

NIGHT FINAL: Philippine rebels release four hostages. A-5



Honolulu Star-Bulletin

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THE PULSE OF PARADISE

50¢ ON OAHU

Arco reverses gas price hike



Star-Bulletin

B.C. Oil Ventures runs Oahu's 18 Arco gas stations and oversees the island's eight dealer-run Arcos.

The drop of 10 to 20 cents a gallon on the heels of a hike was because wholesale prices dropped, the company says

By ROB PEREZ
Star-Bulletin

The company that operates 18 Arco gas stations on Oahu says it dropped its pump prices by at least 10 cents a gallon yesterday, only days after raising prices by similar amounts.

The price drop was as much as 20 cents at a few outlying Arcos, including those in Maile and

Ha Petroleum Ltd. are tied to the L.A. spot price, Eljaouhari said.

He said yesterday's action was not related to a Star-Bulletin article about rising gas prices that ran on that day's front page. The article noted that some Arco stations had upped their prices 10 cents or more.

Yesterday's changes meant the company-run Arcos were selling regular unleaded for as low as \$1.759 along the Leeward Coast and in the \$1.80s elsewhere.

Dealer-run stations are free to set their own pump prices, but B.C. Oil also lowered the dealers' wholesale price yesterday because of the spot-

price drop, according to Eljaouhari. He said the L.A. spot price plunged 33 cents on Thursday and yesterday after having risen dramatically in recent weeks.

Wednesday's spot price of \$1.625 a gallon was a 52-week high. By yesterday, the price had fallen to \$1.29.

Even though B.C. Oil has yet to purchase gasoline pegged to the lower prices — it still has fuel at its Barbers Point terminal — the company decided to lower prices yesterday so consumers could benefit over the weekend, Eljaouhari said.

