

Japan Firm Seeks Rights To Capture Palau Turtles

-Int'l Convention Bans Trade-

A Japanese company is trying to obtain rights to capture green turtles, without limitation, from local residents of the newly formed Republic of Palau in the Pacific.

The number of green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) is decreasing and such an agreement might lead to the extinction of green turtles, said Iataru Uchida, 51, director of Himeji Municipal Aquarium in Hyogo who was commissioned to investigate the matter through the World Wildlife

Foundation (WWF), Japan.

Uchida said that the area is the most important breeding place for green turtles in the Pacific. He plans to make an on-the-spot survey about the matter.

The name of the Japanese company in question is not known.

In July this year, the company submitted an offer to residents of Maril Island, Palau. The draft of the offer indicated that the company would pay 15 percent of the sales of the meat and shells plus \$1,000 for unlimited capture.

International trade in green turtles is banned by the convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, excluding arrangements for academic purposes.

But Japan approves the cap-

ture of 14 species including green turtles. In order to protect domestic industry dealing with turtles, Japanese law allows for the trade of green turtles. Japanese traders can import them with permission from the government of exporters.

In Koror, the capital of Palau, a four-man committee was established to study the offer of the Japanese company. Subsequently, the committee sent a letter to the WWF, United States, seeking its advice.

Uchida of the Himeji Aquarium has already sent a letter to the local committee, suggesting that green turtles should not be sold to the Japanese company.

In Japan, total imports of sea turtles hit an all-time high in 1979 at 127 tons. Since then, the amount has been decreasing. In 1980 when the wildlife protection treaty came into effect, it amounted to 75 tons, in 1981, 50 tons and in 1982, 44 tons.

Recently, however, restaurants specializing in turtle dishes have been opening one after another across the country and demands for sea turtles meat are surpassing the available supply.

2 Die In Gifu Gas Explosion

HASHIMA, Gifu — Two persons were killed and 17 others injured, seven of them seriously, in a propane gas explosion which occurred Tuesday night at a building in Hashima, Gifu Prefecture, Police reported.

Most of the victims were guests at snack shops housed in the building, police said.

The blast took place at 11 p.m. Tuesday inside the "Makoto" barbecue restaurant on the ground floor of a two-story building in Takehana.

591 Election Violators Held

Police arrested 591 persons for vote-buying and other election law violations in connection with the Lower House election on Dec. 18, the National Police Agency reported Tuesday.

Police Arrest