



Youths dressed in sun costumes are led to the annual greeting of the sun Monday on the steps of the old hospital outside of Svalbard Church. The sun failed to penetrate the clouds at the 12:18 p.m. "dawn," and people left shortly afterward due to cold temperatures and high winds. But those passing by at about 1 p.m. were rewarded as sunlight briefly appeared after a four-month absence.

(Sort of) seeing the light

Sun hides from chilly crowd during Solfestuka welcome, but warms spirits of latecomers

The shivering masses shouted their welcomes and the lyrics of "Here Comes The Sun" cut through the wind in the final seconds before the anointed moment at 12:18 p.m.

But the sun, absent from the spot for four months, decided it could wait a little longer.

Hundreds of locals and others made the annual pilgrimage to the steps of the old hospital outside Svalbard Church on Monday for the ceremonial greeting of sunrise in Longyearbyen. The official sunrise is Feb. 14, but the surrounding mountains keep the light from reaching the stairs until March 8.

Kids and more than a few adults wore decorative around their neck or on their heads,

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Wrecked Petrozavodsk splits in two

Removal of Russian vessel at Bjørnøya since crash last May 'becomes much more difficult'

A Russian ship deteriorating since it ran aground along the rocky cliffs of Bjørnøya last May has broken in two, making an already difficult salvage far worse, according to officials.

The bow of the *Petrozavodsk* has broken off from the main part of the vessel, Norwegian Coastal Administration officials said this week. Efforts to remove the vessel have been repeatedly thwarted by weather and inaccessibly rocky waters. Now hopes of removing it

this summer are being reevaluated.

This is the worst situation we could have had," Knut M. Arnhus, senior advisor for the NCA, told *Svalbardposten*. "We had long hoped the ship would remain intact until the summer. Now it becomes much more difficult to remove it."

A major concern is the stern of the ship will tip over and submerge, causing additional salvage complications. The tasks to be undertaken must also be reexamined.

"Our initial plan was to remove all cables and insulation, but that is probably already

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Seed vault deposits set record

More than 500,000 samples at Svalbard facility is most diverse; 'significant' holes remain

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, the world's largest gene bank since opening two years ago, achieved another milestone this week with a deposit giving it the most types of seeds.

The vault 130 meters inside a mountain near the airport now houses more than 500,000 samples, at least one-third of the world's crop seeds.

Among the varieties helping Svalbard set the record are a wild bean from Costa Rica that could help avoid crippling crop disease and a highly valuable strawberry species from the flanks of a Russian island volcano.

Also included is a large collection of soybeans from the United States, home to what is now the second-largest facility in Fort Collins, Colo.

"The U.S. is putting a duplicate copy of its collection here, as are most other major seed banks," wrote Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, in an e-mail interview. The trust partners with the Norwegian government and the Nordic Genetic Resource Center in Sweden in operating the vault.

The Svalbard vault is designed to house 4.5 million seed samples – 2.25 billion actual seeds – but Fowler doesn't expect to reach that number any time soon.

"In my lifetime, I don't think we'll go over

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Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.



The *Petrozavodsk* continues deteriorating where it ran aground last May along the coastal cliffs of Bjørnøya. The bow has separated from the ship, causing officials to worry the stern will tip over and make a difficult salvage job much worse. Photo provided by the Norwegian Coastal Administration.

Problems from wreck continue to get worse

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gone now," Arnhus told the newspaper.

The *Petrozavodsk*, built for transporting frozen fish, contains a large amount of insulation, but none has been seen floating in the wreckage area, he added.

The ship ran aground on the south side of Bjørnøya, a protected bird sanctuary, with two senior officers convicted of negligence. The first mate was drinking alcohol and fell asleep during his watch, and the captain was drinking while on duty.

A ship identification monitor is at the north end of the island, but was too far away to alert the Norwegian Coast Guard the vessel had strayed from its course.

Norwegian coastal and environmental officials determined the ship sustained severe structural damage and spilled tons of diesel into waters which are a seabird breeding area.

Further study indicated wildlife damage was minimal due to the quick-dispersing nature of the fuel.

Efforts to remove the remaining fuel began last July, but the British company Titan Salvage said removal of the vessel would not be possible until at least this summer. The company estimates it will cost more than 90 million kroner and take at least 60 days, but rocks falling from the cliffs are a constant safety concern.

Options include leaving the vessel on the shore, removing the vessel in pieces, and towing it as far from land as possible and allowing it to submerge.

