



Pact ends longtime Arctic feud

Russia, Norway open way for offshore oil projects, but some express concerns about impact

Norway and Russia resolved a 40-year-old dispute Tuesday over dividing a portion of the seas south of Svalbard, thought to contain a wealth of oil and natural gas that may be tapped cooperatively.

But while the international feud may be over – assuming the countries' governing bodies ratify the treaty – debate continues fiercely within Norway, with some suggesting the pact may even pose a threat to the center-left coalition government.

An oft-cited "race for the Arctic" has nations seeking resource and other territorial rights, with continental shelf portions of the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean among the most hotly contested areas. Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg said the treaty divides the 175,000-square-kilometer maritime delimitation roughly in half, and enhances cooperative management of fisheries and hydrocarbon resources.

"Previously we discussed delimiting the Barents Sea, but in recent years we also began negotiating the delimitation line in the Arctic Ocean from Svalbard and Franz Josef Land towards the North Pole," he said during a joint news conference in Oslo with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev.

"An important element in this agreement is

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The first group of racers begins the 42-kilometer course of the Svalbard Skimarathon near Mine 6 on Saturday morning. Nearly 400 people signed up for full- and half-length courses.

A win-win ski race

Overcoming volcano and polar bears victory enough during sunny Svalbard Skimarathon

That "everybody who finishes is a winner" banality gets condescending by about the age of 6, but it's more true than most races when it comes to the Svalbard Skimarathon.

Actually, just getting to the starting line was a victory for many.

The Icelandic volcano eruption that disrupted millions of travelers worldwide earlier this month became a threat to racers again last week as airports in southwestern Norway

were reclosed due to lingering ash. That and the fear of fresh eruptions caused many to cancel travel plans to Svalbard before Saturday's race that started at Mine 6.

"We got lucky with our flight," said Jøran Råheim, a Søreidgrend resident who said she was able to find space on short notice aboard an alternate flight from Bergen after her original one was canceled.

About 380 people participated in this year's race, with officials estimating the total might have been 500 without the eruption.

Råheim and her companion skier, Sissel

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Pole quest a victory over cold, culture



Elham Al-Qasimi, in this April 23 photo from her online journal, celebrates becoming the first Arab woman to reach the North Pole.

First Arab woman to reach the top of the world a heroine to many from homeland, a rogue to some

Elham Al-Qasimi sees the insults as just one more part of the triumph in her becoming the first Arab woman to stand at the top of the world.

Al-Qasimi, 27, is reaping global headlines after completing a week-long, 130-kilometer "Last Degree" ski trip to the North Pole on April 23. Accompanying the articles and broadcasts is an abundance of blogosphere and comment board debate about the United Arab Emirates

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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.



A 175,000-square-kilometer zone of the Barents Sea extending to Svalbard, believed to be rich in oil, has been in dispute between Norway and Russia since the early 1970s. An agreement reached Tuesday between the countries divides the area "into two equally significant parts," according to Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

Agreement may allow joint oil efforts

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an affirmation of the Russian and Norwegian position that this region is subject to international treaties and international law – whether maritime or civil."

But while oil interests expressed optimism about the pact's possibilities, some members of Norway's Socialist Left party suggested it might have to leave the coalition government if

it loses its battle to stop oil activities in the region.

"SV won't be able to continue as part of the government if it doesn't manage to have any influence," Mali Steiro Tronsmoen, head of the Socialist Youth League of Norway (Sosialistisk Ungdom/SU), told NRK in an interview.

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

Briefly

Trash cleanup 'lottery' returns for 11th season

The Svalbard trash lottery is returning for an 11th year, allowing 24 winning residents to remove debris from the beaches of northern Spitsbergen this August.

The primary goal is to clean up fishing nets, trawl bags and other refuse that washes ashore, posing a danger to reindeer and other wildlife. Two crews of 12 people are scheduled to work, the first from Aug. 1-4, the second from Aug. 4-8.

The application deadline is June 1. Participants must be at least 18, in good physical shape and in the population registry of Svalbard. All residents can enter, but preference will be weighted toward those who have not previously participated. The online application is at <http://www.sysselmannen.no/hoved.aspx?m=44267&amid=2612393>.

Three polar bears chased from Longyearbyen

Three polar bears have been chased by police from Longyearbyen since Saturday, prompting a warning by officials to exercise caution and restraint.

Two bears spotted Saturday near a cottage area were chased away, although one returned

repeatedly to the area. Another sighting Tuesday had officials wondering if it had returned, but "based on the observations and photos, we can not ignore the fact that the bear is not the same," said Per Andreassen, first police officer for the Svalbard governor's office.

Andreassen said the Svalbard Environmental Act prohibits seeking out or disrupting polar bears, with violations punishable by fines or imprisonment.