B.C. Oil recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

OHA
seats

See

Sea Dreams

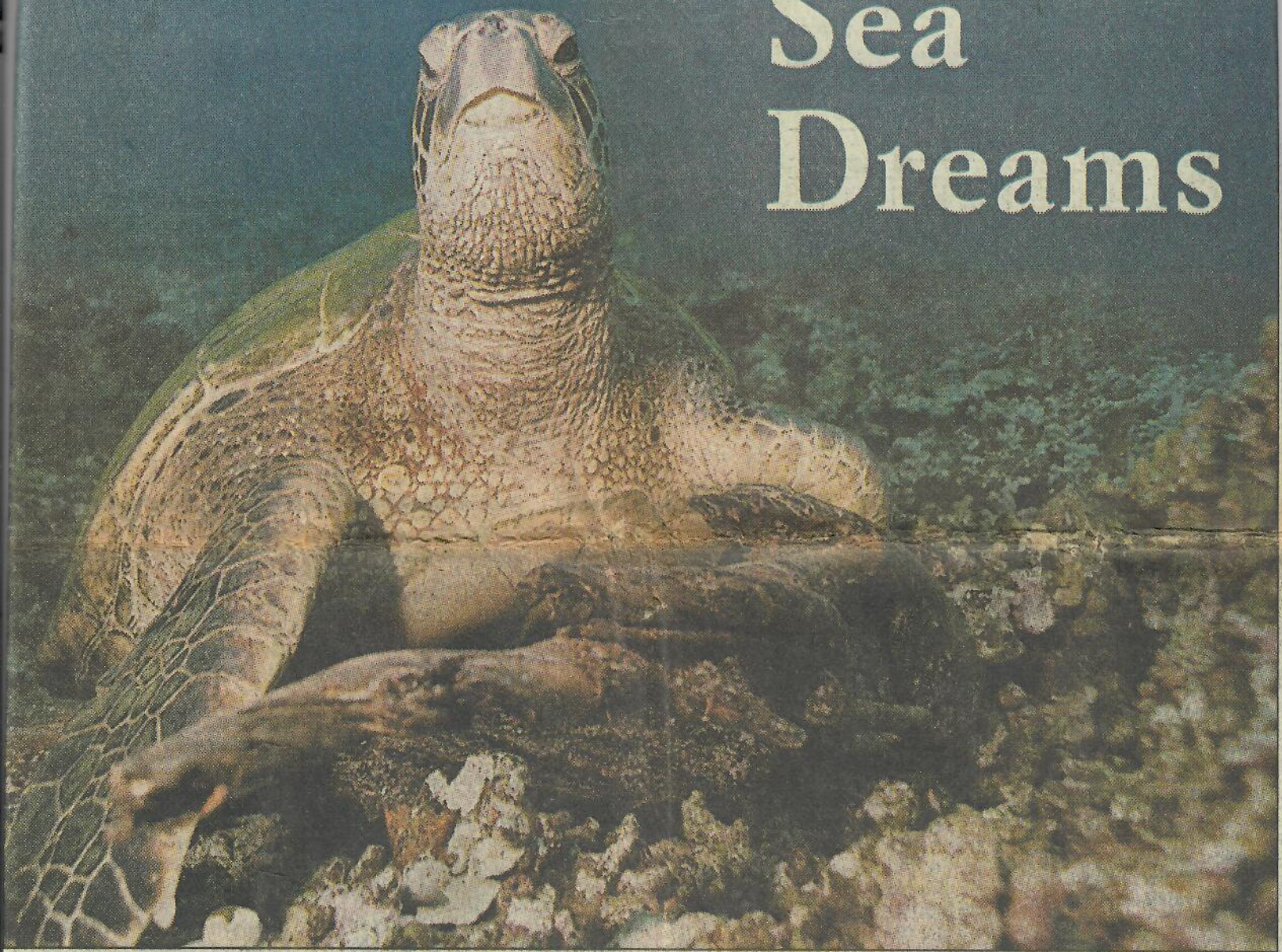


Photo courtesy of Ursula Keuper-Bennett

A green sea turtle, or honu, surveys its surroundings from its perch on a submerged log. In the years since hunting was banned, sea turtles have become more accepting of humans, allowing personal encounters like this. Still, they are endangered creatures and should not be touched or disturbed.

Conservation efforts are helping, but extinction still looms

BY LORI TIGHE
Star-Bulletin

THEY hover in the ocean like flying saucers and when the sun glints off their domed shells, they've been compared to angels. One personal encounter with a sea turtle is often all it takes to convert people to lifelong fans.

"They have gotten the vote by every scuba diver and won the hearts of everyone who sees them," said George Balazs, Hawaii's foremost sea turtle ex-

pert. "They are their own best ambassador for their survival."

Sea turtles were in the news this summer as a federal judge sharply restricted Hawaii-based longline fishing. Environmentalists alleged in a lawsuit that the fishing method kills an unacceptable number of the endangered and threatened sea turtles: the leatherback, the green, the loggerhead and the Olive Ridley.

The legal battle will revive in April 2001, when the National Marine Fisheries Service is to have more scientific data about the effects of longlining on the

four types of sea turtle living in Pacific waters around Hawaii.

Meanwhile, sea turtles are carving their own niche in the tourism market. With each encounter, they seem to attract another defender — such as Lisa Shall.

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"She was gigantic," said Shall, of her first meeting with a 300-pound green sea turtle in mid-August.

Scuba divers, including Shall, hauled the sea turtle, wrapped in fishing line, up onto a dive boat in

Waimea Bay. They held her flippers and head still, as her large brown eyes searched for the ocean. They cut the tightly wound line out of her flipper.

They heaved her back into the bay, and she dove down through the waves to freedom.

The eight divers on board erupted into applause.

"It was very exciting," said Shall, a 27-year-old pharmaceutical chemist from Palo Alto, Calif. "The experience was amazing. It made me more aware of sea tur-

