

Arctic gas push threatens reindeer herders

YAMAL-NENETS, Russia: The flare stack at the Yardeiskoye gas well burns brightly through the long Arctic night, lighting up the treeless tundra in northern Russia as compressors fill the air with an incessant whine. Indigenous Nenets reindeer herders say oil and gas operations in the Yamal region - exploration activity that includes hundreds of wells and dozens of trains and tankers - are polluting the environment and harming their animals' health.

But avoiding the gas fields in Yamal, 2,000 km (1,250 miles) northeast of Moscow, is becoming harder as fossil fuel infrastructure creeps across the region, spurred on by tax breaks passed in March as part of Russia's new Arctic development strategy.

At the same time, the strain on the Nenets' traditional livelihood is compounded by climate change, with extreme weather events and disease outbreaks killing tens of thousands of reindeer over the past few decades, the herders say. "If we don't convey to people that the earth is being destroyed, then indigenous peoples will be destroyed," herder and activist Yeiko Serotetto told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in his family's reindeer-hide tent.

"With such barbaric methods of conquering the Arctic, in 100 years (reindeer herding) won't exist."

Lichen under the ice

People in Yamal have been partially domesticating reindeer for hunting, transport, food, clothing and shelter for much of the past two millennia. Today, about 10,000 reindeer herders in Yamal - who make up one-fifth of Russia's Nenets population - migrate up to 800 miles (1,287 km) across the tundra in the course of each year.

They travel from the forest's northern edge to the Arctic coast, where summer winds give the reindeer a brief respite from mosquitoes and botflies as they build up fat.

With the Arctic warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the planet, according to the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, "rain-on-snow" events have become more common across the region. When temperatures fall below freezing after such rainstorms, they create a nearly impenetrable crust of ice over the lichen that reindeer rely on for

food over the winter.

Rain-on-snow events have worsened over the past 15 years, according to locals and Arctic experts. The biggest in recent years killed about 61,000 reindeer in the fall and winter of 2013-14.

Warming weather also led to a record heat wave in Yamal in 2016 that caused an anthrax outbreak, killing more than 2,650 reindeer and a 12-year-old Nenets boy. A state report said that unprecedented thawing of permafrost soil had unleashed anthrax spores that had been trapped in a frozen reindeer carcass for at least 75 years.

During a hot summer in 2018, the Serotetto family also lost nearly a third of its herd to necrobacillosis, a bacterial foot infection that a Norwegian study suggested is more active in warm, moist weather.

"(The herders) have never lacked the confidence in their skills to navigate what's happening, but right now they're getting worried," noted University of Lapland professor Bruce Forbes, an author of a study looking at changes in the region.

Gas expansion

Part of the threat to the Nenets way of life stems from the natural gas beneath their animals' hooves. Almost half of the European Union's growing gas imports came from Russia last year, much of them from Yamal, where the government claims to have more than a fifth of the world's reserves.

Last month, President Vladimir Putin signed an Arctic fossil fuel stimulus package that slashes taxes on new liquefied natural gas and gas chemical projects to 0 percent for the first 12 years.

Despite the plunge in energy prices amid the coronavirus outbreak, oil and gas projects are pushing ahead. Novatek and Gazprom, two of Russia's largest gas producers, already have several large operations in the area and both have publicly stated they will keep building new gas terminals, refineries, pipelines and fields through the pandemic.

The Yamal region uses revenues from energy to pay herders a monthly subsidy of 5,000 roubles (\$66), and oil and gas companies often give away snowmobiles to the top wrestlers and sleigh racers at the annual Reindeer Herders' Day celebrations.



Reindeer herder Yeiko Serotetto cuts frozen fish for breakfast at his family's camp in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Region of Russia. — Reuters

But many locals and activists say that is not enough compensation for the environmental impact of massive hydrocarbon projects. A Russian state-funded study published last year found that concentrations of mercury were above safe levels in the soil at all 20 sites examined in central Yamal, linking the high levels to air pollution. The governor's office told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a statement that Yamal residents are given the chance to have their say on hydrocarbon projects through letters and public hearings.

But Serotetto and other herders said they are not informed in time to come in from the tundra to attend the meetings.

Skinnier reindeer

Though the wellheads and pipelines take up a small percentage of the region's territory, scientists have said they have an outsized effect on pastoralism. Most herding routes up the Yamal peninsula have to cross a railway and various pipelines and roads, creating bottlenecks for migrating families and cutting off access to campsites and grazing areas.

Gas companies have raised some of their pipelines to allow reindeer to pass underneath and drillers lay tarpaulin across roads to help reindeer cross. Still, a 2007 Norwegian study has found that industrial disturbances can decrease reindeer reproduction and calf survival rates. — Reuters

CLINIC
PAGE

248 33 199

PLASTIC & RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

These services include, but are not limited to, the below:

<p>Non Surgical Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fillers • Botox injections • Body fat transfer <p>Body Surgeries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liposuction • Augmentation or reduction mammoplasty • Body contouring & body lift 	<p>Facial Plastic Surgeries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgery of the eyelids (Blepharoplasty) • Nose surgeries (Rhinoplasty) • Face lift <p>Reconstructive Surgeries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast reconstruction • Congenital defects 	
---	--	--

1808088 taibahospital.com

f @taibahospital

PLASTIC AND RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Dr. Ahmed Al Borji
Specialist of Plastic Surgery

1808088 taibahospital.com

f @taibahospital

E

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist

Ophthalmology Services

Cataract Surgery

Glaucoma

Retina

General Ophthalmology

Follow-Up All Treatments

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinicw

WhatsApp Us +965-6000 2184

1808282

1808282

1808282

To advertise on this Page

Call: 24833199 ext:101,102

To advertise on this Page

Call: 24833199 ext:101,102 or Direct line: 24835616 / 24835617

or email: ads@kuwaittimes.com

WELCOME

Dr. Tammam Abou Ali
Consultant ENT, Head & Neck, Facial Plastic Surgeon.

Relationship of the royal college of surgeons in UK and Ireland.
10 years work experience in Ear, Nose & Throat.
Ex-Head of ENT department in Farwani Hospital, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
10 years work experience in UK and Ireland.

- Endoscopic Sinus Surgery
- Septoplasty and turbinate reduction surgery by laser or RF
- Snoring and OSAP Surgery
- Rhinoplasty with open and closed techniques
- Microscopic Middle Ear Surgery and Tympanoplasty
- Salivary gland and parotid surgery
- Thyroid and parathyroid surgery
- Micro laryngeal surgery

1 888 883

www.qmc-kuwait.com

qmcckuwait

Our Doctors Provide care For the entire Family

Book your appointments today!

Dr. Kiran Turaka
Ophthalmologist

Dr. Zareena Zahir
Ophthalmologist

Dr. Hasan Khan
Senior Cardiologist

Dr. P. Seshendra Nath
Orthopedic Consultant (AUSTRALIA)
Specialised in Neck, Shoulder Hip and Knee

50721507

24551555

www.exircenterkw.com

EXIR MEDICAL SUBSPECIALITIES CENTER

Block No.4 Jahra - Kuwait

WE ACCEPT ALL MAJOR INSURANCES

Tel: 24568857 / 24568859 info@exircenterkw.com www.exircenterkw.com @exircenterkw