

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Business of watching whales overshadows resumption of hunt

People packed the decks of the Japanese whale-watching boat, screaming in joy as a pod of orcas put on a show: Splashing tails at each other, rolling over, and leaping out of the water. In Kushiro, just 160 km south of Rausu, where the four dozen people laughed and cheered, boats were setting off on Japan's first commercial whale hunt in 31 years. Killed that day were two minke whales, which the boats in Rausu also search for glimpses of - a situation that whale-watching boat captain Masato Hasegawa confessed had him worried.

"They won't come into this area - it's a national park - or there'd be big trouble," the 57-year-old former pollock fisherman said. "And the whales we saw today, the sperm whales and orcas, aren't things they hunt. But we also watch minke," he added. "If they take a lot in the (nearby) Sea of Okhotsk, we could well see a change, and that would be too bad for whale watching."

Whale-watching is a growing business around Japan, with popular spots from the southern Okinawa islands up to Rausu, a fishing village on the island of Hokkaido, so far north that it's closer to Russia than to Tokyo. The number of whale watchers around Japan has more than doubled between 1998 and 2015, the latest year for which national data is available. One company in Okinawa had 18,000 customers between January and March this year.

In Rausu, 33,451 people packed four boats last year for whale and bird watching, up 2,000 from 2017 and more than 9,000 higher than 2016. Many stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants, and buy local products such as sea urchins and seaweed. "Of the tourist boat business, 65 percent is whale watching," said Ikuyo Wakabayashi, executive director of the Shiretoko Rausu Tourism Association, who says the numbers grow substantially each year. "You don't just see one type of whale here, you see lots of them," she said. "Whale-watching is a huge tourist resource for Rausu and this will continue, I hope."

Wakabayashi was drawn to Rausu by whale-watching; a native of the western city of Osaka, she fell in love with the area after three trips there to see orcas. "I thought this was an incredible place," she said. "Winters are tough, but it's so beautiful." Hasegawa, who says he has a waiting list of customers in high season, has ordered a second boat. "Right now, the lifestyle we have is good," Hasegawa said. "Better than it would have been with fishing."

Small industry

The five whaling vessels moored at Kushiro port on Sunday, the night before the hunt resumed, were well-used and well-maintained. Crew members came and went, carrying groceries or towels, heading for a public bath. Barely 300 people are directly involved with whaling around Japan, and though the government maintains whale meat is an important part of food culture, the amount consumed annually has fallen to only 0.1 percent of total meat consumption. Yet Japan, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe - himself from a whaling district - left the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and returned to commercial whaling on July 1.

Whaling advocates, such as Yoshifumi Kai, head of the Japan Small-type Whaling Association, celebrated the hunt. "We endured for 31 years, but now it's all worth it," he said in Kushiro on Monday night after the first minke were brought in to be butchered. "They'll be whaling for a week here, we may have more."

Everybody acknowledges that rebuilding demand could be tough after decades of whale being a pricey, hard-to-find food. Consumption was widespread after World War Two, when an impoverished Japan needed cheap protein, but fell off after the early 1960s as other meat grew cheaper. "Japan has so much to eat now that food is thrown out, so we don't expect demand for whale will rise that fast," said Kazuo Yamamura, president of the Japan Whaling Association. "But looking to the future, if you don't eat whale, you forget that it's a food," he said. "If you eat it in school lunches, you'll remember that, you'll remember that it's good."

Pro-whaling lawmaker Kiyoshi Ejima said that subsidies were unlikely, but that the government should be careful not to let the industry founder. About 5.1 billion yen (\$47.31 million) was budgeted for whaling in 2019. "If we pull away our hands too soon, a lot of companies will fail," he added. The goal of selling whale throughout Japan may be impractical, said Joji Morishita, Japan's former IWC commissioner. "The alternative ... is to just limit the supply of whale meat to some of the major places in Japan that have a good tradition of whale eating," Morishita said, adding that the meat is difficult to thaw and cook.

In areas for which whaling is a tradition, this niche market could promote tourism, which Abe has made a pillar of his economic plan. — Reuters

All articles appearing on this page are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein.



