



Foreigner care nixed

Svalbard workers facing severe restrictions as health insurance cancelled for many absences

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Health insurance rights are being severely curtailed for foreign workers in Svalbard, who will lose their coverage after more than a short

absence, even for sick or maternity leave.

The new policy, affecting about 450 of the 2,200 people living in Norwegian settlements, is the result of a legal challenge by an African working intermittently in Svalbard seeking coverage, according to *Svalbardposten*. The court's verdict rejected the claim and specified coverage rules for other non-Norwegians working in the archipelago.

The restrictions include:

- Coverage is terminated after 14 days of sick leave, even if the person has a permanent job and/or will continue working there when the leave ends.

- Maternity leave, including hospital transport and care for the birth, is no longer covered since births are prohibited in Svalbard and pregnant women must travel down to the mainland Norway three weeks before their due date.

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



FRANK BAKKEN / UNIS

Kjersti Hammer, 5, above, chooses a piece of candy from a "natural selection" box with assistance from Pernille Bronken Eidesen, center, and Eike Müller during a science fair Saturday celebrating the 20th birthday of The University Centre in Svalbard. At left, an Airlift Superpuma helicopter demonstrates a rescue operation outside the university.

A sweet birthday for UNIS

World's northernmost university celebrates 20 years as hub for international science research

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

They've discovered new lifeforms, certified our impending doom due to climate change and now scientifically proven an equation known to every four-year-old trick-or-treater: chocolate > gummi sour.

The scholarly scrutiny of sugar, involving solar-powered time-lapse photography of a box filled with assorted sweets, was among the exhibits, games and other diversions at

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Thawing the northernmost news

New Svalbardposten Editor Eirik Palm relaxes paywall, plans to boost reader interaction online

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

When Eirik Palm arrived in town he didn't bother to say hello. Instead, he told everybody his thoughts about Norway's new prime minister and the harsh criticism she's receiving for slighting the importance of climate change.

Palm, 47, made his debut as the new editor of *Svalbardposten* last Friday with a column
See **PALM**, page 3



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Eirik Palm, *Svalbardposten's* new editor, takes notes during a phone call in his office Tuesday.

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Icepeople is published weekly (or thereabouts) on Tuesdays (or thereabouts), with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

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Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

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.

Yet another great moment for evolution science



UNKNOWN



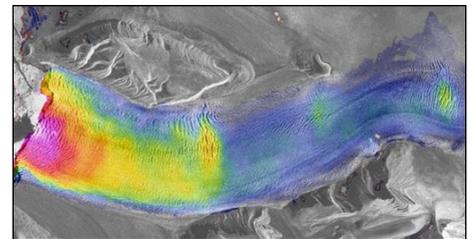
PINTEREST

New DNA evidence reveals a "100 percent match" between the yeti (a.k.a. Abominable Snowman), left, and polar bears in Svalbard, right, according to Bryan Sykes, a geneticist at the University of Oxford. He tested 27 suspected yeti samples sent from around the world, with two brownish hair samples from opposite ends of the Himalayas matching an ancient polar bear species that lived in Svalbard 40,000 to 120,000 years ago, according to PhysOrg. One of the yeti samples was about 40 years old, the other from a reported encounter about 10 years ago. "I don't think it means there are ancient polar bears wandering around the Himalayas," Sykes said. "It could mean there is a sub species of brown bear in the High Himalayas descended from the bear that was the ancestor of the polar bear." Although visual proof of yetis is mostly limited to blurry photos and videos, British climber Eric Shipton sparked a global mania with picture of a supposed a yeti footprint at the base of Mount Everest in 1951. Also, mountaineer Reinhold Messner, claims to have studied yetis since a terrifying encounter with a mysterious creature in Tibet in 1986, according to the *Daily Mail* of London. He said he uncovered an image in a 300-year-old Tibetan manuscript of a "Chemo," a local name for the yeti, with text translated to read "the yeti is a variety of bear living in in hospitable mountainous areas." Sykes' work will air in the three-part British Channel 4 documentary "Bigfoot Files" beginning Sunday.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

If we were a real newspaper with an actual budget we'd be offering a shot glass or something to the first reader able to identify the photo to the right. Of course, this being a town silly with scientists, we'd be immediately deluged with "duh, it's a satellite photo of a glacier" responses. Correct, but we're hoping the color scheme might make a few of them think it's temperature related. It's actually an **depiction of Kronebreen, Spitsbergen's fastest-flowing glacier, featuring satellite radar images taken 11 days apart.** The image, captured by Adrian Luckman, is part of a Research as Art exhibition at The Royal Institution in London showcasing the work of Swansea University researchers ... In other odd university imagery from the Arctic, take a guess what the owner of this car in the UNIS parking lot will be scraping off the windshield.



ADRIAN LUCKMAN / GEOGRAPHY

When "glacial pace" means skid marks: Fortunately, digital cameras are easier to wipe clean than asphalt.

