

ANTARCTIC

To the South Pole by Air

If you see a person in the middle of summer packing warm clothes and stocking up on winter hats and felt boots, it can only mean one thing: he is headed for the Antarctic.

On July 12 an IL-76 MD, number 76623, left Sheremetevo and set course for the sixth continent. The flight this heavy transport aircraft is undertaking is unique. First of all, our airplanes have never before flown from the 'big country' to the South Pole in the middle of an antarctic winter. Secondly, there is an unusual route for this air expedition, which has been organized by Goskomgidromet SSSR (USSR State Committee on Hydrometeorology) and 'OKB imeni Ilyushina' (Ilyushin Special Design Bureau). The airplane is flying to the Antarctic not by the usual route over Africa but by way of North and South America, and for the first time it is due to land on King George Island near the Soviet station Bellingshausen. And finally, a word about the cargo and passengers to be embarked in the American city of Minneapolis: these are the equipment and participants for an international trans-Antarctic expedition (including 42 sled dogs).

"We have long felt the need for establishing a new air route to the Antarctic," says A. Chilingarov, leader of the expedition and deputy chairman of Goskomgidromet. "The existing route is shorter, but a large part of it (approximately 5,000 kilometers) lies above the ocean, and, in view of the instability of Antarctic weather, this presents a definite risk for every flight. The distance from South America to the sixth continent is much shorter - only 1,200 kilometers. In other words, the main goal of this flight is to work out a series of measures for providing effective and timely assistance to Antarctic stations."