

Arctic 'doomsday vault' stocks up on more food seeds

● The latest shipment will bring to around 1.05 million the number of seed varieties placed in three underground alcoves which form the Arctic "doomsday vault", known also as Noah's Ark

Oslo

An Arctic "doomsday vault" is set Tuesday to receive 60,000 samples of seeds from around the world as the biggest global crop reserve stocks up for a global catastrophe.

The seeds are to be deposited in the vault inside a mountain near Longyearbyen on Spitsbergen Island in Norway's Svalbard archipelago, about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) from the North Pole.

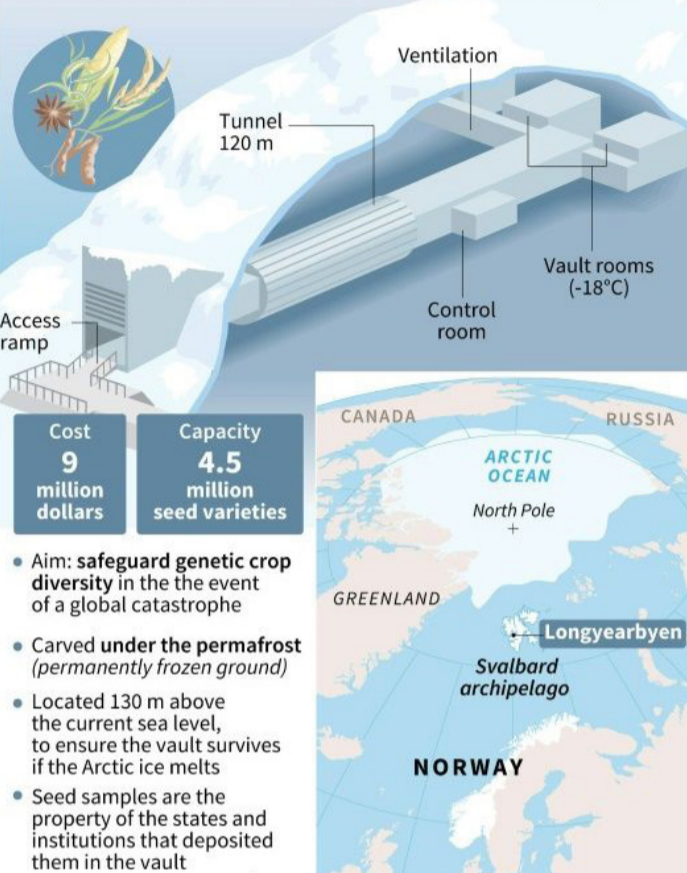
"As the pace of climate change and biodiversity loss increases, there is new urgency surrounding efforts to save food crops at risk of extinction," said Stefan Schmitz, who manages the reserve as head of the Crop Trust.

"The large scope of today's seed deposit reflects worldwide concern about the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss on food production," Schmitz added.

"But more importantly it

The Noah's Ark of plants

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault contains 1.05 million seed samples



Cost
9 million dollars

Capacity
4.5 million seed varieties

- Aim: safeguard genetic crop diversity in the event of a global catastrophe
- Carved under the permafrost (permanently frozen ground)
- Located 130 m above the current sea level, to ensure the vault survives if the Arctic ice melts
- Seed samples are the property of the states and institutions that deposited them in the vault

demonstrates a growing global commitment -- from the institutions and countries that have made deposits today and indeed the world -- to the conservation and use of the crop diversity that is crucial for farmers in their efforts to adapt to chang-

ing growing conditions," he said.

Common as well as wilder varieties of grains are being sent by institutions in countries as diverse as Brazil, the United States, Germany, Morocco, Mali, Israel and Mongolia.

The latest shipment will



bring to around 1.05 million the number of seed varieties placed in three underground alcoves which form the vault, known also as Noah's Ark.

Aimed at safeguarding biodiversity in the face of climate change, wars and other natural and man-made disasters, the seed bank has the capacity to hold up to 4.5 million batches, or twice the number of crop varieties believed to exist in the world today.

It was launched in 2008 with financing from Norway.

Its usefulness was spotlighted during Syria's civil war when researchers were able in 2015 to retrieve from the vault duplicates of grains lost in the destruction of Aleppo.

The countries and institutions that deposit seeds in the vault retain ownership over them and can retrieve them when necessary.

Paradoxically, the vault was itself hit by climate change.

In 2016, water seeped into the vault's tunnel entrance due to permafrost melting as Arctic temperatures climbed unusually high.

