

A. "Let's be more specific. As to the Nenets, by 1954 only 104 families were living in the Belush'ya Guba camp, having migrated there from Pechora at various times. In view of the need to establish an atomic testing range, the Soviet government requested Tyko Vylko to consider the possibility of resettling them on the mainland, their ancestral home. Such a decision was taken at a meeting of the island Soviet.

It was not a base but rather an anchorage for ships of the Northern Fleet which was developed in the archipelago during the war years. It was this that paved the way for building a settlement for the test personnel. The first visit by Russian seamen occurred in 1870 on the Varyag and Zhemchug.

There are no industrial mineral reserves there, nor have any been discovered on Kolguev Island. There are some small deposits of copper, zinc and zinc-lead ores on Vaigach, but it would not have been economically feasible to exploit them. All this became yet another argument in favour of the testing range.

What makes it special is that, in the first stages of nuclear weapons testing, powerful aerial explosions were carried out (at altitudes ranging from 3 to 10 kilometres). There was also a small number of underwater, above-water and land-based explosions. The altitude chosen for the detonations prevented high levels of contamination of the surface below. Thirty years after the cessation of testing in these three media, the levels of gamma radiation are now at the level of the earth's natural background radiation as a result of natural decay."

Q. "But nuclear weapons tests are continuing, even though they are now underground. What guarantees are there that carelessness or some other factor will not lead to disaster? People are concerned that the ecological conditions in the Far North have deteriorated as a result of the test site. Are such fears only due to lack of information about the actual danger of the tests conducted on the range or are there genuine grounds for concern?"