

A Leap into the Arctic Night

Pravda has already reported to its readers about an operation now under way in Arctic high latitudes for dropping fuel and food to drifting polar stations using the IL-76 MD fixed-wing aircraft. During the operation, however, an unforeseen event occurred.

"In ten days", said A. Chilingarov, Deputy Chairman of Goskomgidromet (State Committee for Hydrology and Meteorology) USSR, "we delivered 72 tonnes of fuel to the SP-28, SP-30 and SP-31 stations, and to polar stations on Viktoriya, Rudol'fa, Kheisa and Russkii Islands. Unfortunately, because of bad weather, we didn't manage to drop these "parcels" in time for the New Year.

It would seem that delivery, using the PGS-500 parachute systems developed at the Il'yushin Experimental Design Bureau and tested during several expeditions in both the polar day and night, is reliable. The unexpected, however, was not absent.

On 13 January an IL-76 MD aircraft supplied the SP-30 station and made its first parachute drop. A message came back from the ice floe: "Seven out of 18 pallets have broken. The parachutes didn't open. The cargo came off". The aircraft commander decided to discontinue the drop and return to base.

Subsequent events developed as follows. Aleksandr Sidorenko, leader of the Ekspark Parachute Group, got in touch with Chilingarov. What should they do? Break off the operation? But the people on the ice floe were waiting for the freight. Again, the cause of the failure could be determined only on