

"We have long been debating whether we need year-round navigation along the Northern Sea Route. But, as before, navigation in our sector of the Arctic lasts approximately two months," laments V. Filatov, First Secretary of the Nizhnekolyma Raion Committee of the CPSU. "Things have not gotten beyond the talking stage."

I think that Vyacheslav Antonovich is right. For the time being the aviators at Cherskii are not able to be of genuine assistance to the sailors by providing accurate ice reconnaissance and reliable guidance on all routes. It is becoming increasingly difficult to solve other problems as well. Why is this? I mentioned the reason at the beginning: the indispensable IL-14 is going into retirement. Since 1970 the Ministry of Civil Aviation has re-organized the polar air fleet, and life in the Far North has become much more difficult. Virtually nothing has appeared to replace the LI-2, IL-14, IL-18 and AN-12, now retired from service or currently being phased out.

For almost twenty years polar aviation has been under the control of the Yakut, Magadan, Krasnoyarsk and Archangel regional administrations. As popular wisdom would have it, too many cooks spoil the broth. The expensive MI-8 helicopter made its appearance, but it is unprofitable for fishermen, hunters and reindeer herders to use it.

"When the Polar Aviation Administration was abolished, they began installing essentially identical equipment of airplanes destined for the Arctic and for Central Asia. We adapt them ourselves for practical use, thereby surmounting a heap of obstacles," says G. Yachmenev, commander of the Kolyma-Indigirka Integrated Detachment.