

"For us to use MI-8 helicopters," he goes on, "is virtually impossible. Because of their small fuel tanks their radius of operation is limited. On missions to support drifting stations, the helicopter pilots are forced to establish intermediate bases on ice floes and air fields between "hops", which is extremely risky during the Polar Night. The planes are not equipped with "Cospas-Sarsat" beacons of the international search and rescue system."

"It is particularly the ethnic minorities who suffer from the high cost of technology," says V. Filatov. "Over a period of two years the State farms of the Lower Kolyma paid out more than 700,000 rubles for the operation of the MI-8 and AN-2 despite the fact that flying time was significantly reduced."

A Commission on the Arctic has been formed by the USSR Council of Ministers. But, as the aviators point out, it would be better to create a special committee with stronger powers which would unite all of the necessary organizations and coordinate their activities in the region.

The people I spoke with in the Arctic are convinced that the day is not far off when convoys of merchant ships flying the flags of various countries will be sailing the Northern Sea Route. And this day will come even faster if the Arctic receives the reliable AN-74 and, later, the AN-28, also promised for a long time, to perform ice reconnaissance, accompany ships at sea and support polar stations. And, to be fully on the safe side, northerners believe polar aviation should be resurrected as a top priority. The high latitudes need strong, reliable wings.

Pravda

16 July 1990

Page 8 (slightly abridged)