate's opponents in the March 16 special election include Jose Peralta, a sitting member of the New York State Assembly and a Democrat, and Republican Robert Beltrani. According to WNYC, Monserrate has himself not received any official endorsements. Monserrate is running under a party name that he created, titled, "Yes We Can".

The district court's ruling determined that the expulsion by the New York State Senate was not inappropriate, stating, "the power of a body to determine the fitness of its members is embedded in American democracy." Judge Pauley noted, "Similar processes to discipline have long existed in deliberative bodies at all levels of government." New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo issued a statement February, in support of the ruling of the lower court. "We are gratified that the Court has confirmed our position that the Senate had the authority to expel Mr. Monserrate," said the Attorney General.

Prior to the ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit rejecting Monserrate's appeal, the former Senator voiced optimism about the impending decision, "They imposed a different standard on me without due process and I'm confident the court will rectify the violation."

In a statement given to the New York Daily News, Monserrate's attorney Norman Siegel said, "We're naturally disappointed. We'll have more to say when we read the opinion." The hearing on Friday before the U.S. Federal appeals court lasted approximately one hour. During the hearing, one of the appellate court judges commented that Monserrate was aware that what he had done was, "a crime, (and) you're not supposed to do it."

Monserrate's misdemeanor assault conviction pertained to an incident where he dragged his girlfriend through the lobby while exiting his apartment building. He was acquitted by a judge of charges of felony assault. Felony conviction would have resulted in an immediate expulsion

from the New York State Senate.

Monserrate is the first politician to be expelled from the New York State Senate in almost a century. He is a former New York City police officer. Prior to becoming a member of the New York State Senate, he was a city councilman. He became a member of the New York State Senate weeks after the alleged conflict with Giraldo, and was made chair of the committee overseeing consumer affairs. Along with Democrat Pedro Espada Jr., Monserrate started a shift in control of the Senate by aligning with the Republican Party.

### **Kidnapped Spanish aid worker is released**

A Spanish aid worker kidnapped in Mauritania last year has been released, according to the Spanish government. Alicia Gamez, 39, was abducted on 29 November along with two other Spanish aid workers—both men—who are still being held. A North African branch of al-Qaeda claimed responsibility. Spain's Deputy Prime Minister, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega said in a press conference on Wednesday that Gamez was "safe and sound" and on her way to Barcelona.

According to Fernández de la Vega, no ransom had been paid for Gamez's release; she stated that it was a result of work done by Spain's diplomats and intelligence services. She also expressed thanks for the "collaboration given by other countries". She said that the Spanish government would continue efforts to see the release of the other aid workers, Roque Pascual and Albert Vilalta, who are reported to be "healthy, nervous and eager to be released soon".

The three Spanish aid workers had been in Mauritania, working for the Barcelona Solidarity Action organisation. They were kidnapped at gunpoint while delivering relief to villages between the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. They had become separated from their convoy, approximately 170 kilometers (105 miles) north of the capital city Nouakchott. Vilalta was wounded by a gunshot to the leg but was treated for his injury. In early December, the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility. The hostages were believed to have been taken to Mali.

The al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb also claimed responsibility for the abduction in December of an Italian couple in Mauritania. Sergio Cicala, 65, and Philomene Kaboure, 39, were also apparently taken to Mali. Early reports indicated that Kaboure may have been released alongside Alicia Gamez, but these have been unconfirmed and now look doubtful.

A Frenchman, Pierre Camatte, captured in Mali in November by the same group was released last month, following a controversial decision to release four militants from a Malian jail. In the case of the Spanish aid workers, there have been reports that the kidnapers are demanding similar releases of detainees from Spanish custody, as well as a ransom. Spain currently holds dozens of convicted or suspected Islamic militants, including those convicted for the 2004 Madrid train bombings.

### Pakistan Navy fires test missiles

The Pakistan Navy has announced the firing of test missiles from ships, submarines, and aircraft during operations in the Arabian Sea.

Pakistani officials said that the tests were a display of commitment to the protection of Pakistan and sent "a message of deterrence to anyone harbouring nefarious designs against Pakistan". The statement, released shortly after the operation, also said that the tests were designed to measure the "lethality, precision and efficacy" of the weapons.

Pakistan's Naval Chief, Admiral Noman Bashir, was a witness to the event, and said that he was pleased with the tests, saying that he was satisfied with the state of the Pakistani Navy. He also commended the performance of the Navy personnel involved with the tests.

The maneuvers included tests of newly acquired missiles of a Chinese design, and came just a month after India tested a missile of similar design to some of the Pakistani weapons. India's test involved a missile capable of carrying nuclear weapons, although it was unclear if Pakistan's test included weapons capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

### Illinois House lessens penalty for sexting

The Illinois House of Representatives voted this Thursday to lift some penalties for teenagers who engage in sexting. While minors are still prohibited from sending nude photos of other minors taken on cell phones, they will no longer be required to register as sex offenders. Instead, they could be punished with court-ordered supervision or community service.

The bill, which was sponsored by State Representative Darlene Senger from Naperville, passed with a 114–1 majority and will be considered by the Illinois Senate. The lone dissenter, State Representative Careen Gordon from Morris, declined to comment on her vote.

Senger says that sexting has become a problem because when teens send nude pictures of themselves to their boyfriends or girlfriends, they don't realize that what they are doing is illegal or that their pictures can be distributed to other people. A national survey has revealed that 48 percent of teenagers have received sexual text messages or emails, while 39 percent have sent or posted sexual photos online.

Criminal charges are more serious if the content is posted online. As Connie Burch told Illinois homepage.net, however, "the threat of having to register as a sex offender goes too far." The main purpose of the legislation is to create awareness among parents about what has become a prevalent issue for teenagers. As Senger told the Chicago Sun-Times, "We still have the ability to prosecute those whose intent is to create child pornography even if they're under 18. However, if you're just doing something because you think it's a prank, we can explain why this isn't funny."

### Airplane in Nigeria crashes during mock rescue exercise

A Nigerian airplane crashed in the city of Port Harcourt yesterday, resulting in several minor injuries.

The plane was supposed to be taking part in a mock rescue exercise, and was carrying 30 members from the National Emergency Management Agency and other emergency workers, when it slid off the runway and into some bushes after

landing at Port Harcourt International Airport.

The rescue workers on the ground, intended to participate in the emergency drill, instead had to deal with a real emergency; however, only a few people on board the aircraft sustained minor wounds.

A spokeswoman for the police, Rita Inoma-Abbey, commented today that "[n]o life was lost, but the aircraft was severely damaged."

### Quiz of the Week

Solutions to the quiz:

1. Control air traffic at a major US airport
2. Air Canada
3. Made the day shorter
4. Because Russian athletes did not perform as well in terms of medal count in Vancouver as in previous years
5. Taiwan

### Commons Picture of the Day



*P-51 Mustang in flight during an air show at Langley Air Force Base, in Virginia (USA). Image is in the public domain.*

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