Photo taken on May 17, 2019 shows an aerial view of a chemically deforested area of the Amazon jungle caused by illegal mining activities in the river basin of the Madre de Dios region in southeast Peru, during the 'Mercury' joint operation by Peruvian military and police ongoing since Feb 2019. — AFP

Deforestation + climate change = dead end for wildlife

Climate change combined with galloping tropical deforestation is cutting off wildlife from life-saving cooler climes, heightening the risk of extinction, researchers said Monday. Less than two-fifths of forests across Latin America, Asia and Africa currently allow for animals and plants to avoid potentially intolerable increases in temperature, they reported in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. "The loss of tropical forests between 2000 and 2012 led to an area larger than India losing the capacity to protect species from the effects of climate change," lead author Rebecca Senior, a professor at the University of Sheffield, told AFP. "Not only does forest loss remove habitat directly, it also makes it harder for species to move."

The lack of escape routes to cooler habitats means that warming "will likely result in national and global extinction of vulnerable species", she added. At current rates of climate change, animals and plants moving to the least heat-ravaged spots accessible today would, on average, be exposed by 2070 to an environment 2.7 degrees Celsius hotter than during the second half of the 20th century, the study found. Even under a best-case scenario in which humanity caps global warming at 2 C - an increasingly unlikely prospect - species in tropical regions would still see a jump of 0.8 C by that date.

Extreme fragmentation

The 2015 Paris climate treaty enjoins nations to hold warming to "well below" 2 C. Last year, the UN climate science panel concluded that even this threshold would

From undertakers to princes, Norway motorists go electric

Some want to save the planet even in the afterlife. In Oslo, a funeral home offers the dearly departed a trip to their final resting place in an eye-catching electric hearse, as electric vehicles take over the roads in the Scandinavian country. "Many people drive an electric car in Norway and some want to leave this planet in a green way," says undertaker Odd Borgar Jolstad, demonstrating his customised Tesla in the tranquility of the Grefsen cemetery overlooking the capital. "So this is our little contribution to the environment," he smiles.

Rich or not, young and old, hip urbanites and rural dwellers alike: Norwegians, including Crown Prince Haakon, are increasingly switching to electric cars. The choice is especially green in this country, where most of the electricity produced is environmentally friendly, derived from hydro power. From the affordable Nissan Leaf to the luxurious Tesla, more than half of new cars sold in the country in March were run on batteries rather than fuel. "We will probably pass 50 percent" for the full year as well, says Christina Bu, secretary general of the Norwegian EV (electric vehicle) Association. That is unprecedented in Norway and elsewhere, and the share is expected to increase further with the arrival of new models offering ever-increasing range.

Brexit, stupid: The appeal of Boris Johnson

There is a long charge sheet against Britain's Boris Johnson but among Conservative party activists who will choose the country's next prime minister, Brexit appears to trump everything. The former foreign minister and ex-London mayor is accused of lying, incompetence and using divisive rhetoric, and also faces questions over his colorful private life. But he led the campaign to take Britain out of the EU in the 2016 referendum and his promise to deliver on that vote, come what may, has made him the runaway favorite now to take power in Downing Street.

"Boris has a following in places a long way from London where people are very cross that they've voted for Brexit and it hasn't happened," said biographer Andrew Gimson. Prime Minister Theresa May will

not prevent severe impacts, such as the loss of shallow-water coral reefs, which anchor a quarter of marine life. A single degree of warming since the industrial revolution has already boosted the frequency and intensity of heat waves, droughts and tropical storms. Animal and plant species have always moved up or down mountains, towards or away from the poles, or into cooler or warmer waters when faced with shifts in climate.

But rarely has climate change been so rapid, and never has it been combined with extreme habitat fragmentation. "Tropical species are particularly sensitive to temperature change," Senior said. "Most are found nowhere else on Earth, and make up a huge proportion of global biodiversity." Scores of studies have shown how rising temperatures have forced fauna and flora to adapt their behavior in ways that curtail their ability to collect food, reproduce or both. Some 550 species - more than half already threatened with extinction - are listed as vulnerable to droughts and temperature extremes on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List.

Nail in the coffin

They include mammals such as red-handed howler monkeys, jaguars and giant otters. Amphibians - already besieged globally by mysterious pathogens - are especially vulnerable. "They are highly specialized to particular habitats, can't move very far, and are very sensitive to overheating and drying out," Senior pointed out. "This is another nail in their coffin." Higher temperatures force some tropical hummingbirds to seek shade rather than forage, testing their capacity to adapt. Other research has

Growing green awareness?

While the Nordic country is the biggest oil producer in Western Europe, it is officially aiming for all new cars sold to be zero emission by 2025. "There are of course some challenges but it's definitely possible," Bu says. To meet that goal, Norway will have to switch into higher gear for its recharging infrastructure, setting up stations along motorways, in rural zones and private parking lots, she notes. But do Norwegians, who owe their immense wealth to North Sea oil, really have a greater environmental conscience than others?

