

What is there is the bitter realization that, in the current international situation when a third of the planet's population lives in countries that are members of the "nuclear club" and no reliable obstacle has as yet been erected to development of new generations of this terrible weapon of destruction (or "weapon of deterrence", as it is called), a unilateral nuclear moratorium is, apparently, scarcely possible.

What is also there is a sincere respect, an acknowledgement of the high degree of professionalism and mastery, rare in our day, on the part of test scientists, miners and the military who have succeeded in achieving the extraordinary safety and scientific effectiveness of the experiment: the nuclear charge, which lay two kilometres deep within the mountain for more than a year, "withstood" the test of polar winter, performed exactly as planned, yielded results which scientists will be analyzing for a long time, and did not cause the slightest harm to the polar environment. The radiation and environmental situation for hundreds, even thousands of kilometres around the test range was unaffected.

All the same, why was the underground nuclear blast, which according to press reports was carried out pursuant to a decision of the Soviet government and the Council of Defence reporting to the President of the USSR, conducted in a somewhat surreptitious manner? No official notice was given about it in advance either to our neighbours in Northern Europe, to the leaders of local organs of power in the oblasts adjoining the test range, or even to people's deputies of the USSR, whose mandate from the northerners is to represent their interests in the country's Supreme Soviet.

Neither did anybody alert those responsible for monitoring the safety of the nuclear tests - the USSR State Committee on the Environment. The Presidium of the Russian Supreme Soviet also voiced a strong protest regarding the blast, viewing it as a violation of the Russian Federation's Declaration on State Sovereignty. So why was it done the way it was?