



Leaks: U.S. snubs Svalbard

Stacks of diplomatic messages – not from WikiLinks – reveal chilly attitude on Norway's views

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A chilly attitude about Norway's view of Svalbard by the United States is expressed in

stacks of leaked diplomatic reports made public today – but not the ones putting U.S. relationships with the rest of the world in a deep freeze.

Fears of Norway pulling the U.S. into an unwanted conflict with Russia over rights to disputed areas of the Arctic were expressed by officials a few years ago, according to several

hundred diplomatic messages from the American Embassy in Norway obtained by Torbjørn Pedersen, a senior researcher at the University of Tromsø.

"If Norway opens the area for oil exploration, or if the level of conflict in the fisheries protection zone should again be high,

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KARLA PAZ / ICEPEOPLE

Siril Malmstein, 7, gazes at a just-lit Christmas tree in Longyearbyen's central square Sunday.

Got a Light, Santa?

Torches, treats and tree warm up chilly Advent celebration

By KARLA PAZ
Staff writer

This is one writing assignment Siril Momstein, 7, didn't mind turning in on a weekend with the rest of her peers.

She dropped her letter to Santa in a

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Breaking: Mine scandal grows

Store Norske is facing a lawsuit as it drops 'unreasonable' contracts; former director is facing more corruption charges. **See story, page 2.**

Shows enter new dimension

More elaborate live productions, 3D movies pack schedule as culture center debuts Thursday

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Those about to saturate themselves in weeks of nearly non-stop theater, concerts and movies celebrating the opening of Longyearbyen's new culture center might take a moment to remember the non-stop work by some making it possible.

"Yesterday I worked from 8:30 in the morning until about 10 in the evening," said Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor, in an interview today. "I think I will be very tired (Thursday) at midnight."

Thursday marks the official debut of Kulturhuset, with a lengthy evening of speeches, music, dance performances and visual art scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. The new center in



DEN NORSKE OPERA & BALLETT

Ragnhild Heiland Sørensen, left, a soprano with Den Norske Opera & Ballett, is one of the featured performers at the official opening of Longyearbyen's new culture center Thursday.

the middle of town is replacing the 59-year-old Huset building on the outskirts about two kilometers away as the city's primary entertainment venue.

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Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Slippery slope



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Youths play on the snow-covered skateboard ramp in Longyearbyen's central square Sunday. The ramp was moved Nov. 23 from its former location next to the youth center to improve access between a parking lot and the new Kulturhuset celebrating its official opening Thursday.

Legal war grows in Store Norske case

Company sued as they drop subcontracts; former director facing more corruption charges

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Store Norske is throwing out three subcontracts negotiated by its former director, who is facing criminal corruption charges, stating the company is paying 100 million kroner per year above market price for them.

The decision expands the maze of legal battles already underway as one of the companies is suing Store Norske for breach of contract, according to a report today by TV2.

Furthermore, the corruption case against former Director Robert Hermansen deepened as prosecutors revealed Friday he arranged to receive 3.9 million kroner from Kristian Jebsens Rederi in Bergen, according to NRK.

Charges of gross misappropriation of funds against that company have also been upgraded to gross corruption.

Hermansen, manager of Store Norske from 1999 to 2008, has previously denied wrongdoing and stated the company is using him as a scapegoat to get out of unfavorable agreements approved by the board of directors. He told reporters the latest dispute involves a private loan negotiated with Kristian Jebsens Rederi's former leader, Atle Jebsen, who died last year in a car accident.

