

Indifference is impossible

All catastrophes, be they earthquakes or tsunami, are terrible in their consequences, with the lives of thousands affected. The Chernobyl nuclear power station accident obliged the relocation of many. Now, twenty five years on, there is a new world outlook and a more serious attitude towards health



Irina Bilodid gives advice

By Yekaterina Medvedskaya

Last year, over 60,000 thyroid ultrasound investigations were conducted, at various clinics around the Belarusian capital. Almost 14,500 of these diagnostic examinations were performed by endocrinologists at Minsk's City Endocrinological Dispensary, with most being done for preventive purposes. According

to the Dispensary's Chief Doctor, Irina Bilodid, the attitude of patients has greatly improved in recent years, with their positivity reaping better results. Previously, many ignored their health unless they fell seriously ill; now, most go to the doctor with the idea of taking early precautions. "In talking to patients and in giving quotes to the press, doctors from our dispensary always stress that your health is in your own hands," notes Ms. Bilodid. "As soon as even the slightest symptoms of disease appear, you should immediately go to your doctor, avoiding self-treatment."

Demand for thyroid ultrasound scans has risen. In 2010, almost 80,000 outpatients were registered as having endocrine problems, with over 25,000 having thyroid irregularities. Minsk's City Endocrinological Dispensary also accepts patients from outside the capital, with ultrasound examinations and endocrinologists' consultations proving popular among



Minsk's Endocrinological Dispensary uses the latest equipment to examine patients

those from neighbouring states. People from Lithuania, Ukraine, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan arrive in the Belarusian capital, unsurprisingly; our clinic boasts the most contemporary equipment, alongside professional doctors.

"German colleagues often attend our clinic to conduct seminars, sharing their latest developments. In turn, our specialists have undertaken training in Germany many times," continues Ms.

Bilodid. "From time to time, our endocrinologists also attend the Belarusian Academy of Medical Post-Graduate Education to update their knowledge."

Undoubtedly, those diagnosed with illness experience a change in lifestyle; they must adapt to a new situation. Ms. Bilodid is confident that those suffering from thyroid pathologies can lead full lives, enjoying exercise and a balanced diet. "As a rule, soil where

crops are grown contains very little iodine," asserts Ms. Bilodid. "Sometimes, it can lack zinc or selenium, which can cause changes in the thyroid, but this deficiency can be compensated for by taking vitamins and mineral supplements."

Back in 2001, the Council of Ministers of Belarus adopted a regulation to sell only iodised salt, which is a wonderful way of enriching food with iodine.

Digital tomorrow may soon arrive

European states retire analogue TV but is Belarus ready to shift to digital broadcasting?

Flickering images and extraneous noise shall soon become a thing of the past, with digital TV replacing analogue broadcasting, bringing in the highest quality of reception. Old standards will be retired, with the new taking over. Belarus is to leave behind analogue broadcasting by June 17th, 2015, with Europe achieving this three years earlier. Germany, Luxembourg and Scandinavia have already shifted to digital broadcasting, with Latvia retiring analogue broadcasts last summer. Lithuania joins them in 2012, as will Poland in 2013.

Belarus' Communications and Informatisation Ministry is encouraging manufacturers of TV signal receivers to use digital technology. Nikolai Pantelei, who heads the Ministry, notes that the Council of Ministers has already received a proposal for consideration, prohibiting the production of TV sets without digital tuners (alongside their importing into Belarus). This will be the first step towards the public extensively owning digital receivers.

The first Belarusian digital transmitter appeared in Kolodishchi, in 2005, covering the capital and part of the Minsk District. At present, 46 radio-television stations operate countrywide, embracing 94 percent of the population. This

year, another 15 stations are to be built. Already, Belarus leads in the CIS regarding digital signal coverage. Our domestic manufacturers are producing hybrid-analogue and fully digital TV sets, with attachments offered to allow the receiving of cable and aerial digital signals. In the first years of digital TV, Horizont and Vityaz sold no more than 100 such attachments; now, several thousand have been sold.