Svalbard study: Dinos killed by climate change

Fossils and minerals from Svalbard indicate a sudden plummet in the sea temperatures was the first step toward the extinction of the dinosaurs, according to British researchers.

A sudden drop of about nine degrees Celsius in the Atlantic Gulf Stream about 137 million years ago, caused by high CO2 levels in the atmosphere, killed off cold-blooded species in swamps and seas, the study indicates.

The finding contradicts long-held beliefs a sudden event such as a meteor strike caused the dinosaurs' extinction about 65 million years ago. Recent research suggests a series of environmental changes were responsible.

More information about the study is at www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=29944



Trond Sandelin, left, waxes skis for racers Saturday morning shortly before the start of the Svalbard Skimarathon near Mine 6. He also helped race volunteers in Longyearbyen who stayed up past midnight Friday waxing about 50 pairs of skis for participants.

Ideal weather greets skiers at marathon

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Tvedt, were among the first group starting the full course at 10 a.m. in a non-timed division. Both of them – and many in the competitive division – said their primary motivation was simply enjoying the experience and scenery.

Finishing is also reward enough for many, due to the Arctic landscape's inhabitants.

"The biggest difference is you need to have guards for the polar bears," said Jan Eull, 65, a Hønefoss resident who said he's participated in hundreds of ski races. "That's a new experience."

Eull, gathered next to a stand offering last-minute ski waxes to racers, also helped put wax on about 50 pairs of skis late into the night before the race.

"We did the last one at about 12:30 (Saturday morning)," he said.

A helicopter from the Svalbard governor's office scouted the area before the race and guards with high-caliber rifles patrolled the course on snowmobiles once it started. There hasn't been a reported encounter during a race to date, but officials have been busy responding to sightings nearby in recent days.

Racers were rewarded with weather a bi-

ased observer might call stunning, with cloudless skies, no wind and a temperature of minus 7 degrees Celsius.

"I cannot remember when I have ever seen skiers so happy as they are today," said Jens Kopland, a travel company leader who's brought tours to the race for the past six years, in an interview with Langrenn.com.

The overall winner was Odd Egil Brobakk, a "self-proclaimed birkebeiner" who was among those deciding to risk a flight to Svalbard despite the ash cloud, finishing in two hours, nine minutes and 22 seconds.

"This is by far the greatest ski race I have done and if I get the opportunity again I will come back," he told Birkebeiner.no. Brobakk was in a close competition throughout with three other men, including Erik Gjømle, brother of the more famous Ella, according to the site.

"I had not so good plan," said Gjømle, who finished third. "But you cannot be depressed on a day like this."

The woman's winner was Live Berg with a time of two hours, 27 minutes and 41 seconds.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Norwegian, U.S. database to track bear/human incidents

A database of incidents between bears and humans is being assembled by researchers from Norway and the United States due an expected rise in future conflicts. More people are making their way north, more commercial activities are occurring in bears' habitat, and there are more bears on land as sea ice decreases in size and thickness, according to participants at a polar bear conference in Tromsø last year. A decision was made at the conference to prepare the database, with researchers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Norwegian Polar Institute and Svalbard governor's office among those named earlier this month to work on the project. Among the goals are reducing human/bear encounters and improving people's response if one occurs.

Ancient mammal tracks from Mine 7 get Svalbard name

The 60-million-year-old Pantodonta mammal tracks discovered in Mine 7 now have a name: Thulitheripus Svalbardii. "There are no such footsteps described in any country. Therefore they get their own name," said Jørn Hurum, a paleontologist who co-authored a study about the December 2006 discovery by two workers in the mine. Fossils from the Thulitheri, meaning "large animals from the North," are on display at Svalbard Museum.

Miner hoping to solve the mystery of John Willis

What happened on the northeast side of Rindersbukta and who was John Willis? Stein Arne Ellingsen hopes to find the answers. Ellingsen, who owns a nearby cabin just south of Svea, is trying to discover the story behind a pole with a brass plate bearing the English words "To the Memory of John Willis B.D.S. 13-3-61 – 29-7-85 A Good Friend and Companion." Ellingsen, a machine mechanic for Store Norske, said he doesn't know if Willis died in 1885 or 1985. The "B.D.S." has a current-day meaning for a degree in dentistry, but Ellingsen said he questions if the mystery man could have obtained one by the age of 24.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. Winds from the N at 28 km/h. High -8C (-20C wind chill), low -14C (-23C wind chill).	Cold with some sun. NNE winds at 12 km/h. High -9C (-13C wind chill), low -13C (-18C wind chill).	Mostly cloudy w/ a flurry. NNE winds at 8 km/h. High -9C (-10C wind chill), low -13C (-13C wind chill).	Cold, some snow. NE winds at 11 km/h. High -9C (-12C wind chill), low -12C (-18C wind chill).
Extended forecast: Sunday, some snow, -9C (-14C), -10C (-18C); Monday, snow ending late, -7C (-15C), -9C (-17C); Tuesday, low clouds -4C (-13C), -6C (-14C); Wednesday, clouds and snow flurries, -3C (-8C), -6C (-11C).			

