

## NEWS

### The 6 m telescope Programme Committee. 20 years on duty

The 6 m telescope BTA was turned over by the Leningrad optical firm for operation at the Special Astrophysical Observatory of the USSR AS on January 1, 1977 after a year of test observations. By the decision of the Government the telescope was given the status of an all-union instrument, therefore the whole astronomical association of the Soviet Union had to deal with the choice of strategy. It was for the first time in home astronomy that a large instrument was not declared the property of an individual observatory, when the observing time was shared by the director among the staff members. The necessity arose for developing new ways of scheduling observations.

In 1976 the Department of General Physics and Astronomy approved the "Regulations of the 6 m telescope observational time allocation". The basic points of the "Regulations" are as follows.

1. The 6 m Telescope Programme Commission (later Committee) (hereafter 6 m TPC) is established.

2. The 6 m TPC is attached to the United Scientific Council (USC) of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The 6 m TPC membership is sanctioned by the USC for a term of 5 years, the Observatory director being automatically its member. To organize the activity of the 6 m TPC, SAO appoints scientific secretary.

3. The subjects of scientific work at the telescope are discussed by the 6 m TPC twice a year. When considering the tasks to be performed, the 6 m TPC follows the following criteria:

- preference is given to the topics that are thought to be the most important for the current state of the problem;
- the tasks must be actual and offering new promise;
- the observational programmes have to conform to the technical capabilities of the telescope and the light detectors.

4. The time requests are accepted from astronomical institutions of the USSR, the requests from abroad are treated on general terms.

These principles have basically remained unchanged and been followed ever since. Only minor alterations

have been introduced. For instance, the time requests need not come from an institution and be signed by the director, but from researchers themselves.

Corresponding member of the USSR AS V.V. Sobolev had been appointed the first Chairman of the 6 m TPC, and he ran the first sitting of the Committee at the Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory, Armenia, 1996, October (during the IAU Symposium of flare stars). I.M. Kopylov, Eh.E. Khachikian, O.A. Mel'nikov, Eh.A. Dibai, A.A. Boyarchuk were among the participants. Based on the decision of the meeting the Committee's secretary made up the first schedule of observations which were started with the programme "Magnetic fields of stars" in January 1977 (observers: Yu.V. Glagolevsky, Yu.V. Sukharev, I.I. Romanyuk).

Over the past years the body of the 6 m TPC has changed four times. Besides V.V. Sobolev, its activity has been managed by famous astrophysicists acad. A.A. Boyarchuk, Dr. V.Yu. Terebizh, Dr. Yu.N. Gnedin. Presently the most experienced Committee's members are acad. of the Armenian AS Eh.E. Khachikian and Dr. I.M. Kopylov, who have been permanent members of the Committee.

The 6 m TPC gathered 42 times. A total of more than 3000 requests were considered for 150 days of work. The economic and political shocks, including the break-down of the USSR, did not discontinue the regular activity of the Committee. So the staff of 6 m TPC still comprises leading astronomers from the states of the former USSR. The present staff of the Committee was approved by the United Scientific Astronomical Council (USAC) on March 25, 1995. It includes 11 experts: Dr. Yu.N. Gnedin (MAO RAS) — Chairman, Dr. I.M. Kopylov (MAO RAS) — Deputy Chairman, Dr. V.L. Afanasiev (SAO RAS), corr. member RAS Yu.Yu. Balega (SAO RAS), corr. member RAS D.A. Varshalovich (St. Petersburg, TI), Dr. V.A. Gagen-Torn (Univ. of St. Petersburg), Dr. R.E. Gershberg (CrAO, Ukraine), Dr. A.V. Zasov (SAI of Moscow Univ.), Dr. T.A. Kipper (Tartu Obs., Estonia), academician of the Armenian AS Eh.E. Khachikian (Univ. of Erevan, Armenia) and Dr. B.M. Shustov (IA RAS). Since 1994 the 6 m TPC has been organizing conferences of the 6 m telescope users at which a user is requested to make a report

on the observing programme being fulfilled, as well as for discussion of new promising problems. The director's report on the programmes accomplished in the previous half-year, communications of invited speakers about the news in astrophysics, and also presentation of information on new techniques and devices developed for the telescope are traditionally put on the agenda of the conferences. Along with the scientific priority and novelty of a task the Committee also takes into account if the problem is within the frames of international collaboration, the introduction of new techniques, the amount of publication of the results of the previous observations. The 6 m TPC encourages researches of young astronomers. At the Committee's initiative, work is under way over the creation of archives of publications based on the data obtained at BTA. The conferences of the 6 m TPC are generally hosted at SAO, which allows a better interaction between the Committee's members and the Observatory's specialists. It cannot be much too exaggerated that the conferences of BTA users are congresses of observers from the CIS, which have no analogues.

For a number of years the Observatory's obser-

vational time share had been 30%. After a body of experienced specialists had developed at the Observatory, there was no need in such a quota. Since 1994 the astronomers of SAO have taken part in the competition on equal terms and got no less than 40% of the telescope time. The number of time requests is persistently large. Excess coefficient is over 3 for light time and 4 for dark time. Researchers from France, Germany, Italy, the USA – the countries that are foremost in astronomy – have been showing increasing interest in the telescope. On the average they are allotted 20% of time. New methods and equipment for joint observations are the valuable contribution of our foreign colleagues.

In April and October, 1997 two 6 m TPC conferences were held at SAO. They were attended by 70 astronomers from different countries of the world. Beginning with the present volume, the Bulletin of SAO will contain standing information about the work of the 6 m TPC.

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