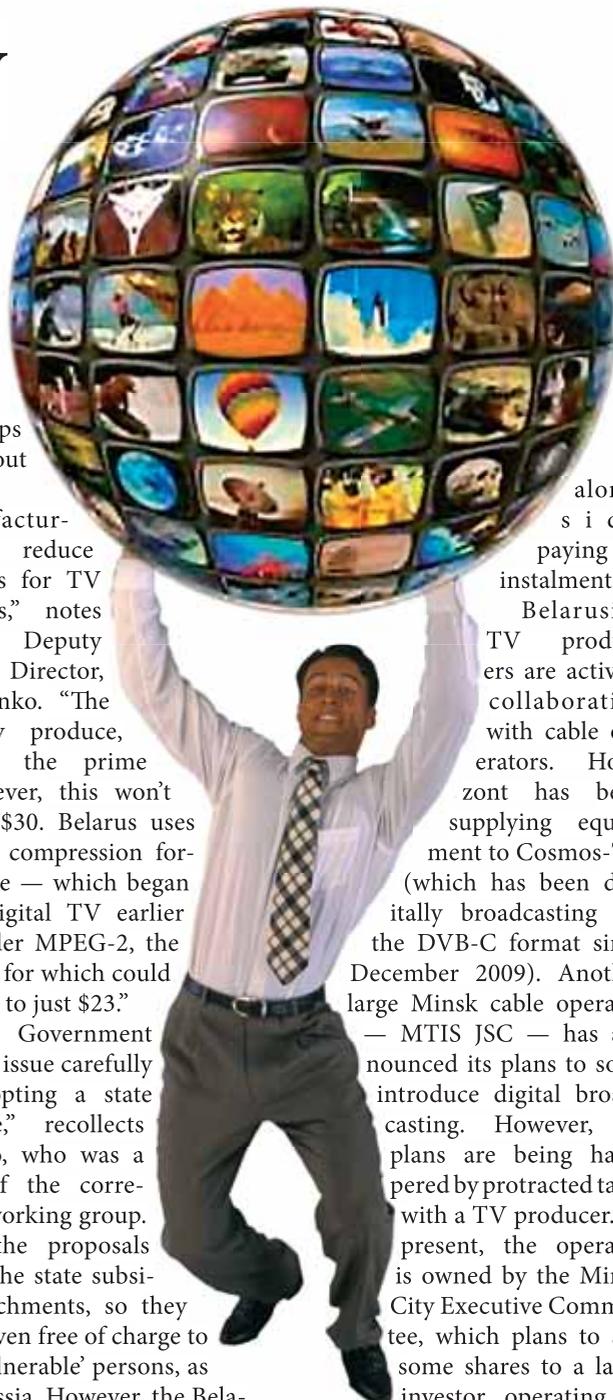
Digital television shares the same frequency as analogue TV, intending to be a direct replacement. Neighbouring states have been settling the issue for the past two years. In Belarus, analogue transmissions remain, with just eight TV channels having digital versions.

In 2008, Beltelecom and some Internet providers introduced IPTV — also a digital broadcast. Specialists say cable operators can independently shift to digital television in cities but villagers will need to purchase special attachments (transforming analogue signals to digital) and UHF band adapters (as manufactured by Ver-tex-Brest, of the Belarusian Sight-Impaired Association). Some cable operators from Italy are keen to become involved in the technology (which is already on sale in Bel-

arusian shops for about Br80,000).

"Manufacturers could reduce their prices for TV attachments," notes Horizont's Deputy General Director, Sergey Gunko. "The more they produce, the lower the prime cost. However, this won't fall below \$30. Belarus uses a MPEG-4 compression format. Europe — which began applying digital TV earlier — uses older MPEG-2, the attachment for which could fall in price to just \$23."

"The Government studied the issue carefully before adopting a state programme," recalls Mr. Gunko, who was a member of the corresponding working group. "One of the proposals envisaged the state subsidising attachments, so they could be given free of charge to 'socially vulnerable' persons, as done in Russia. However, the Belarusian budget cannot afford to do this; moreover, defining the criteria for those in need would be tricky. Instead, loans are being offered,



Course of ecological strategy

The environmental monitoring system in Belarus is one of the best within the post-Soviet territory — as noted by European Commission expert Vladislav Bizek, on meeting House of Representatives' deputies

A group of experts has arrived in Belarus to prepare a report on prospects for co-operation between Belarus and the European Commission regarding eco-matters; similar research has been conducted by the EC in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. According to Mr. Bizek, Belarus has 'a well-developed system of strategic planning' in the environmental sector. He mentions adequate planning and programmes of an environmental nature, praising the level of legislative development in Belarus. He stresses that many legislative instruments are the equal of those in European countries and calls the local environmental monitoring system one of the best in the CIS, especially regarding air quality control. "Belarus' system matches that of Western Europe. Similar systems operate only in Moscow and St. Petersburg," he stresses.

Experts note that Belarus has untapped potential regarding energy efficiency, organic agricultural development and the implementation of industrial innovative technologies. Promising areas of co-operation include the construction of solar power plants in the Chernobyl regions, as well as the cultivation of 'energy crops' — such as rape.

alongside paying in instalments." Belarusian TV producers are actively collaborating with cable operators. Horizont has been supplying equipment to Cosmos-TV (which has been digitally broadcasting via the DVB-C format since December 2009). Another large Minsk cable operator — MTIS JSC — has announced its plans to soon introduce digital broadcasting. However, its plans are being hampered by protracted talks with a TV producer. At present, the operator is owned by the Minsk City Executive Committee, which plans to sell some shares to a large investor operating in this field. MTIS' Marketing Director, Dmitry Bushchik, notes that the cable operator must independently purchase attachments.