



Top LNS executives resign

Charges of corruption in deals with Store Norske result in 'shock' as CEO, chairman leave

Two top executives at Leonhard Nilsen & Sønner AS (LNS) resigned this week as both were charged with gross corruption in dealings with Store Norske and its former leader Robert Hermansen.

The departures of LNS Administrative Director Malvin Nilsen and Chairman Frode Nilsen were announced by the company today as the criminal charges were disclosed publicly

for the first time.

"We strongly regret that the Norwegian authorities are pursuing these charges," the company wrote in a prepared statement. "This has come as a shock to us all. Both the company and the persons who are charged are set to cooperate and be transparent in relation to the ongoing investigation. If it turns out that Malvin Nilsen and Chairman Frode Nilsen made errors in the Store Norske case they need to take responsibility for it."

The charges stem from contracts LNS
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Frode Nilsen, above left, and Malvin Nilsen resigned as administrative director and chairman, respectively, of Leonhard Nilsen & Sønner AS.



The Kongsberg Satellite Services' Station receives a glowing show of Northern Lights during a previous winter. Auroral activity in Svalbard has fizzled to less than half of that seen in 2003 as a low in the 11-year solar cycle is lingering, according to meteorologists. Photo courtesy of NASA.

Northern Lights at 100-year low

Auroral activity half of 2003 peak, but visitors not in a dark mood

The skies are staying dark an unusually long time – and not just because of the rapidly approaching polar night.

The Northern Lights, or aurora borealis, are at their lowest level in more than 100 years, the Finnish Meteorological Institute said today.

The lights generally follow an 11-year solar cycle and were visible from Svalbard almost every night of the auroral season during the last peak in 2003. But that figure has dropped by more than half, said Noora Par-

tamies, a researcher for the institute.

"The solar minimum was officially in 2008, but this minimum has been going on and on and on," she told AFP. "Only in the past half a year have we seen more activity, but we don't really know whether we're coming out of this minimum."

Karl Våtvik, co-operator of Svalbard Villmarkssenter, which offers tours to view the Northern Lights, said there has been a noticeable decline in recent seasons compared

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Shutdown at Ny-Ålesund?

Dispute about fixing decaying fuel tanks could force evacuation of research station at end of Oct.

An escalating disagreement about fuel tanks in need of maintenance may result in the shutdown and evacuation of Ny-Ålesund next month, according to officials involved in the matter.

The possibility is highly unlikely, said top executives with Kings Bay, which owns the international research site, and some scientists there didn't express strong concerns about the impasse.

But there appears to be little movement as an Oct. 30 deadline for resolving the matter approaches and an article published Sunday at *Svalbardposten's* Web site states tensions have "evolved from bad to worse over the past year."

"So far nothing has happened and nothing

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Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Copy editor

Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

Mailing address

Icepeople
Vei 210 -2- 13
Longyearbyen, Svalbard
9170
Norway

Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

Web site

www.icepeople.net

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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 noteworthy debut party



Inger-Johanne Mørk, left, and Simen Henriksen, will unveil and perform songs from their debut CD "Snøstjerna" at a release party at 7 p.m. Friday at Barentz Pub. Mørk said the five-song collection, recorded at Huset, costs 89 kroner and should be available in local stores within a few weeks. She said the album may also eventually be available online through iTunes. Photo courtesy of Longyearbyen Lokalstyre.

Briefly

90-year-old Russian ship sets Svalbard sea record

Russia's 90-year-old *Sedov* became the first large sailing ship to visit Svalbard during the fall and winter seasons after a voyage to Barentsburg and Longyearbyen last week.



While in Barentsburg on Thursday the crew played football with miners from Spitsbergen and performed a concert on the ship, said Tatyana Zhitnik, a spokeswoman for Murmansk State Technical University, which owns the vessel. The ship docked Friday in Longyearbyen, where it also visited in 2006, offering tours to residents.

The *Sedov*, built in 1920 and used by Russia's military until it was given to the university in 1991, will next be used to explore Russia's continental shelf, Zhitnik said.

New baggage fees for SAS take effect Friday

New fees for checked baggage on Scandinavian Airlines take effect Friday, with passengers checking more than one piece most likely to be affected.

Economy-class travelers on European flights can check one bag weighing up to 23 kg. free, an increase from the previous limit of 20 kg. Economy Extra can check two bags with a total weight of 23 kg. and business class can check two bags with a total of 32 kg.

But the per-kilo charge for exceeding the

limit has been replaced with a flat fee for each bag weighing 23 kg. or less, and with a total dimension of up to 158 cm.