Norway is likely to be stuck paying a significant portion of the removal cost because it exceeds the amount the shipowners are responsible for under international shipping requirements.

Briefly

NRK: SvalSat data used illegally for Iraq war

Norway violated the Svalbard Treaty by allowing the U.S. to use data from the SvalSat station for the Iraq War, according to NRK.

The data aided in tracking sandstorms, one of the biggest challenges for U.S. troops to overcome, the news agency reported this week. An official U.S. report describes using a station matching only the Svalbard facility.

The treaty states Svalbard will not be used for war purposes.

Russia has criticized what they consider Norwegian military activity on Svalbard several times. Norway, NRK reports, has had a very restrictive practice in relation to military operations – and has also allowed military aircraft to land in Svalbard.

The Norwegian foreign ministry denies a violation occurred in this instance.

"It is not in violation ... to download the data used to forecast," said Karstein Klepsvik, a ministry polar advisor. "Anyone can benefit from weather reports, even the military."

SvalSat, established in 1997, is unique in its ability read data from all orbiting polar satellites.

Movie previews to get unprecedented security

Longyearbyen is hosting two screenings of the animated movie "How to Train Your Dragon" a week before its world premier, but viewers will themselves be watched by security guards looking for recording devices.

The U.S. film, dubbed in Norwegian for the preview, will show at 6 p.m. March 19 and 21 at Huset. United International Pictures, the movie's distributor in Norway, requested the screening in Longyearbyen and will be sending the security officers, wrote Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor, in an e-mail interview.

This is the first time with security at Huset," he wrote. "They will check that the audience doesn't use their camera/recorders/mobiles. They will be in the room all the time."

The movie is about a Viking teen living on an island who fights dragons as a way of life.



A wild bean from South America, a valuable strawberry species from near a Russian volcano and soybeans from the United States are among the seed types deposited this week at the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, seen here from the top of its mountainside entrance. The facility now houses more than 500,000 varieties of seeds, the most diverse such collection in the world.

Seed vault has lots of room – and need – left

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1.5 million," he told The Associated Press in a separate interview. "I'd be rather surprised if we go over a million. At that point, we'd have all the diversity in the world ... and the most secure samples."

Fowler, in his e-mail, wrote building the vault far larger than necessary makes sense architecturally and practically since it potentially could preserve species for thousands of years.

"We originally planned for a vault to accommodate 3 million samples, thus building in a margin of error in our estimate of no more than 1.5 million samples existing," he wrote. "But during the construction process, we discovered that for no extra cost we could build a third vault room that would improve structural strength and provide even more room.

"Like so much else with the vault it's bigger, more robust and more safe than it realistically needs to be. However, when planning for a very very long-term future, it pays to do it this way."

The Svalbard vault was selected as the backup for the world's 1,400 other seed banks because of the preservation qualities of the Arctic, remote location and relative political stability.

Fowler told The Associated Press the bank still has significant holes in its collection.

"There are a few unique collections that we don't have up there yet – Ethiopia and some of

the Indian materials and some of the Chinese materials," he said.

Seed vault advocates say climate change is making the need to preserve species urgent, pointing to indicators such as studies showing Africa's maize production could drop by more than 25 percent in 20 years. The reports say that would destabilize much of the continent and spark a global food crisis, unless breeders quickly develop new heat and drought resistant varieties.

But Fowler, noting the recent Copenhagen climate summit ended in stalemate, said preventative action against warming is slow in coming.

"If crops and agriculture don't adapt to climate change, neither will humanity," he said. "But to help farmers adapt, plant breeders need access to as much genetic diversity as possible to keep crops vigorous and productive in shifting climates."

The new shipment to Svalbard includes thousands of seed varieties from scores of countries. Nearly 4,000 species from 75 countries were sent by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Columbia, which is part of a 15-center international group that has contributed the most varieties to date.

The U.S., in addition to soybeans, sent wheat, rice and a rare German Pink tomato.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS



'Kebab man' arrested for immigration violations

Kazem Ariaiwand, an Iranian known for his red kebab wagon, was arrested March 8 in Tromsø for violating immigration law, according to officials. He came to Longyearbyen in 2003 after failing to receive asylum on the mainland, and has traveled between Longyearbyen and Switzerland the past two years. He was reportedly traveling to Svalbard to settle practical matters before settling into his new home. He is in jail awaiting an expulsion order to Iran or Switzerland.