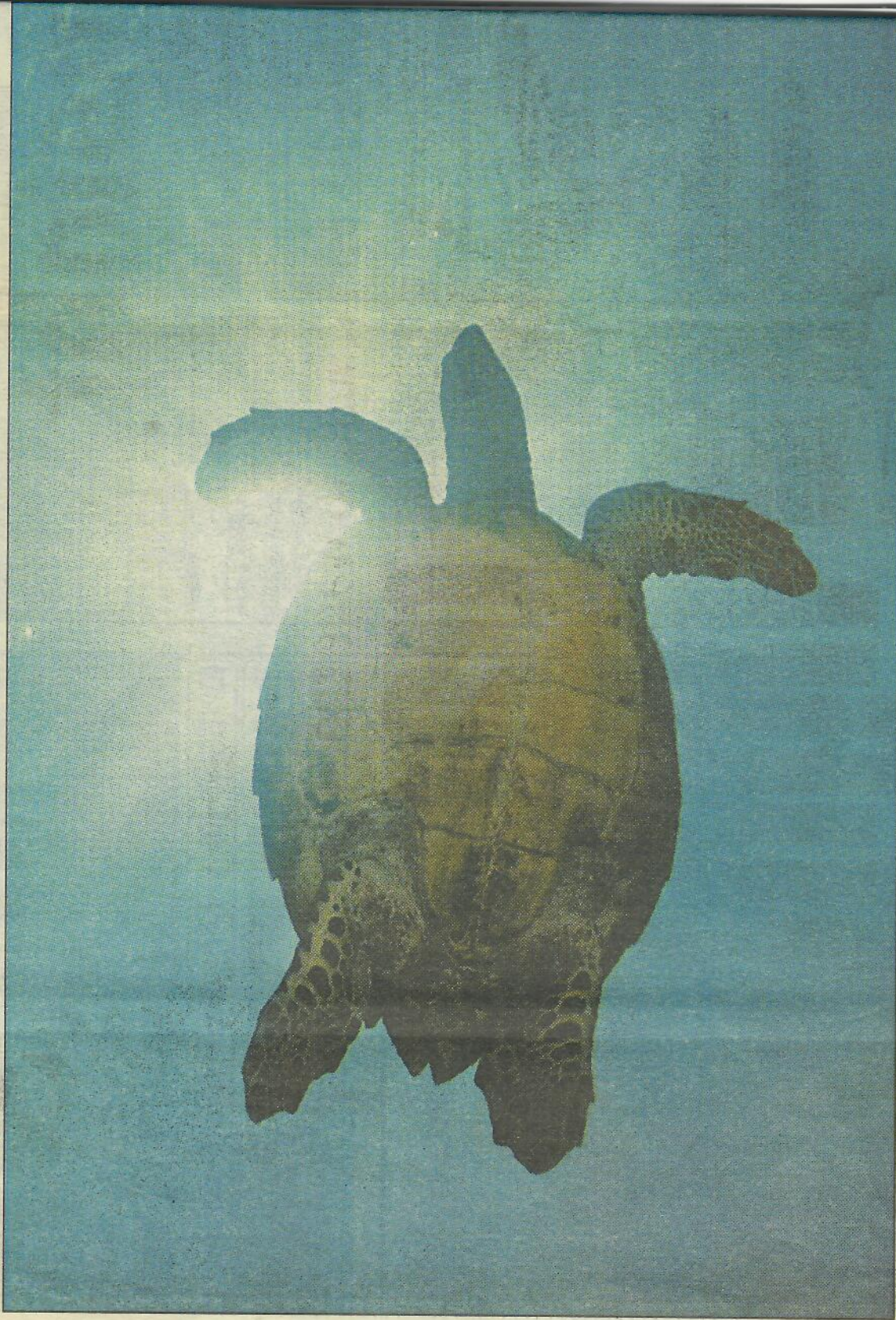
PLEASE SEE TURTLES, A-10

W A I I

Hawaii's Filipinos to offer Estrada aloha and questions



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Photos courtesy of Ursula Keuper-Benne

A hawksbill turtle is silhouetted by the sunlight filtering through the ocean. Some divers have compared seeing turtles in this setting to seeing angels. "They are their own best ambassador for their survival," says George Balazs, Hawaii's foremost sea turtle expert.

es and what's being done to save them."
 "There's no question about it," said Balazs, biologist and leader of marine turtle research for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Honolulu.
 "Turtles have a following of their own."



Among the four species of sea turtle found here, the green sea turtle, or honu, is the most common, the "local" turtle. The others, experts say, migrate here to feed on the "ono grinds" in Hawaiian waters.

Sea turtles in general are dying out. Of the seven species of sea turtles found in U.S. waters, six are on the endangered species list, according to the Center for Marine Conservation. In addition to deaths by commercial fishing, their troubles include egg poaching, tumors, marine debris and losing their nesting grounds.

Some species are more in trouble than others, such as the leatherback, the largest of sea turtles. Scientists estimate they are within five years of extinction.

The Fisheries Service estimates that between 1994 and 1998, Hawaii longline fishermen hooked about 710 sea turtles, killing 136. Environmentalists say the death toll may be higher and warn that the turtles, particularly the endangered leatherback, can't afford a similar mortality.