Extra-bag fees are 170 kroner for travel within Norway, 250 kroner for Europe and 350 kroner for other continents. The amounts can increase significantly for items exceeding the permitted dimensions. The fees will be reduced the amount of VAT for Svalbard travelers.

Full details are at www.flysas.com.

Man overcomes ice, bear to sail around Svalbard

A Bærum man has completed a sailing circumnavigation of Svalbard, overcoming ice and a visit by a polar bear during the five-week excursion.

Jon Amtrup, 42, said he had "some luck" guiding the *Explorer North* around the archipelago after launching Aug. 7 from Tromsø. A three-member crew accompanied him, which was replaced by a new trio halfway through the journey.

Ice was heavy around many islands, but advisories from a person stationed on land offered guidance. They also came within 50 meters of a polar bear at Fleur de Lys, which Amtrup drove off with a rifle shot between its legs.

"It was a situation we just had to deal with," Amtrup said. "None of us were particularly afraid."

No sailboats completed the trip in 2009 and only two did so this year, Amtrup said.





Heavy-duty vehicles operated by Leonhard Nilsen & Sønner AS carry portable buildings and other equipment along the route between Longyearbyen and the Svea coal mine. Two top officials at the company have resigned as they face charges of corruption in financial dealings with Store Norske, which owns the mine. Photo courtesy of LNS.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
 VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Owners: Housing sales cool, rentals hot in Longyearbyen

Housing sales are cool, but the rental market is hot in Longyearbyen, according to private property owners. Roy Albrigtsen said nobody was interested in buying his apartment when he put it on the market this spring, but current rental prices don't make that a problem. "I get more in rent than I pay in installments," he said. Snorre Jenssen, another apartment owner, said people she talks with call the sales market lackluster. "It's been a bit strange, really, because there has been apartments for sale in all price ranges."

No-alcohol policy means big changes at new center eatery

A decision not to allow everyday serving of alcohol at Longyearbyen's new cultural center will force Spitsbergen Travel to "change the entire business concept," said Trygve Steen, the company's administrative director. The municipal board approved the policy at its Sept. 21 meeting, but will allow alcohol to be served at private parties and on an application basis for events such as Polarjazz. Spitsbergen Travel is planning a 2 million kroner investment into the new center's kitchen and ventilation, and the decision is a disappointment since the concept of the eateries at the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel the company operates focus on food and alcohol.

Municipal workers unhappy with higher rent proposal

Longyearbyen's municipal employees are objecting to an increase in rent to pay for a 10-year backlog of housing maintenance. "We will not pay for maintenance that has been bad before," said Tom Ramberg, head of the city's education union. Nine unions authoring a letter opposing the increase to 30 kroner per square meter, up from 27.3 kroner, effective in July 2011. Rent would also increase two kroner a year from 2012 to 2019. Municipal Administrator Ivar Undheim said there are three possible solutions, with alternatives including seeking an increase in state housing funds and an increased allocation from the municipal general fund.

Top LNS executives step down

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reached providing logistical and transportation services for Store Norske's mining operations at Svea. Audits found the contracts were far above market value, of unusually long length and reached without a competitive bidding process. In addition, Hermansen received a private loan of 1 million kroner from LNS, which also invested 2 million in a separate company he headed.

Hermansen, administrative director of Store Norske from 1999 to 2008, also faces

charges and resigned all of his public board positions earlier this year. Also charged is Kjetil Onstad, a former consultant for Store Norske, and transportation subcontracting company Jebsens Rederi.

At a special meeting today, officials elected Inge K. Hansen as the new chairman of LNS, Bjørnar Olsen as the new chairman of LNS Spitsbergen and Dag Rindal Brox the acting administrative director of LNS.

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

Auroral activity lowest in a century

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to earlier years. But it hasn't affected the number of visitors taking tours or their satisfaction.

"They have never been here before so it's new to them," he said.

The Northern Lights are triggered by solar winds crashing into the Earth and being drawn to the magnetic poles, wreaking havoc on electrons in the parts of the atmosphere known as the ionosphere and magnetosphere. A dimming

of the lights is a signal that activity on the sun causing solar winds, such as solar flares and sun spots, is also quieting down.

Partamies said this is the first time researchers have been able to use a network of modern observation stations, including the one in Svalbard, to track a solar cycle when it becomes as severely disrupted as it seems now.

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

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mostly cloudy. SW winds at 5 km/h. High -3C (3C wind chill), low -3C (-3C wind chill).	Cloudy w/ mixed rain and snow. SSE winds at 3 km/h. High 2C (2C wind chill), low -3C (-3C wind chill).	Rain turning to sleet. SSW winds at 4 km/h. High -1C (-1C wind chill), low -2C (-2C wind chill).	Sleet. SSW winds at 1 km/h. High 1C (1C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy with occasional sleet, 1C (1C), 0C (0C); Monday, sleet, 1C (1C), 1C (1C); Tuesday, sleet, 1C (1C), 1C (1C); Wednesday, sleet clearing to clouds by mid-morning, 1C (1C), 0C (0C).