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Elham Al-Qasimi, left, and father, Abdul, relax Tuesday in Longyearbyen following her successful effort to be the first Arab woman at the North Pole. An *Alameen Post* article notes "the Al-Qasimi family agrees that Elham got her adventurous spirit from her father. But no one expected it to take her to this extreme."

Pole trip more than a personal victory

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native's culture, financial means and whether the trip in temperatures as low minus 30 degree Celsius was all that challenging.

"I'm OK with it," said Al-Qasimi, whose fingertips were still stiff from frostbite four days after reaching the Pole. She said the debate is another sign of how rapid change to her culture is allowing more individual expression, much like her quest.

"It's not a traditional part of our culture, going on expeditions, even for the men," she said.

The general response has been overwhelmingly positive, with girls and women of all ages writing with thanks and congratulations, Al-Qasimi said. She said she expects to be busy with media interviews, school appearances and other activities soon after returning home.

Al-Qasimi, who was born in Dubai but lived in the United States until age 12, spent six months training for the expedition in places like the French Alps and northern Minnesota. Some of her exploring nature come from her father, Abdul, who took the family on excursions throughout the U.S. while earning his PhD there and accompanied her to Longyearbyen.

"I think he'd prefer I stay home and knit," she said.

Her father said he thought she would be taking a cruise to the Pole when he first heard about her plans.

"Little by little I came to understand what she was doing," he said.

It's been a tough year for Pole expeditions as thin and melting ice has blocked a number of attempts. Al-Qasimi, in her online journal, wrote they received a warning on the eve of their "summit day" that "a huge storm was coming in on the 24th (and) the ice was breaking up rapidly."

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

Taking exception with 'do not feed the trolls'

Engaging in debate with hostile internet commenters seldom comes to good. But Elham Al-Qasimi, who braved into the deep blogosphere of remarks about her being the first Arab woman to reach the North Pole, managed to win over at least one skeptic in this exchange at beingboing.net:

Michael Holloway (bio: "blogger since 2003. Supporter of the The Toronto Cyclists Union. Baseball writer"): "So it's really a story about the daughter of a ruling elite in an oil rich monarchy known as the UAE (which is a creation of Imperial power) learning that with wealth and privilege she can do anything she wants, as long as she doesn't try it at home."

Elham Al-Qasimi: "I am normal girl whose last job (and sole income) was working for a charity, meaning some months I couldn't afford even Starbucks coffee if I didn't budget carefully...I am not from a rich ruling family. I am not from a ruling family. I have no power and no priveleged status ... I worked super hard to raise the funds for this expedition, and in doing so had to face and overcome many many sociocultural boundaries not just pitch a physical sport/sponsorship opportunity. To put it into perspective: As a teenager I was not allowed to travel as far as the cinema without a chaperone."

Michael Holloway: "I stand corrected. Great retort. Keep up the good work and good luck. And congratulations!"

Al-Qasimi's journal of the expedition is at www.elhamalqasimi.com.

What's up

April 28

7:30 p.m.: Concert by Jørn Bøgeberg Trio, featuring multiple styles. Tickets sold at the door. Galleri Svalbard.

May 2

Family ice fishing day on Linnévannet. Sleep in communal tent camp May 1, bring food for communal cooking and other supplies. Register by April 28 at karianne.steen@gmail.com. More information at <http://www.salten.no/content/view/1524/96>.

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "En Helt Vanlig Dag på Jobben," Norwegian comedy/drama, all ages. Huset.

May 6

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

Board of City Operation Authority meeting. Time not specified.

Næringsbygget, Smutthullet room.

May 7

9 p.m.: Board of growing enterprises meeting. Næringsbygget, Tundra room.

May 9

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

May 11

7 p.m.: Meeting of the local board. Lompensenteret, Mediateket.

May 12

7 p.m.: Presentation by filmmaker and author Jan Anders Diesen on Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition. Radisson.

May 16

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

May 17

7 a.m. - 10 p.m.: Traditional celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day.

May 18

7 p.m.: Brainstorming session for new cultural center. Næringsbygget, Smutthullet 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:

- *Oil spill response time longer in Arctic*
- *Whaling plan draws fire from all sides*
- *Is cleaner air bad for global warming?*
- *Melting Arctic may lead to interbreeding*