Probably not - the speedy electrification of the country's automotive fleet is attributed mainly to generous state subsidies. Electric cars are almost entirely exempt from the heavy taxes imposed on petrol and diesel cars, which makes them competitively priced. A VW Golf with a standard combustion engine costs nearly 334,000 kroner (\$38,600), while its electric cousin the e-Golf costs 326,000 kroner thanks to a lower tax quotient.

Per Kolner, a retired business leader in his late 60s, is already on his fifth electric car. He bought his first one because of the high cost of city road tolls. "First it was actually the cost," he says, standing in front of his spanking new Tesla 3. "Tolls kept popping up all around and on my way to and from my work every day I had to pass them four times, which made about 10 to 15 dollars a day just in toll fees." Electric cars have long been able to whiz through toll plazas without paying.

Social costs

But even denizens of this wealthy state grumble about the cost. As Norway's car fleet grows increasingly clean-



In this file photo taken on Jan 12, 2013, a captive jaguar drinks water in an enclosure at Petro Velho Farm, a refuge of the non-governmental organization NEX in Corumba de Goyas, about 80 km from Brasilia. — AFP

documented species decline and loss due to forest loss and fragmentation, which has created islands of primary forest hemmed in by palm oil plantations, biofuel crops, cattle ranches and the soybean crops used to feed livestock. An area of tropical forest five times the size of England - some 600,000 sq km - has been destroyed since 2014, according to Global Forest Watch, a research unit at the University of Maryland. The new study, however, is the first to investigate the interaction between tropical habitat loss and climate change on a global scale over more than a decade. — AFP

er and is therefore subjected to fewer taxes, the state's revenue from car-related taxes is now 2.6 billion euros lower than in 2007, according to the government. Some benefits have already disappeared: road tolls are no longer completely free, just reduced, and the same goes for parking and recharging stations in public parking lots.

Electric cars are also allowed to use bus lanes freely. However, as their large numbers slow down bus traffic, in the most congested parts of Oslo they can use bus lanes only if there are at least two or more people in the vehicle. The duration of the exemptions - guaranteed until 2021 - is increasingly being questioned. "We subsidize electric vehicles in Norway because they have somewhat lower CO2 emissions than conventional cars," notes Bjart Holtsmark, a researcher at Statistics Norway. "But there are a lot of other social costs related to car driving: congestion, accidents, noise and so forth. And with respect to those types of problems there are very small differences related to these types of cars."

According to Norway's biggest insurer Gjensidige, new electric cars are involved in 20 percent more accidents involving personal injuries than diesel models, in part because of their faster acceleration. Meanwhile, electric cars are attracting more than just private consumers, with commercial clients following the trend as well as taxis and postal and fire services, among others. But on Oslo's streets, the electric hearse still raises eyebrows. "Often, when we drive around, people walking by - and even some drivers - take out their phones to take pictures," says Jolstad, wearing a dark suit as befits the job he has held for three decades. — AFP



Boris Johnson

some in Johnson's team feared the politician with a reputation for unpredictable behavior might do or say something that would ruin his chances. He limited his media appearances during the early stage of the leadership campaign, but that led to accusations that he was ducking scrutiny over his Brexit plan, which critics say remains vague. Johnson has also faced fresh questions over his love life after police were called to the home he shares with his girlfriend following a row. But at a Conservative party meeting in Birmingham shortly after that story broke, many

activists dismissed the scandal. "What's important is what's this guy going to be delivering for you in Brexit," said 23-year-old technology analyst Hasnain Ahmed. Others highlighted Johnson's charisma and wit, which make him stand out among other politicians. "Boris didn't answer the questions very well, but on the other hand Jeremy Hunt was quite boring," said Richard Tasker, vice-chair of a local party association who is backing Johnson.

Johnson's supporters are also backing him as the best man to lead the party if the Brexit deadlock results in an early election. They say he can reach beyond the Conservative base, noting he was elected twice as mayor of cosmopolitan, liberal London. But the Brexit campaign that Johnson led in 2016 was deeply divisive with its focus on limiting migration and its exaggerated claims about the cost of the EU. Last August, he also caused an uproar with an article suggesting that veiled Muslim women look like "letter boxes" - even if the rest of the piece defended the right of religious dress. In painting himself as a national vote winner, Wells said Johnson is "trading on past glories." — AFP

Quite boring
Despite his strong lead from the start,