Fishermen say interactions are lower, and they are not killing enough turtles to make or break a species.

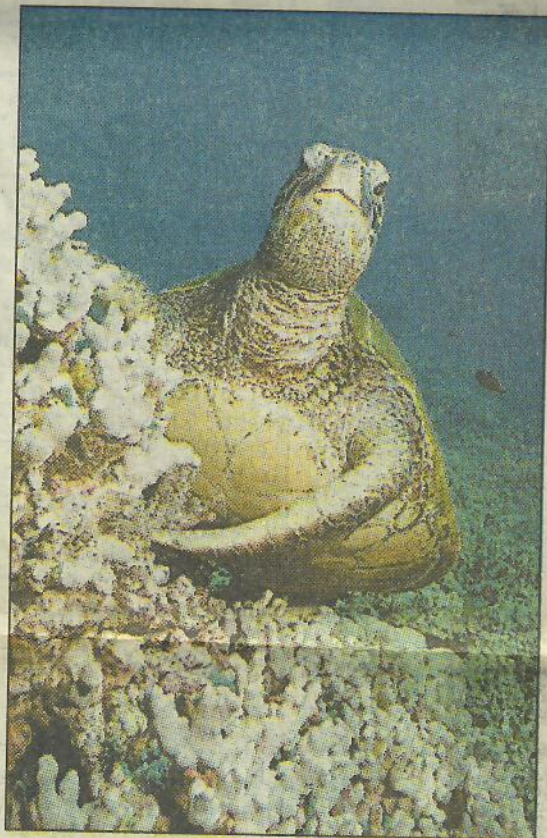


Why save the turtles? It's a good question. A lot of people have a hard time understanding why they need special protection," said James Spotila, Ph.D., an environmental researcher at Temple University in Philadelphia, who has studied leatherbacks since 1988.

The leatherbacks "represent the last of the dinosaurs. They are a big, long-lived creature, and the big ones are the first to go extinct. We look at it as an early warning sign of other species in trouble," Spotila said.

Plus, the leatherback turtles are simply fascinating creatures, Spotila added.

They are called the gypsies of the sea because they travel thousands of miles for food. Leatherbacks dive as deep as a whale, about 100 feet, to get food. They have a constantly regulated temperature, unlike most reptiles.



This young turtle was seen on a dive this summer. She was resting, with her flipper up, on Cladophora algae, which is often seen at dive sites. From her expression it's clear she found the divers of interest, and scuba divers are rapidly becoming avid fans of sea turtles.

They can live 50 years and become as large as a Volkswagen Bug.

And if scientific wonder doesn't impress, what if the leatherback "carries a special gene or oil for curing cancer? If we cause them to go extinct, the world will be a poorer place," Spotila said.

"If we're catching leatherback turtles, we need to change our fishing practices."



Balazs, who has studied sea turtles in Hawaii for 30 years, sees signs of hope for the comeback of some species — "if you leave them alone and don't kill them," he said.

The turtle he has researched most, the Hawaiian green sea turtle, has become a suc-

cess story because it's been left alone.

"Hawaii is well known for placing the green turtles back on the road to recovery for the past 28 years," he said.

Balazs fell in love with the first green sea turtle he ever saw in 1963 while on vacation in Bora Bora.

"They stir the imagination," he said. "I like those eyes. It's a vegetarian, the only sea turtle that is. It grazes on the pastures of the sea."

Hawaiians revere the sea turtle they call honu for nourishing them as food and for guarding families with its aumakua spirit.

In Hawaiian lore, one green sea turtle changed its shape into a child and protected the children of Punaluu on the Big Island. Her name was Kauila.

The commercial fishing of turtles, and not the native Hawaiian takes, drove the species to the edge of extinction in the late '60s.

Balazs' research convinced the state to ban commercial killing of green sea turtles in 1974.

Tens of millions of green sea turtles once swam the world, according to Turtle Trax, a respected web site of sea turtle information (www.turtles.org). Now fewer than 200,000 mature females are believed left.

In Hawaii, the green turtle is a threatened species. Only 100 to 350 females nest each year, mainly at the French Frigate Shoals.



Today green sea turtles swim up to divers for the first time in decades, Balazs said.

"If a turtle saw a scuba diver in the early '70s, it turned around and hauled butt," he said. "Now, they'll swim to you. They have no fear of people. They are actually inquisitive about people."

