

Oktyabrskaya metro station, time 17.54

By Dmitry Ulasevich

A blast occurred in the metro in the evening, as thousands of Minsk residents were returning home from work. An explosive device of an unidentified type exploded at the largest connection hub — Oktyabrskaya metro station — at 17.54. Harsh black smoke crawled along the platform, with glass broken in carriages; all was in darkness, since the electricity was interrupted.

Gradually, those who had survived the event began to phone relatives and friends. "At the time, I was using an escalator from the platform to reach to the entrance hall of Oktyabrskaya and Kupal-

ovskaya stations," explains witness Dmitry, an estate agent. He can hardly choose his words from shock. "Suddenly a loud pop was heard and plaster began to fall from the ceiling. It was as if a wave had struck me on the back of the head. A strong sound immediately deafened me. It's good that I was in the last carriage, so that I reached the escalator quickly. Otherwise, I could have been at the epicentre..."

Those injured were brought from the station on stretchers and by hand. Many were given assistance on the spot. We helped a tearful woman with burns to her face, called Natalia, who told us that it

was as if she had been in hell.

"There was a fiery blaze and then complete darkness, cries and the disgusting acrid smell of burning..." she recalls.

Following the explosion, people behaved bravely, not panicking, and immediately began to provide help to those who'd been hurt. Rescuers and doctors, who arrived at the Oktyabrskaya metro station within a few minutes, worked promptly and efficiently. Those injured were taken to hospitals all over Minsk, with over a dozen of people out of those brought to the Emergency Care Hospital requiring urgent surgery. According to Chief Doctor Victor Sirenko, they



Everyone nearby rendered help to the wounded

are in a serious condition, with injuries associated with 'mine explosions, where limbs are wounded'. Hundreds of Minsk residents have expressed their wish to donate

blood.

Deputy Prosecutor General Andrei Shved has told journalists that a criminal case has been initiated regarding this terrorist act.



Rescuers stand by metro after explosion

Tragedy through rescuer's eyes

Emergency Ministry staff arrived at Oktyabrskaya station just three minutes after receiving information on the explosion. The Head of Fire-Fighting Search-and-Rescue Unit #11 of Minsk's Moskovsky District Emergency Department, Mikhail Tarasevich, tells us how victims were rescued

We received information on the explosion at about 6pm. Our unit is located not far from the Oktyabrskaya metro station, near the House of the Government, so we were among the first to arrive on the scene. I immediately ordered that the fire hose be placed by the escalator, as we'd been initially informed that something had happened there. Afterwards, I took two fire-fighters from my unit inside, carrying masks for victims. We met people halfway, many of whom bore bloodstained clothes and black faces.

We entered the hall easily and saw no smoke — only dust in the air. We put on our gas masks but, a minute later (on going downstairs by the escalator) took them off. It was hard to breathe, yet possible.

I won't tell you what I saw on the

platform, as it was so awful. Never before have I witnessed such a situation. However, I had no time to show emotions. We acted as if it were a training session: without delay.

The victims' injuries were of various degrees of gravity. People were shouting and some were crying.

A couple of minutes later, other rescuers arrived, hurrying to us with stretchers. We placed an elderly man upon one. It's difficult for me to recollect his appearance; I only remember his brown jacket. Fighters from my unit took him out.

The wounded were on the floor. Initially, we lacked enough stretchers and, to save time, I entered a carriage and pulled out the backs of the seats to use as stretchers. To lift them, carrying an injured person, five or six men were needed. Everyone worked together: rescuers, police and ordinary passengers.

I didn't realise the scale of this tragedy immediately — only the next morning, as I watched the TV news, seeing everything from an outside view. You know, I don't want to appear cruel, but I would strangle the rascals who inflicted this upon my city with my own hands.

Hope lives here

Relatives of blast victims wait day and night at the entrance of Minsk's Emergency Care Hospital's Intensive Care Department

By Irina Privalova

According to Victor Sirenko, Chief Doctor at Minsk's Emergency Care Hospital, dozens of patients were in a serious condition, with many connected to artificial respiration units. Their relatives were spending day and night at the entrance of the Intensive Care Department. Nobody cried, because grief had already dried their tears. They went to the department in turn, just to look at their loved ones.

Yelena is mother to one girl injured by the metro explosion. She took Validol pills from her handbag with trembling hands. Her husband stood nearby with his head down. "Our girl is just 25 years old. There's something wrong with her leg. I don't know exactly what yet," Yelena explained. Seeing that the door to the department was opening again, she ran to meet doctors halfway. Any new information was welcome.

Psychologists replaced each other in the entrance hall. Six specialists stayed with relatives all the time, trying to ease their stress and feelings of regret.

"It's very difficult for them," explained Olga Prilishch, a psychologist at Minsk's Psychoneurological Dispensary, who was giving consultations to all those who need assistance. "I've recently spoken to a mother of one girl; doctors are still battling for her life but her mother also needs help urgently..."

Natalia Samurganova, a 32 year old employee of Minsk's City Training and Methodical Centre, was luckier than the rest. In the rush

hour, she was in the second carriage, with her two colleagues. She remembers hearing a loud pop and seeing a blaze of light. She says her ears are still ringing. Natalia received a barotrauma and her hand is bandaged; however, these injuries are nothing compared to shock.

"It seems there was no panic. Men were taking us out of the carriage through windows, crying 'Quicker, quicker!'" Natalia recalls. However, her memories are scant.



Emergency service doctors work professionally

Announcement of the Council of the Republic's Presidium and the House of Representatives' Council of the National Assembly of Belarus

On April 11th, 2011, a terrorist act occurred at Minsk's Oktyabrskaya metro station, leading to numerous human victims.

We view this terrible atrocity as an attack on the highest values: life, health and dignity. It is an attempt to shatter the legal foundations of the Belarusian state while bringing panic, fear and mistrust to society.

This tragic event has again assured us of the necessity of uniting efforts by the state, society and

all citizens for the sake of ensuring peace, concord and security.

We're convinced that no one will be able to destabilise our country, to scare the Belarusian nation or coerce it into moving from its chosen path. The organisers and performers of this cynical and cruel crime will not avoid fair retribution.

Members of the Council of the Republic and deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus share the pain

of this severe and grievous loss, expressing their deepest condolences to the relatives of those who have died. We wish a quick recovery to all those who have suffered from the terrorist attack.

RUBINOV A.N. — Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus

ANDREICHENKO V.P. — Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus