BELARE 2007-2008: IVAN PAPANIN SOON TO REACH BREID BAY



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The Ivan Papanin ice-class cargo ship carrying aboard the 120 containers of the Princess Elisabeth Station reached 5° East on December 11th. She is progressing smoothly towards the South and is expected to come into Breid Bay around December 14th.

"For several days, the air had been getting cooler on board, a sign that the ship was progressing southwards", says Philippe Herman, Belgian Army coordinator. Last week, the ship's crew saw their first iceberg and then, the cargo ship started ice-breaking. Although the ice thickness was not yet significant at the time, the whole ship was shaking as strange sounds reverberated through the haul.

A few days later, the ship was caught in sea ice. It took the captain several tries before freeing the ship from the ice's embrace. A few days later, the captain had to shut the engine off when the motor broke down. After four hours of repair work, the Ivan Papanin was ready to resume her voyage.

The journey through Antarctica's waters proceeded without any trouble as the ship crossed the Antarctic Circle. After having watched a sunset on the horizon from the ship's deck, the crew went to bed and slept through an artificial night. Indeed, from this point south, the sun no longer sets. The sun only circles the heads of the crew around the clock, dipping slowly under the horizon before it rises again.

The ship reached 5° East on December 11th with the members of the Norwegian expedition ready to unload their equipment. In a couple of days, it will be the Belgians' turn to greet the ship. As a matter of fact, Alain Hubert has already made his way towards the coast, in order to identify potential unloading sites. The choice of the unloading point will depend on ice conditions at the coast.