



Arctic fight: The tepid war?

Battle for resources, research overhyped as cooperation vital, experts say at Svalbard summit

Svalbard is Ground Zero in perhaps the ultimate world war as nations rush their best minds, mechanisms and military to the High North. But some political and science leaders gathering here last week said despite heated words and headlines, it's more an escalation of

achieving common goals than hostilities.

Headlines fixate on the Arctic being home to a majority of the world's unresolved border disputes, up to a quarter of the world's untapped oil, the future commercial highway for much of the northern hemisphere, and the battle for intellectual superiority in fields such as technology and science. But Norwegian Foreign Office Ambassador Otto Mamelund said he doesn't recognize the "race for the Arctic" depicted,

and the potential for future cooperation is much greater than conflict.

"You have to be there first to get what you want...that's the implication for a race for the Arctic," he said. "But we don't see a race for the Arctic. If one ship sails through the Arctic Ocean there is no hindrance for the second ship that comes after it."

"Also, if one nation develops its resources

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A bonfire, BBQ, bikinis – and goose bumps

Everything from swimsuits to parkas considered proper attire at summer solstice beach party

Inger-Johanne Mørk, 15, goes swimming at the beach once a year – after getting two months to soak up continuous sunlight and another two months to dry out before it sets.

Visitors dressed in parkas may have shivered in the 10C air watching Mørk submerge in water she estimates was 2C to 4C. But while warming up near a massive bonfire afterward, she said it was no sweat.

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Erie Haldorsen, 12, and Birgitte Bossart, 12, go for a dip in barely above freezing waters during the summer solstice party Saturday in Longyearbyen. Several hundred locals and tourists swam, ate barbecue and gathered around a 10-meter-wide bonfire to celebrate the "longest day."



Bjørn Frantzen, head of the Longyearbyen Field Biology Society, welcomes members and other bird enthusiasts to the opening of the group's new observatory Friday. The site behind Svalbard Snoscooterutleie is "perhaps the best delta" in the region for bird viewing, he said.

New bird observatory attracts traffic

Man and mammal bring coexisting versions of rush hour to delta

Given that Svalbard is one of the most pristine areas in the world, you wouldn't think one of its best bird-watching spots is a place with lots of vehicles and sewage.

But a new observatory overlooking Adventfjorden from behind Svalbard Snoscoot-

erutleie offers prime viewing from one of the most accessible places in the archipelago. Enthusiasts have long come to watch and collect data about more than 70 species flocking here by the thousands despite the close proximity to

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We screwed up!

The Spitsbergen Rock article in the June 16 issue incorrectly identified the band Figur Flint and singer Ronny Haugeland as Luxus Leverpostei and Bob Kåre, respectively. The Web and PDF versions have been corrected. We apologize and are listening to Lionel Richie this week as punishment.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.



Visitors search for birds using telescopes at the new observatory during its opening Friday. Officials with the Longyearbyen Field Biology Society said the center will be open to the public during warmer months, and accessible to schools and other local entities during the winter.

Bird center offers views, guidebooks

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a major road and an auto, snowmobile and ATV dealer where motorized group sightseeing tours frequently depart.

"This delta area we have here is perhaps the best delta in all of Svalbard," said Bjørn Frantzen, leader of the Longyearbyen Field Biology Society (LoFF). "The cars, the traffic you are speaking of does not really affect the delta."

Also, those visiting the simple nine-meter by four-meter wood building that opened Friday don't have to worry about a sewer stench, since a discharge pipe now extends three kilometers into the fjord. But Mikael Lagerborg, another society member who helped build the LoFF-huset, said at one time it played a role attracting ivory gulls to the delta.

"When the pipe was broken this was a real three-star restaurant for the gulls," he said, adding a carving of one is featured on the side of the not-quite-painted building.

An opening ceremony Friday afternoon allowed a handful of enthusiasts and some local high school students to scan the waters using a couple of telescopes and peruse a 39-page guide about bird life newly published by LoFF (available at www.loff.biz, along with observation reports, posters and other information about Svalbard bird life). In addition, they got to see the observatory's first permanent resident - an elder with a nest under the water-facing edge.

"That's our first real supporter," Frantzen said.

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

Seminar: Sound science is good politics

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on the continental shelf that doesn't stop a second nation from doing the same thing," Mamelund said.

Indeed, he added, nations can help each other because of the technology and other knowledge gained from such efforts.

Mamelund's remarks were made Friday at a "Geopolitics in the High Arctic" seminar at The Norwegian Scientific Academy For Polar Research in Longyearbyen. Experts from several countries spent the two-day event discussing past and future scientific projects, updated data about climate change and Svalbard's unique role as an international Arctic hub.