Nope, it's not muddy snow, but rather **the blanket left by an unusual sandstorm during the past week.** The university's Facebook pace notes such storms happen maybe every two years and in August, but "this year we had a very wet summer and it took a long time for the river delta to dry up. And since there is very little snow on the ground, there is a lot of bare ground. So when the wind direction and wind speed is right we will get such sandstorms" ... Finally, while India got lots of headlines recently for ramping up its science research efforts in Svalbard, the word isn't completely out yet. An article in *The Times of India* notes a resident here contributed to the Aam Aadmi Party and consoles "don't worry if you have never heard of this place because neither has AAP." The upstart "anti-corruption" party is waging an unorthodox campaign defying the tradition that candidates be of the same religion as most in their area.



UNIS

At Oxford, it'd just be toilet paper: But since hazing in Svalbard is a fond pastime of Mother Nature, she did a more annoying "branding" job.

Spoiler: No, he doesn't make it



ELEMENT EUROPE

Karsten Kleppan, hailed as one of Norway's best skateboarders, attempts to pop the gaps in a mine trestle in Pyramiden during what he claims is the first boarding tour of the Russian ghost town. Kleppan, visiting Svalbard recently with a documentary crew, tested his skills on objects ranging from the skateboard ramp in the center of Longyearbyen to rusting equipment in Pyramiden's recreation hall. A 12-minute video of his visit is at www.tacky.no/skateboard/article/?id=123444.

New editor: Less paywall, more social media

PALM, from page 1

detailing numerous ways the climate change issue is critical for Svalbard and what the few words so far from the Conservative-led leadership might mean since "the archipelago has probably never played a more central role in international politics and environmental research than it has today."

Palm, in an interview this week, said he dislikes typical introductions offering first impressions locals have already heard frequently. It's an approach he hopes to apply to news coverage despite an all-new reporting staff, saying he's found local residents open-minded and welcoming despite being a newcomer.

"It was surprisingly easy to get interviews," he said. They're also providing plenty of suggestions in e-mails and phone calls "so I see that as an opportunity as well."

Placing Palm's column on *Svalbardposten's* main homepage, instead of buried on a separate "leder" page, wasn't the only major change in his debut. A rigid paywall implemented last year former longtime editor Birger Amundsen has been lowered somewhat, with condensed versions of some articles now available free to non-subscribers.

Whereas Amundsen said "I don't care about people who don't want to pay," Palm

said he thinks a limited amount of free content is important for luring new subscribers.

"If you have a sports shop but don't have windows you won't have anyone taking a look at what you're selling," Palm said.

Palm said there will be other small changes, including become more active on social media to encourage two-way communication with readers, and that "it is important that we show faces." But he doesn't expect the kind of dramatic overhaul Amundsen made when he took over the paper in 2005, including a totally new design and its first substantial online presence.



EIRIK PALM

Palm, who worked for NRK and most recently as executive editor of

Finmark Dagblad, said he first thought about moving to Svalbard about 15 years ago, but his family situation made doing so impractical. He was selected from 15 applications for the editor's job, which is a two-year contract with a one-year extension option.

While "shoe-level" journalism in Svalbard means things like long snowscooter trips to events and coal mines, Palm said he was an enthusiastic hunter and scooter rider in Finnmark and he has covered energy issues worldwide.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Svalbard gets big increase for big items in 2014 budget

An allocation for Svalbard in 2014 of 728 million kroner, nearly 200 million more than this year, is included in the national budget presented Monday by Norway's departing Labor-led ruling coalition. Some of the largest increases are for the Svalbard governor's office, which is receiving 165 million kroner for new helicopters and a hanger, 17.3 million kroner for a new service vessel, and 6.7 million for three new officers in the police and environmental protection departments. The budget also includes 41 million to continue required emissions upgrades at Longyearbyen's power plant, which received a total of 43.8 million for such work in 2012 and 2013, a relief for city officials who were uncertain of the funding and stating residents might have to pay higher electricity rates instead. The University Centre in Svalbard will receive 117.9 million kroner, an increase of about six million.

City seeking funds to offer extra help for July 22 victims

An application seeking 30,000 kroner to provide psychosocial assistance to youths and parents still experiencing difficulties after the July 22, 2011, massacre at Oslo and Utøya is being sought by Longyearbyen's Municipal Council from the country government in Troms. A recent national study of the mental health of young people after the tragedy shows Longyearbyen is among the areas with poorer conditions, and local officials are hoping to establish thematic meetings for youth and parents with a psychiatrist from November to February to discuss the issue.