In recent years, they have been hauling their 300- to 400-pound bodies onto remote Big Island beaches to sunbathe — unheard of and unseen for decades, Balazs said.

As turtle encounters with humans increase, more fans are born. The turtles are redefining the limits of how humans can interact around them, Balazs said. They could even give Hawaii's beloved humpback whale competition for its popularity.

"On Maui at the Kahului Airport you see fliers advertising snorkel and dive trips selling sea turtles, turtle town, turtle alley, turtle dives," Balazs said.

"They are a close second to the whales, and it's real hard to compete with a whale."

On the Web: www.turtles.org

ESTRADA: Philippine leader has broad support in Hawaii

FROM PAGE A-1

ome will have the opportunity to address these issues when Estrada and members of his cabinet stop in Honolulu Monday through Wednesday, on their way to the mainland back to Manila. "We have a lot of goodwill and a lot of support here," said Dean Alegado, a professor at the University of Hawaii.

Alegado pointed to several areas of concern, including the lack of promised justice for victims of human rights violations

Panel Tuesday morning, still encourages business in the Philippines.

"We're very supportive of any opportunities in the Philippines, as well as providing technology transfer from Hawaii to the Philippines," said Chamber President Rey Prado.

Numerous companies from Hawaii have already set up shop in the Philippines, he said. "We still feel that of all the Asian countries, it's probably one of the best bets at this point for investments in Asia."

While the chamber is concerned

Estrada's schedule

MONDAY

- 1:15 A.M. Arrives in Honolulu
- 12:30 P.M. Wreath laying at the Arizona Memorial
- 5:30 P.M. Governor's reception at Washington Place
- 7:30 P.M. Filipino community dinner at Hilton Hawaiian Village Tapa Ballroom

TUESDAY

- 9 A.M. Business opportunities breakfast, Hilton Hawaiian Village South Pacific Room I and II

WEDNESDAY

- Early morning departure

Village. Approximately 900 people will be in attendance, according to the Philippine Consul General's office.

Jacinto Pablo of Waipahu will be there with four of his children, ranging in age from 13 to 7. His wife will stay home with their 1-year-old, he said.

Estrada "is doing an excellent job for the Filipino people in the Philippines," Pablo said. "I observe it. I see the difference. He's one of the best presidents also."

At \$50 a seat, taking four children to the dinner is a hardship, even with two complimentary tickets, but according to Pablo, "The dinner is expensive, but the after-effect of seeing people of high caliber will be an inspiration to the

TURTLES: Becoming a close second to whales among tourists

FROM PAGE A-1

and what's being done to save them." There's no question about it," said Balazs, biologist and leader of marine turtle research at the National Marine Fisheries Service in Honolulu.

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reproduce a species. Environmentalists say interactions are lower, and mortality is high.

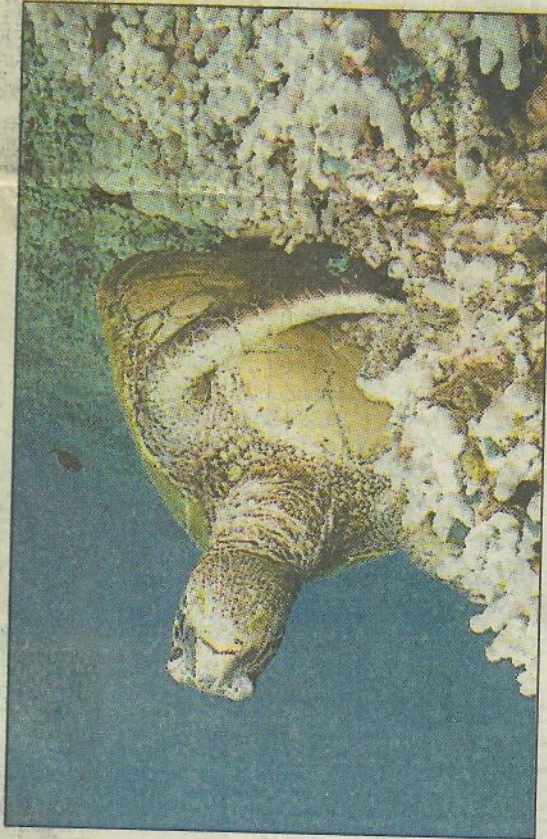
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