Less space available on cruise ships this year

Fewer berths will be offered on Svalbard expedition cruises this year due to a reduction in ships and smaller vessels replacing older ones, said Frigg Jørgensen, secretary-general for Aeco, the area's industry group. Quark Expeditions will replace two ships and not deploy a third, the new *Fram* will replace the *Nordstjernen* for Gap Adventures, and Polar Quest will send only two ships because a third no longer meets Norwegian certification.

Woman hospitalized in Barentsburg after crash

A woman in her 50s was brought to the hospital in Barentsburg after a snowmobile accident during a March 6 trip with a group to Longyearbyen. She sustained a broken rib and possible spinal injuries. A helicopter rescue was not possible due to high winds and snow. She is scheduled to be transported to Longyearbyen when conditions improve.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy, occasional snow. NNW winds at 20 km/h. High -11C (-24C wind chill), low -14C (-26C wind chill).	A morning flurry and cloudy. NNE winds at 20 km/h. High -14C (-26C wind chill), low -19C (-28C wind chill).	Sunny turning cloudy. NNE winds at 14 km/h. High -17C (-25C wind chill), low -21C (-25C wind chill).	Cloudy and cold. NE winds at 9 km/h. High -19C (-22C wind chill), low -21C (-25C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, partly cloudy -14C (-18C), -20C (-22C); Monday, cold and partly cloudy, -18C (-19C), -22C (-23C); Tuesday, intervals of sun and clouds -13C (-13C), -14C (-19C); Wednesday, low clouds and windy, -11C (-21C), -19C (-34C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Local students who helped decorate and contribute memories to the traveling "Cubes of Moments" art exhibit play with some of the 15,000 wood blocks falling from the main structure as the ice holding it together melts Tuesday at Svalbardhallen. The exhibit is expected to melt in three days.

New and traditional events see the light

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but those were the only rays as gaps in the mostly cloudy skies didn't include the horizon above Nybyen. And with frigid temperatures and strong gusts resulting in a windchill well below minus 30 degrees Celsius, revelers hustled inside the church for waffles and hot drinks shortly afterward.

"In the four years I've been here I've never seen the the sun on this day," said Tore Ørjasæter, the church's catechist, who played guitar and led youths in song during the ceremony. "But this is the coldest it has ever been."

The 25-minute ceremony featuring songs and speeches was one of the first events of Solfestuka, a weeklong celebration of the end of the three-and-a-half-month long polar night. Other early events were warmer as locals an-

swered trivia at Barentz Pub, sang along to favorite songs with bands at Huset, discussed Norwegian movies with a pair of famous critics and watched youths compete in a talent show at Brasseri Nansen.

Also, while the sun didn't play a direct role, some serious melting occurred as an art exhibit featuring 15,000 wood blocks held together with ice as mortar began crumbling inside Svalbardhallen.

The traveling "Cubes of Moments" exhibit, which reflects a 30-minute reel of video and photographs from locations on the tour, opened today after local students spent time with the artists decorating some of the blocks and discussing memories that are its theme.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story and schedule of upcoming events.



Tore Ørjasæter, catechist at Svalbard Church, leads youths in song during the greeting of the sun ceremony Monday, the coldest he said he's experienced during his four years in Longyearbyen.

What's up

March 9

7 p.m.: Lent mass. Svalbard Church.
Waffles and coffee at 7:30 p.m.

March 14

11 a.m.: Youth baptism. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs," U.S. family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Lourdes," Austrian/French/German drama, all ages. Huset.

March 16

5 p.m.: Gathering for Norwegian Church Relief. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Evening Mass for Lent. Svalbard Church.

March 18

2 p.m.: Board of cultural and leisure meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

6 p.m.: Bydrift board meeting. Næringsbygget 2, Smutthullet room.

March 19

9 a.m.: Board for early enterprise meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

March 19 and 21

6 p.m.: Movie preview screening: "How to Train Your Dragon," U.S. animated family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Huset.

March 21

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus," British adventure/fantasy, ages 11 and up. Huset.

March 23

7 p.m.: Evening Lent Mass. Svalbard Church.

March 26

6 p.m.: Confirmation Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

March 27 – April 4

Easter school holiday.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Russia may sharpen focus on Svalbard*
- *First training class for guides underway*
- *Four to ski across Spitsbergen for charity*
- *Creationists: Don't teach global warming*