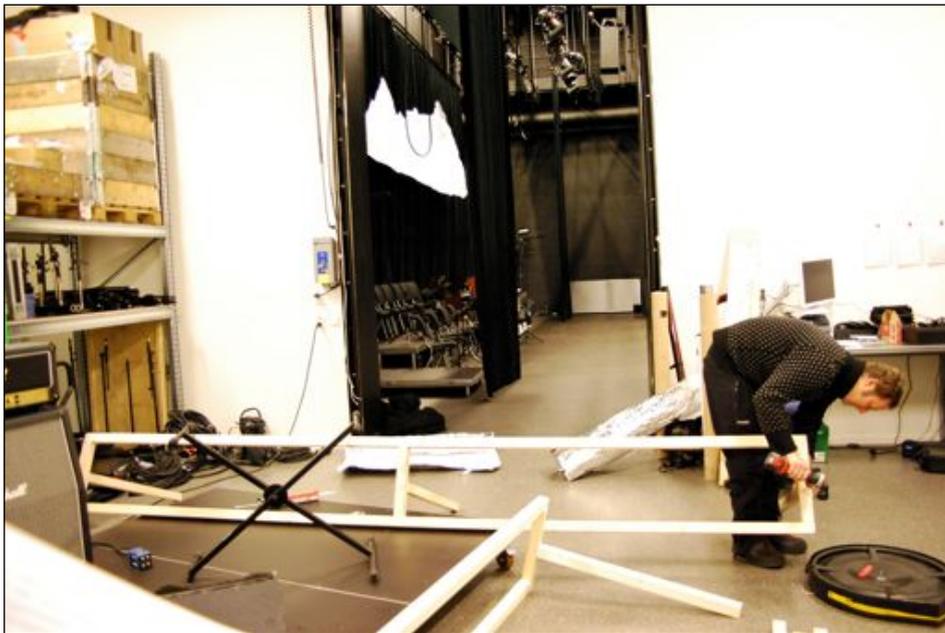
Government and private audits conducted beginning last year revealed the questionable subcontracts, which officials said are far above market value and unusually long in length. Top officials at some of the companies have resigned and/or are facing charges as a result.

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

Icesheet

Whew. We're relieved to know "visitors do not come to northern Norway to lie on the beach," according to research conducted by The Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo. Their expert studies in Svalbard and other parts of the Far North show tourists are more bothered by poor visibility and "not (getting) to wear their down jackets" than cold weather ... The director of the same agency, attending the Cancun climate summit this week, says a group of U.S. politicians on a junket to Svalbard six years ago are turning the cold shoulder now, with Republicans like John McCain calling preventative action "just a matter of time" when facing the impact then to "a monstrosity" when facing

today's Tea Party-seeped electorate. Apparently it's hard for Sarahcuda Nation to take warnings about climate based on studying millions of years of trends seriously when the Earth is only 6,000 years old ... Lot of rage this week after *Svalbardposten* announced electronic editions will be offered as non-downloadable and non-printable versions accessible only online with a Web browser starting next year. Not only that, but issues will only be available for a month after publication. We sympathize with the problem of PDFs they current send being illegally shared and understand more discussions are planned to discuss readers' complaints, so for now we won't detail advice on the internet about hacking and saving such files.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Jan Erik Holto works on a set piece today in the holding area adjacent to the main state at Kulturhuset. The first performance at the new culture center was to a half-full theater Nov. 12, but the official opening featuring a multitude of performers and visiting dignitaries is sold out.

Culture center gets gala opening

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The new center offers more elaborate staging possibilities for live performances, a digital movie projector with 3D capability, a main and secondary stage, a full-time cafe, and upgraded backstage facilities.

Almost everything appears to be ready or on schedule, Ødegård said.

"We don't know about the cinema yet," he said. "I hope it will be ready today or tomorrow."

Theaters nationwide are receiving the new 3D projectors, resulting in a backlog from demand, Ødegård said.

"It's difficult to get the cameras from the producers," he said. "We could have done this several weeks ago, but the company could not do it until now."

Longyearbyen's first-scheduled 3D movie is the U.S. animated comedy "Mega Brain," which will premier at Kulturhuset at 5 p.m. Friday if the equipment is installed in time.

Thursday's debut gala, which sold out almost immediately, involves a healthy percentage of Longyearbyen's population representing a range of residents' talent and occupations.

"For this event there are about 150 to 200 people working on stage or behind it," Ødegård said.