Two men fined for knifing tent and assaulting man inside

Two men have been fined 7,500 kroner for assaulting a man at the Hotellneset campsite in July, according to the Svalbard governor's office. The assailants used a knife to cut into a tent, believing the man inside had stolen two firearms from them a few days earlier. They found one of the weapons and assaulted the man. Both assailants were visibly intoxicated, noisy and aggressive toward numerous guests at the campsite.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. S winds to 29 km/h. High -6C (-11C wind chill), low -9C (-14C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 35 km/h. High -8C (-15C wind chill), low -11C (-17C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 49 km/h. High -6C (-14C wind chill), low -9C (-15C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 29 km/h. High -9C (-15C wind chill), low -10C (-16C wind chill).
Sunrise: 9:36a, sunset: 3:47p	Sunrise: 9:46a, sunset: 3:37p	Sunrise: 9:56a, sunset: 3:26p	Sunrise: 10:07a, sunset: 3:15p

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -7C (-11C), -10C (-14C), light 4:45h; Monday, p. cloudy, -7C (-11C), -11C (-16C), light 4:20h; Tuesday, cloudy, -9C (-13C), -10C (-15C), light 3:52h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -9C (-14C), -10C (-15C), light 3:22h

Data provided by storm.no



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Abelone Vaage Stangeland, 4, peers out from the entrance of a expedition tent Saturday during The University Centre in Svalbard's 20th birthday celebration. The exhibit in the logistics department featured the standard equipment carried by dozens of annual research and safety training expeditions.

UNIS, 20, celebrates sweet science

BIRTHDAY, from page 1

The University Centre in Svalbard's 20th birthday celebration Saturday. Hundreds of visitors, mostly kids with their parents, indulged in a huge cake in the cafeteria before exploring the range of the school's scientific studies in a way that didn't require a graduate degree to understand.

"It's like natural selection," said Eike Müller, a staff engineer at UNIS, describing the candy box exhibit. "Some things taste better and they get chosen first."

Another sweet reward awaited participants in "barcode lottery" if they could match a fictitious "DNA sample" (a tiny slip of paper with an alphanumeric ID such as "D50") to a chart

of known local lifeforms. A woman with that sample got a match with a species of mushroom; her male companion wasn't as lucky with a "B96" ticket that was outside the range of known flowering species with IDs up to 70.

UNIS opened in 1993 with the concept of providing Arctic research in an ideal location with and boosting Svalbard's status as an international research hub due to its unique status of accepting foreigners. About 450 students enroll annually, split roughly even between Norwegians and foreigners. The primary fields of study are Arctic Biology, Arctic Geology, Arctic Geophysics and Arctic Technology.

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

Insurance change brings uncertainty

HEALTH, from page 1

- Coverage is not provided for workers on other types of leave.

- Membership in the National Insurance program expires one month after a person has left a job in Svalbard.

Officials with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) discussed the new policy with foreign employees in Longyearbyen on Oct. 8, shortly after the verdict occurred, said Mayor Christin Kristoffersen. But she said there is still considerable uncertainty about the meaning of the decision and its impacts.

"The important thing for us is to specify what consequences this will have and what consequences this will have on the society," she said. "If we're unhappy with the consequences we have to decide if there could or should be a change in the law. It depends on how we want to treat inhabitants on Svalbard compared to inhabitants in Norway."

Among the uncertainties, she said, is if the new policy could alter the ratio of foreigners to Norwegians working in Svalbard.

The 450 foreigners in Norwegian settle-

ments as of 2012 is a sharp increase from an estimated 300 in 2009, according to Statistics Norway. The increased interest from those interested in Svalbard's high wages and unique lifestyle suggests that, even with health coverage scaled back, there may well continue to be far more applications than jobs available.

NAV officials told *Svalbardposten* a public statement about the changes is pending. But in a news release issued the same day as the meeting with Longyearbyen's foreigners, the agency noted officials with Norway's Inclusive Working Life (IA) program in Troms and Finnmark met in Svalbard to discuss "how to reduce sickness absence."

"Much can be done if the parties are aware the moment the doctor considers that there is a need for sick leave," said Stein Rudaa, head of the Troms IA program. "We must prevent unnecessary long absences."

He said some municipalities have been able to use savings from sick leave to build facilities such as a nursing home or maintaining the operations of a small school.

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

What's up

Oct. 17

4-7 p.m.: Crafts and food fair by local students to benefit NRK charity telethon. Longyearbyen School.

Oct. 19

5-10 p.m.: Thai feast, with proceeds going to NRK charity telethon. UNIS.

Oct. 20

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "De Tøffeste Gutta," Norwegian drama, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Butler," U.S. drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 21

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

Oct. 22

9 a.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

Oct. 23

6 p.m.: Movie: "Gåten Ragnarok," Norwegian action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 24-27

Dark Season Blues festival. Full schedule at www.svalbardblues.com and in the Oct. 22 issue of Icepeople.

Oct. 27

11 a.m.: Family Mass with baptism. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Gåten Ragnarok," Norwegian action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Supervention," Norwegian documentary, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Oct. 28

9 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

2 p.m.: Environmental and Industrial Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

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:

- *U.K. wants to be Arctic oil drilling hub*
- *Shutdown ruins years of Antarctic work*
- *Russia blocks Antarctic marine sanctuary*
- *Norway's fix for elk collisions: disco poles*