Egypt's ex-president Hosni Mubarak dead at 91



A 2015 photo shows ousted Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in a Cairo court between his sons Gamal (L) and Alaa

Cairo

Egypt's former long-time president Hosni Mubarak died Tuesday at age 91 at Cairo's Galaa military hospital, his family and state TV said.

His son Alaa Mubarak tweeted that "this morning my father, president Mubarak, passed away".

Mubarak's brother-in-law, General Mounir Thabet, told AFP that the family was at the hospital and that the presidential office would organise the funeral.

Mubarak had long been battling an illness and recently been admitted to an intensive care unit.

He took power in 1981, following the assassination of former president Anwar al-Sadat, and remained head of state for three decades.

He was overthrown after

three weeks of mass protests that started on January 25, 2011.

His toppling came amid mounting popular anger triggered partly by rampant police brutality and by 2010 parliamentary elections which were widely slammed as rigged.

Mubarak faced multiple charges after his overthrow, including over the deaths of protesters in 2011 and corruption.

After years of protracted trials and legal proceedings, he was acquitted on most charges.

Under Mubarak's 30-year-rule, Egyptians lived under emergency laws that gave sweeping powers to the country's security agencies.

The former president had survived multiple assassination attempts including one by Islamist militants in 1995 in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

World's oldest man dies in Japan at 112



Chitetsu Watanabe after being recognised as the world's oldest living male. He has died away aged 112

Tokyo

A Japanese man recently named the world's oldest living male has died aged 112, a local official said yesterday.

Chitetsu Watanabe, who was born on March 5, 1907 in Niigata, north of Tokyo, died on Sunday at his nursing home in the same prefecture, the official said.

The news came less than two weeks after he was officially recognised by Guinness World Records.

Watanabe, who had five children, said the secret to longevity was to "not get angry and keep a smile on your face".

He admitted a penchant for sweets such as custard pudding and ice cream.

The oldest man in Japan is now Issaku Tomoe, who is 110 years old, according to Jiji Press, although it was not clear if Tomoe holds the title globally.

The oldest living person is also Japanese, Kane Tanaka, a 117-year-old woman.

Japan has one of the world's highest life expectancies and has been home to several people recognised as among the oldest humans to have ever lived.

They include Jiroemon Kimura, the longest-living man on record, who died soon after his 116th birthday in June 2013.

The oldest verified person -- Jeanne Louise Calment of France -- died in 1997 at the age of 122, according to Guinness.

Last marshal of the Soviet Union Dmitry Yazov dies

AFP | Moscow

The last marshal of the Soviet Union Dmitry Yazov, who participated in a coup against then USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, has died, news agencies reported.

Russia's defence ministry said in a statement carried by agencies that Yazov had died in Moscow at the age of 95 following a "serious and prolonged illness".

Defence minister between 1987 and 1991, Yazov participated in a coup attempt against Gorbachev in August 1991, a year after being awarded the rank of marshal.



The last marshal of the Soviet Union Dmitry Yazov (right), with President Vladimir Putin, has died aged 95

The coup failed and its leaders were arrested three days later, but the attempted overthrow heralded the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was finally dissolved in December 1991.

Yazov was released from prison in 1993 and granted amnesty for his role in the failed coup in 1994.

Yazov's death leaves just one leader of the failed coup still

alive, Oleg Baklanov, a member of the Communist Party's central committee.

Last year, Yazov was sentenced in absentia in Vilnius for war crimes during a 1991 uprising in Lithuania against Soviet rule.

He remained a revered figure in Russia. On February 4, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu awarded him the "For Merit to the Fatherland" award.

He was also decorated by President Vladimir Putin, who awarded him the Order of Honor in 2004 and the Order Alexander Nevsky in 2014.

Bangladesh's biggest zoo calls time on elephant rides

Dhaka

Bangladesh's biggest zoo has called time on elephant rides following a long-running campaign by activists.

The ban was quietly introduced last month, Dhaka zoo curator Nurul Islam said, adding it would never be lifted.

"We agree that these rides were not good for the animals," Islam said, acknowledging the efforts of animal rights groups.

"Elephant rides are a kind of animal abuse and cruelty towards the animal."

Islam said the elephants had previously been made to give rides to up to 1,000 spectators a day before the ban.

"The mahouts (elephant caretakers) are unhappy that we stopped a source of their



A mahout guides a decorated elephant in Dhaka

income, but it was clear that the animals were suffering for the

rides," he added. Rubaiya Ahmad of the Bang-

ladesh Animal Welfare Foundation welcomed the news as "fantastic".