The biggest group is a newly formed choir of about 100 locals who will perform Verdi's "Slavekoret." In addition, about 20 members of the Longyearbyen Storband will perform, as will a group of about 20 youth dancers. Small dance groups of Thai residents and residents of Barentsburg are also scheduled.

Among the featured visiting performers are soprano singer Ragnhild Heiland Sørensen and pianist Boris Schaefer from Den Norske Opera & Ballett. Norwegian Justice Minister Knut Storberget will officially open the ceremony.

Among the estimated 35 other invited guests from the mainland are the building's architect, consultants, movie industry representatives, the mayor of Tromsø and top officials with the Tromsø International Film Festival.

"The guest list is changing all the time," Ødegård said, noting about half of the audience in the 245-seat main theater are invited guests.

The center has already hosted a couple of trial performances, including an play by an experimental theater company and a choral concert, that played to less-than-full houses earlier this month. But those unable to get in Thursday won't lack for other chances this weekend.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Fees for gym, business trash pickup may increase in 2011

Higher fees for some recreation programs and business trash collection are among the changes being considered for next year by Longyearbyen officials. The city's governing board will meet Dec. 14 to consider fee levels for movie tickets, Galleri Svalbard, Svalbardhallen and other entities. Proposals include increasing an annual gym pass at Svalbardhallen to 2,400 kroner from 1,850 kroner and the pass for first-grade students to 1,900 kroner from 1,560 kroner. "The starting point we looked at is how the rates are on the mainland," said Anne Ellingsen, the program's manager. "Now we are almost on par with the national average." A reduction in squash court fees is also proposed. Business trash collection would increase to 5.84 kroner per kilogram, up from the current 4.17 kroner per kilogram.

Deep freeze at sea may chill season for Noorderlicht

The deepest freeze of sea ice in years is good news for recreation enthusiasts, but may mean problems for the *Noorderlicht* sailing ship. Basecamp has offered lodging on the vessel while it is frozen in the ice for the past ten years and has permission from Svalbard's governor to operate in Tempelfjorden from 2011 to 2015. But the terms, imposing stricter rules on icebreaker access in the area, do not allow Basecamp to apply for and receive such assistance after Jan. 10 each year. The new rule is for the safety of snowmobile riders crossing the fjord. With ice already in place, the *Noorderlicht* cannot sail beyond Longyearbyen, forcing the company to keep close track of conditions in the fjord since they "can change from day to day, and week to week," said General Manager Solfrid Håkenstad.

Man fined 20,000 kroner for assaulting bouncer at Huset

A Longyearbyen man in his 20s has been fined 10,000 kroner by the Svalbard governor's office for assaulting a bouncer Friday night at Huset. The large fine is due to a previous incident of violence by the man, who admitted his actions in Friday's confrontation.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy, some snow. SSE winds to 18 km/h. High -12C (-16C wind chill), low -14C (-19C wind chill). Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Partly cloudy. E winds to 29 km/h. High -14C (-24C wind chill), low -20C (-28C wind chill). Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Partly cloudy. E winds at 7 km/h. High -21C (-27C wind chill), low -24C (-32C wind chill). Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Cloudy. ESE winds at 11 km/h. High -25C (-34C wind chill), low -28C (-37C wind chill). Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -28C (-37C), -28C (-37C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -25C (-34C), -28C (-37C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -24C (-32C), -26C (-35C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -26C (-36C), -27C (-37C), light 0:00h.			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Local residents bearing torches gather outside an entrance to Lompensenteret on Sunday – but they came to praise, not burn, the Longyearbyen Storband for playing Christmas carols during the city's annual Advent procession and tree-lighting ceremony.

Old mine now Santa's home, locals say

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mailbox at Mine 2B, well-known among locals as his *real* workshop, during a torchlight walk Sunday from Huset to Longyearbyen's central square.

"Almost all my schoolmates are here today," she said. When asked what she wanted, she said "I would like to get for Christmas a pair of skis."

