



Minsk National Airport technical infrastructure allows servicing of latest aircraft

Sending off aircraft safely

Why do runways need spraying with herbicides and why do snow-clearing machines need plane engines?

By Kirill Yevmenov

Aviation has always been viewed as an elite branch, with young boys (and men) dreaming of piloting a plane. However, behind the glamour of flying aircraft there is a whole team of ground staff: operators, engineers, mechanics, aviation technicians, control tower navigators, doctors and drivers. We visit the 50th mixed aviation base, in Machulishchi, to find out more.

True professionals

The Mi-8 helicopter blades gain speed and the pilot is clearly instructed (over his headphones) by aviation technician Igor Velichko: 'Accumulators and ground power supply are on! Socket voltage is one, two — ready! Transducer one hundred fifteen is on. The right is being launched! Rotation is running and the temperature is rising. Oil pressure is normal — as are the hydro-systems...' The pilot is left in no doubt that his aircraft is ready for take-off, with no cause for concern.

None would argue that Mr. Velichko's job requires skill. Not everyone can remember so many intricate words or the location of the numerous transducers and tumblers. It's vital not to mix up the order of operations while testing radio-electronic devices, power systems and altimeters. Moreover, everything must be done within strict time limits: 85 minutes in summer and 115 minutes in winter. His team of specialists ensures that every aircraft is ready for its next flight. Few other jobs bear the same responsibility; in signing off a plane, they hold so

many lives in their hands, as well as responsibility for expensive machinery. Needless to say, aircraft fuel is also highly flammable, so the crew takes extreme care on the ground. "Everything must be done meticulously," Mr. Velichko asserts.

Absolute readiness

No definitive textbook exists for aircraft maintenance, and it takes at least a decade to train. Meanwhile, those who look after the runways also bear huge responsibility. A 3km runway can welcome the largest aircraft, including military-transport heavy-weight Il-76 and An-24 planes, alongside the world's largest Mi-26 helicopters. Everything must be kept correctly, explains the Head of the Battalion Headquarters, Maxim Stanchik. He tells us, "In winter, we have more work to do, clearing snow. No flights can operate if the snow reaches a depth of one centimeter. To ensure a safe landing, the runway must be dry, without ice, so we use special heating machinery, equipped with aviation engines. While rotating at high speed, they create hot air which we can direct at the ice."

Reliable machinery

Obviously, the surface of the runway needs to be kept completely smooth, without cracks or corrugations. Any damage is immediately filled with special bitumen and, as Mr. Stanchik explains, herbicides are sprayed to stop grass and weeds from growing. To scare birds away, dummies are placed around the perimeter and signal rockets deter 'unwanted guests'.



Terrestrial equipment at Minsk National Airport allows aircraft to land under any weather conditions, even in poor visibility, heavy fog, snow and rain

The battalion is also responsible for the repair and servicing of aircraft, working in shifts day and night to keep the aerodrome operational. However, the military are always ready to help civilians where needed. Not long ago, the Xavier snow storm paralysed traffic along the road connecting Machulishchi with the highway. Dozens of cars were stuck so the battalion, led by their commander, rendered help on



Specific ticket to great life

By Alexey Yaroshevich

Schoolchildren don't learn by heart Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry on the theme of passport these days but few need reminding of how important that document is, with its coat of arms against a blue cover



Young citizens

Every year, young boys and girls across the country gain their passports. Young citizens from Minsk recently launched a campaign entitled

We are Citizens of Belarus! organised by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, and dedicated to Constitution Day,

on March 15th. In the Council of the Republic, 20 children received their first identification documents from the Chairman of the Upper House of Parliament, Anatoly Rubinov.

Since August 2012, the minimum age for obtaining a passport has been lowered to 14, from 16. As Mr. Rubinov explained before the ceremony, "Young people mature faster these days, so it's important that this intellectual and physical development is accompanied by civil maturity."

The children chosen for the ceremonial passport presentation included Anastasia Zaitseva, who studies at the 190th secondary school and dances with the honoured group Rovesnik; she often goes on tour, winning international competitions, and is also a volunteer with Kind Hearts. Naturally, she has plenty of opportunity for travel and tells us, "I'm delighted to have received my passport here. I was quite nervous and still am a little."

Through city gates to hockey nets

Belarusian Railways updating its lines to three cities in time for 2014 IIHF World Championship

Railway stations in Minsk, Brest and Grodno are being revamped, as are those located near large sporting facilities country-wide.

In March, Belarusian Railways' experts and managers took a familiarisation tour of facilities in Poland

and Finland to see how major sporting events are supported by rail travel, including security at stations and on passenger trains.

Meanwhile, rail personnel are to be given a thematic phrase book in English, to help them converse with foreign guests; those most likely to need to chat to passengers will also undertake lessons in the foreign language.