Data provided by yr.no



The Kings Bay Arctic Marine Laboratory, above center, and other facilities at Ny-Ålesund are under threat of being evacuated next month if a dispute about providing fuel and repairing storage tanks is not resolved. Photo courtesy of the Scottish Marine Institute.

Exec: Fuel impasse will be resolved

DISPUTE, from page 1

suggests that something will happen within the time limit that expires in five weeks," the article states.

The possibility of evacuating Ny-Ålesund was rejected by Kings Bay Director Roger Jakobsen when asked this week how far in advance planning and carrying out such an operation might begin.

"I don't think we actually have to evacuate at all because this issue is so important there will be a solution," he said.

Jakobsen said researchers he has talked to who work at the station say they want the matter resolved, but none have announced plans to cancel projects or abandon them early.

The dispute concerns Ny-Ålesund's fuel tank facility, which is owned by Esso Norge and provides power for the community. The Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency has ordered the tanks be brought into compliance with emissions standards.

Esso Norge, expressing a desire to be rid of the aging facility, is proposing paying Kings Bay 500,000 kroner to take over. Kings Bay officials estimate bringing the site into compli-

ance will cost considerably more and is demanding 3.5 million kroner.

Esso Norge is now threatening to remove the tank facility altogether if the matter remains unresolved by the Oct. 30 deadline.

The oil company is also demanding an 850,000 kroner freight payment to bring 500,000 liters of diesel to Ny-Ålesund next month, according to *Svalbardposten*. The newspaper states an Esso Norge attorney has declared local government officials close the waters there on Oct. 31 and there are limited weather-dependent opportunities for travel after Oct. 1, but the Svalbard governor's office denies such a policy exists.

Jakobsen said to his knowledge Ny-Ålesund has never been evacuated or faced such a standoff. He said alternative means of keeping the station open are being discussed in addition to the ongoing negotiations, but "we cannot tell what the alternatives are at the moment."

"We will have an agreement with Esso Norge one way or another, I'm sure of that," he said.

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

Expansion of heavy oil ban draws fire

Business critical of government proposal to expand existing ban to most Svalbard areas by 2015

A proposed change in the nine-year-old Svalbard Environmental Protection Act to ban heavy oil from ships starting in 2015 is drawing heat from the tourism and other industries.

The change sought by Norway's Ministry of Environment would expand an existing ban for protected areas in east Svalbard and the three largest national parks in west Spitsbergen. An exception would be made for transportation to Longyearbyen, Barentsburg and the Store Norske mine at Svea.

Svalbard Tourism, in a statement opposing

the measure, said it could mean the end of large-ship tourism in the affected areas, noting 27 of 29 overseas cruise vessels used heavy oil. The agency stated tourism businesses in Longyearbyen could lose up to 40 percent of their revenue as a result.

Opponents also fear it may impact other industries, including ending Russian fish transport shipments around Bjørnøya, according to NRK. Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø told the news agency the ban is the most effective way to prevent an oil disaster, but is waiting further study of the proposal's impacts before taking a position on the proposal.

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

What's up

Oct. 1

7 p.m.: CD release party: Inger Johanne Mørk and Simen Henriksen present and perform songs from their debut "Snøstjerna." Barentz Pub.

Oct. 2-3

Gathering of invited participants to prepare for new cultural center. Svalbardhallen. Begins at 10 a.m. Oct. 2.

Oct. 4

7 p.m.: Book launch: "Persistent Memories – Pyramiden – a Soviet mining town in the high Arctic." Archaeologists Hein Bjerck and Bjørnar Olsen, and photo artist Elin Andreassen present their work based on a 2006 trip to the historic settlement. Svalbard Museum.

Oct. 8-10

School autumn holiday.

Tango class. More information available at elise.stromseng@unis.no.

Oct. 12

10 a.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

Oct. 14

2 p.m.: Board for Culture and Leisure Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

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

Oct. 15

9 a.m.: Control of Growing Enterprises Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

Oct. 21-24

Dark Season Blues. Artist, ticket and other information at <http://blues.svalbard.com>.

Oct. 25

6 p.m.: Guided tour of new Longyearbyen Cultural Center for organizations interested in using the facility.

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:

- *Swedes 1st to Pole – if not eaten by bear*
- *In Russia, BP sees a second act*
- *Finding aviators buried in Greenland ice*
- *Arctic mosque on barge trip to Inuvik*