The theme "good science needed for sensible policies" was emphasized at a similar seminar when the academy opened last year, with one speaker saying "lack of knowledge is dangerous because it can lead to no action or misguided action based on faulty information." That focus continued this year as politics, de-



Jørn Thiede, a German polar researcher serving as an adjunct professor at The University Centre In Svalbard, discusses the need for international scientific cooperation during a seminar Friday in Longyearbyen.

spite the seminar's title, wasn't the overt theme among most of the nine officials who highlighted scientific matter in their presentations.

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



Partiers in a wide range of dress gather around a massive bonfire at Saturday's midsummer party. Among the bravest was Glenn Huddle, center, who took time to down a cold beer after a swim before putting the rest of his clothes back on.

Midpoint of 4-month-long day passes

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"It was a lot more warm this year," she said.

Plenty of her classmates and a few hardy adults braved the waves, while others indulged in the comforts of barbecue, portable lounge chairs and music during the midsummer party Saturday at the Svalbard Sailing Club. Organizers claim the annual event is probably Longyearbyen's biggest outdoor bash, with children's game booths, dozens of picnic tables and the 15-meter-wide bonfire among the places to gather.

"Apart from the membership fees, it is our main source of revenue. So for once you have a good reason to drink beer," the club's invitation notes.

Glenn Huddle, a thirtysomething Longyearbyen resident, was one of those hoisting a well-deserved beer while dripping wet in his swim trunks by the bonfire. He claimed he went 100 meters into the water and, like Mørk, guessed the temperature was "oh, about four" degrees.

Swimsuits were a decided minority when it came to party attire – indeed, it's hard to say a trendy outfit exists at a bash where threads range from bikinis to heavy coats, scarves and hats (and, no, it wasn't just the tourists in heav-



Phonthypa Seesatsu, 11, tries to knock over a pyramid of cans during the summer solstice party. Youths spent much of the evening at game booths, in the water and feeding the bonfire.

ier gear).

Sailing club members spent the evening grilling and serving 30 kilograms of pork chops, 25 kilograms of hamburgers, 20 kilograms of potato salad and plenty of other food to long lines of partiers – plus at least a few cans of beer. Tunes from the overhead speakers were as diverse as the outfits, ranging from Johnny Cash to techno.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Limits on helicopter rescues planned due to costs, risks

Restrictions on when helicopters are deployed for rescues are planned by the Svalbard governor's office, citing an increase in missions that can cost up to 50,000 kroner. "There is a danger that people can take chances they otherwise would not have taken in the knowledge that we have a well-developed emergency rescue," said Sgt. Erik Nygaard, adding officials may have contributed to those expectations with their current practices. There have been 52 missions so far this year, compared to 72 in 2008 and 60 in 2007. Nygaard said "nobody has the right" to an automatic rescue and the safety of the crew must also be considered.

Politicians divided about future of coal mining in Svea

Mixed opinions about future Svea coal mining operations were voiced by Parliament members meeting last week. Concerns about ensuring environmental protection remains the top policy priority and mining being a contributor to global warming were voiced by Christian Democratic and Socialist Left members. Norwegian Labor and Centre party officials said mining is a vital economic base for keeping Svalbard a family-oriented community.

More UNIS funding supported

Funding needs to be increased at The University Centre In Svalbard, members of Parliament generally agreed last week. The endorsement is based on recommendations in the Svalbard long-term strategy plan released earlier this year. "It was a great moment to sit in Parliament and hear the consensus," said UNIS Director Gunnar Sand. "But I want to see money on the table before I think of it."

Seabed earthquake strikes

A magnitude 5.1 earthquake occurred Sunday about 280 km southwest of Svalbard. No damage was reported and several similar quakes have occurred during the past year.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday

Cloudy, late rain or snow. S winds at 8 km/h. High 2C (-1C wind chill), low -2C (0C wind chill).

Thursday

Rain and snow, turning to rain. NNE winds at 9 km/h. High 3C (1C wind chill), low -1C (-2C wind chill).

Friday

Mostly cloudy. WNW winds 8 km/h. High 2C (0C wind chill), low -1C (-2C wind chill).

Saturday

Sunny. W winds at 8 km/h. High 1C (-1C wind chill), low -1C (-2C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, sunny, 1C (1C), 0C (-3C); Monday, rain and wind, 3C (-1C), -1C (-5C); Tuesday, cloudy, 1C (0C), 1C (-1C); Wednesday, cloudy and moderate wind, 2C (-1C), 1C (-1C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Perny Steinset Iversen, right, dishes up soft-serve ice cream shortly after Mix Isbjørn opens Friday in its new and larger location in Lompensenteret.