About 200 people celebrated the first Sunday of Advent by making the chilly two-kilometer procession, visions of holiday treats, carols and the lighting of the city's Christmas tree in their heads.

It started with a welcoming speech by Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø outside the memorial stone at Huset. The torch procession then started towards the center of the city, passing by Mine 2B a few hundred meters down the road.

Even though there is a considerable discussion about the correct place of Santa's hometown, Longyearbyen residents believe the

mine is his home because, despite being long out of production, it is lit almost all the time during the dark season. Also, his mailbox is at the base of the mountain, where children deliver their letters annually.

Beginning the Advent march at Huset started two years ago, said Anne Lise Sandvik, a longtime resident.

"I have been part of this tradition since 1983," she said. "It has been at Huset, inside Lompensenteret and other different places. We also have walked from the harbor up to the center."

Many parents walked with their children while holding wax torches, bringing a flicker of warmth to a windy afternoon with a temperature of minus three degrees Celsius.

"I was afraid that it would be so cold and that people would not have dared to come out – it is a little windy and it snows, but it awakes the Christmas mood," Sandvik said.

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

A 'final solution' sought for Svalbard?

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the United States could be required to change the policy and decide Svalbard question," he wrote in a column published in today's *Aftenposten*. "And the conclusion does not need to go in Norway's favor."

The most recent are reports from Ambassador Benson K. Whitney in 2005 and 2006, when he reported that Svalbard was about to be "an arctic hotspot" with military tensions possible. He urged the U.S. to consider "supporting a final solution to the legal dispute on Svalbard," according to a separate article published by the newspaper.

"This interprets Pedersen as a signal that Svalbard might be brought before the Hague tribunal," *Aftenposten* wrote. "But the advice

was not taken into account."

Pedersen obtained the messages in the course of his research. His revelation of their content comes the same week as the organization WikiLeaks revealed about 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables from recent years containing unfavorable messages about numerous countries and foreign officials.

Those messages suggest the U.S. is hardly taking a favorable stance toward Russia, expressing little hope the post-Soviet leadership will become more democratic or reliable.

Russia and Norway recently signed an agreement roughly dividing a long-disputed area in the Barents Sea.

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

What's up

Dec. 2

7 p.m.: Official opening of Longyearbyen Culture Center (Kulturhuset) with concerts and presentations. Admission 200 kroner adults, 150 kroner students/seniors.

Dec. 3

5 p.m.: Movie: "Mega Brain" (preview showing in 3D; official Norwegian opening Dec. 26). U.S. animation/comedy. 90 kroner. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Concert by Vamp, a 19-year-old folk, Celtic and rock band from Haugesund. Kulturhuset.

10:30: Reunion concert by Howlin' Huskies, a Svalbard rock and blues band. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 4

Noon: Family show "Virrvarr" with Clown Knut. Kulturhuset.

2 p.m.: Christmas swim. Svalbardhallen.

5 p.m.: Movie: "Grusomme Meg" ("Despicable Me") in 3D, U.S. animation/family, all ages. 90 kroner. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Gaza's Tears" ("Gaza's Tears"), Norwegian documentary, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

9 p.m.: Movie "Fair Game," U.S. action/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

11 p.m.: Movie: "Jackass" in 3D, U.S. comedy/action/documentary, ages 15 and up. 90 kroner. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 5

11 a.m.: Family Advent liturgy featuring Polargospel and youth scouts. Svalbard Church.

3 p.m.: Theater monologue: "Jeg, Ole Bull" by Helge Jordal with violinist Ella Helen Bukkøy. Kulturhuset.

4:30 p.m.: Open house. Kulturhuset.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Mummitrollet - Kometen Kommer," Finnish children's film with Norwegian speech, all ages. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Fritt Vilt III," Norwegian horror, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

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:

- *Lt. Gov.: Svalbard can be a tax haven*
- *Tight security at Cancun climate summit*
- *Activists using 'Godzilla' to fight whaling*
- *Recreating the Ice Age as a hobby*