



CANADIAN WEEKLY BULLETIN

INFORMATION DIVISION
 DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
 OTTAWA - CANADA

Vol. 9 No. 6

December 11, 1953

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WEEK'S EVENTS IN REVIEW

TO MOVE AKLAVIK: The Minister of Resources and Development, Mr. Jean Lesage, announced on December 7 that the Cabinet has approved in principle a plan to move Aklavik, the largest community in the Canadian Arctic. The settlement will be rebuilt at a new site where it will be safe from the erosion of the Mackenzie River and the dangers of sinking through melting permafrost.

As Arctic communities go, Aklavik is a large city. For most of the year it has 400 inhabitants and in July and August the population almost doubles. It is the centre for fur trading, administration, and missionary activities for the Mackenzie Delta and the surrounding region. Aklavik serves some 50,000 square miles. It has grown quickly in the past twenty years and is continuing to grow. Its wholesale removal will pose difficult administrative, scientific, and construction problems.

Aklavik is being moved for the good of its health. Sanitary conditions are unsatisfactory. Water supply and sewage disposal are inadequate and are growing worse year by year. With this menace to public health the Government was faced with a difficult decision - to try to build a water and sewer system at great cost in unstable ground, or to uproot the whole community and move it to a place where essential services are relatively inexpensive.

The scientists of the Building Research Division of the National Research Council

helped the Government with its decision. Men who have become experts in the complicated problems of building on the permanently frozen ground made extensive soil tests. Everyone who had lived in Aklavik in spring knew the mud, but it still came as a surprise to find that more than 50 percent of the soil consisted of water in the form of ice crystals. If the frost should thaw to 10 feet down, through a warmer climate, heat from buildings, or the results of excavation or cultivation, scientists estimate that the surface would drop six feet, right down to the level of the river. It is impossible to build sewers or foundations on ground of that kind without enormous expense, and repair bills are high because of the constantly moving surface of the permafrost.

Though the Government's decision was based primarily on the health of the inhabitants, Mr. Lesage explained that in the long run it will be an economy measure.

Moving a northern town is not a new job - the townsite of Yellowknife was shifted to high ground just before the war - but never has an operation like this been planned north of the Arctic Circle, where the problems of building on permafrost are at their worst. Officials estimate that the move may take four years.

In 1954 scientists, construction men and surveyors will examine the possibilities of new sites. The new site of Aklavik will not be