Selling ice in Arctic easy at new Mix

Swarms devour soft-serve, slushes, burgers and other new offerings at expanded kiosk

It's not like there's a shortage of slush in Longyearbyen, but Gry Sneltuedt found herself overwhelmed by demand for it anyhow, churning out 90 liters of a sugar-infused variety from a new machine the first day her Mix Isbjørn kiosk opened in a new and larger location in Lompensenteret.

The 177-square-meter shop, twice the size of the former location, was packed much of Friday as curious locals and visitors from a 3,400-passenger cruise ship checked out the much-expanded snack bar, souvenir and grocery offerings. Most Mix franchises focus on prepared foods, confections, lottery tickets and publications, but Sneltuedt is among those making additions to fit the community's needs.

"If you come to a Mix kiosk in a small town in Norway they all have their own concept," she said. "For us it's the souvenirs and it's a little bit of the food like they have at Svalbardbutikken."

The idea isn't to compete with Longyearbyen's only supermarket, but allowing people to buy essentials during holidays and hours when it is closed, she said.

On opening day locals showed the most enthusiasm for new snack bar items including the slushes, soft-serve ice cream and hamburg-

ers, Sneltuedt said. There's also a couple aisles and a large refrigerator/freezer shelf unit with more basic provisions, compared to a few small shelves before. She said she'll seek to further modify the store to suit the needs of locals when tourist season winds down.

"The thing I want to do is when we come to August and September is ask people what they want," she said.

Sneltuedt, who moved to Longyearbyen in 1993 after working intermittently for years in Ny Ålesund, opened Mix with two partners where Kroa is now. The kiosk relocated to a space across the parking lot from Lompensenteret and Sneltuedt eventually bought out the other partners.

She said two years remained on the rental agreement there, but she was unable to extend it and therefore made the move out of necessity. Available retail space is scarce, but the current location was vacated by Svalbardbutikken when they moved their electronic and other non-food items into their main building last year.

Sneltuedt said she signed the new rental agreement May 5, and construction and other arrangements proved to be the biggest challenge as a project estimated to take eight weeks was completed in less than six.

"I was afraid things weren't going to work because we were going to fast," she said. There's still a few problems to be worked out, "but there's always going to be something."

For the ultimate chill, get wired

Icepeople.net is updated daily with news about Svalbard and the rest of the polar world. Among the stories not fitting into our vast four-page print edition:

- Underground habitat in Svalbard the home of future generations?
- Spanish fleet, caught illegally fishing in Svalbard, gets aid money to reduce activity
- Seed vault may be a part of global disaster, some worry
- Polar bears not dying out, scientists say in book about popular 'scare stories'
- Failure of whaling talks could lead to collapse of international commission

Briefly

Local board endorses lowering voting age

Longyearbyen will join other Norwegian cities seeking to lower the voting age for local elections to 16 after the municipal board endorsed the proposal June 16.

"It is important to encourage young people to more politically active and conscious," a board declaration states. "This will lead to greater commitment to the political issues that interest young people. Moreover, it is important to provide education about democracy and political systems in cooperation with the school and the local board. Such a scheme would create more politician confidence and trust, and thus also in the long term lead to increased new recruitment in Longyearbyen government."

The test project will lower the voting age from 18 for council elections in 2011. The deadline for local governments to apply to Norway's Justice Department is July 1.

Austria sparked a movement among European countries in 2007 by lowering the voting age to 16 for all elections. Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland have lowered the age on a limited basis.

Cultural center work now live via webcam

Construction of Longyearbyen's new cultural center can now be followed live via Web camera, according to an announcement today.

Still photos updated every minute offer a rooftop view of the city's main pedestrian walkway. The new center, scheduled for completion in October of 2010 as an addition to the current municipal building, is still in the excavation stage.

The camera is accessible by clicking the picture icon on the left side of municipality's home page at www.lokalstyre.no.

What's up

June 28

8 p.m.: Movie: "Gran Torino," U.S. action/drama, ages 15 and up, Huset.

July 5

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Secret Life of Bees," U.S. drama, ages 11 and up, Huset.

July 16

7 p.m.: Exhibit opening, watercolors of Arctic fossils and plants by Hedvig Wright Østern, Galleri Svalbard. On display until Aug. 31.

July 23

7 p.m.: Solo concert by free improvisational jazz pianist Maarten Regtien, Galleri Svalbard.