BELGIAN ANTARCTIC RESEARCH EXPEDITION RESUPPLY SHIP AKADEMIK FEDOROV SAILS FOR ANTARCTICA



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After days of fierce windy weather, calm blue skies appeared in Cape Town and the Akademik Fedorov was finally able to set sail for its long 10 day journey to Breid Bay, Antarctica, the unloading site for the Belgian Antarctic Research Expedition (BELARE).

The Fedorov is an ice breaker belonging to the Russian Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute which is capable of travelling at about 15-20 knots per hour and can break ice up to 2m thick.

The vessel is heading to Antarctica to resupply various research stations including Princess Elisabeth. For BELARE it is carrying 15 containers destined for resupplying and maintaining Princess Elisabeth Antarctica research station. The shipment includes building materials - wood, beams, doors etc - needed for the planned renovations and construction of a new two story accommodation annex to replace a temporary structure that was built 10 years ago. The new addition will improve the station's living and working space and will add extra stability to the building infrastructure.

Some of the other containers hold food provisions to keep the scientists and crew fed for the season, as well as equipment and tools. They also hold four smaller sledges that were built in Cape Town to carry loads over short distances.

There is also a new snow melter that was built in Cape Town. It's an improved system with better insulation and its own heating system to improve energy efficiency.

The cargo also includes a new fuel drum compacter. A normal container can only fit about 80 drums, and it is costly and inefficient to ship empty drums back to Cape Town. Now with the drum crusher, several thousand metal drums being stored at Princess Elisabeth can be compacted and sent back to Cape Town to be recycled over the coming years.

Alain Hubert and his team are already on the way to Breid Bay to meet the ship. Once the Fedorov arrives at the fast ice edge, they will have prepared a platform to unload the containers onto large sledges. A Prinoth snow tractor can pull 3 sledges with containers. The route back to the Station is about 20 hours of travel (220km uphill) to Princess Elisabeth.

They will need to do two traverses to get all the cargo back to PEA. The building crew has already demolished the old accommodation annex and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the building material, and the snow melter and work is going ahead at a brisk pace.

Several improvements to the systems management have already been rolled out and the team is full of energy and optimism.

There will be plenty more stories to tell in the coming weeks!

See video