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In honour of the opening of the 16th Antarctic season, the state flag of the Republic of Belarus and the flag of the NAS of Belarus were raised on the flagpoles of the Belarusian Antarctic field base Mount Vechernyaya (Photo courtesy of Belarus' NAS press service)

Life on the edge of the world

Our polar explorers continue to conquer the mysterious and inaccessible ice continent. They will live in Antarctica for the next six months, working in conditions of stormy winds and aggressive sun. Belarusian polar explorers talk about life in Antarctica and myths about themselves.

Let us recall that the ceremonial start of the 16th Belarusian Antarctic Expedition was given on October 30th at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) of Belarus. This year, 13 people went to Antarctica under the leadership of an experienced polar explorer, a participant in all previous 15 expeditions, Aleksei Gaidashov. The expedition includes scientists from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (Republican Centre for Polar Research, Scientific and Practical Centre of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus for Bioresources, Institute of Environmental Management, Physics Institute), Belarusian State University, Brest Regional Clinical Hospital and other organisations of the country. The team consists of 7 specialists who already have experience working in Antarctica and 6 newcomers. → 11



‘Green agenda is meaningless amid confrontation’

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, took part in the World Climate Action Summit in Dubai. This major international meeting was attended by heads of state and government from more than 150 countries. In general, the event brought together more than 70 thousand people from all continents — ministers, businessmen, public figures, scientists and experts — in the capital of the United Arab Emirates.



In Dubai's Expo City the Belarusian Head of State was welcomed by UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

On the sidelines of the summit Aleksandr Lukashenko had a number of meetings with his counterparts from various regions of the world, including with leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Serbia, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Togo, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Botswana. The Belarusian Head of State also negotiated with the Presidents of Zimbabwe, Kenya, as well as with the Chairman of the Union of the Comoros, who is the Chairman of the African Union. In fact, the Belarusian leader's negotiating marathon lasted the whole day.

The opening of the summit was preceded by an official photography ceremony. Aleksandr Lukashenko is in the first row among world leaders.

The goal of the global forum is to restore a peaceful existence on the planet by solving global problems of ecology, food security, energy resources, and creating an economy safe for people.

The speech of the President of Belarus was very bright and piercing, and his words were given a standing ovation in the hall!

Aleksandr Lukashenko called on the international community not to express ‘concerns’, but to act in the name of preserving life on Earth. The Belarusian leader voiced Belarus’ approaches and proposals to address global issues of climate and environmental security. The Head of State, in particular, said,

“Today we, the leaders of the world, are talking about the future of planet Earth — our common home. We have and will have no other home. We talk about the future of our children and grandchildren. About the future of everyone who comes into this world after us. We represent different cultures, different value systems, different civilisations. But we are united in the face of the global challenge that nature itself has thrown at us.”

Aleksandr Lukashenko drew attention to climate change and the gloomy forecasts of scientists, “It is very progressive that we hear them and respond to them. But in order to effectively counteract the threat, we have to honestly and openly identify its underlying causes. First of all, it is the absence



of the sense of moderation in the drive towards geopolitical supremacy, including military supremacy (I’d say it is primarily military supremacy) on the part of those, who provoke and start wars in various parts of the planet. And wars are the main source of dirt on our continent. It is also the thirst for profiteering, which converts natural resources into personal capital and steals from future generations. It is attempts to remove the countries, which stand in the way of dominating the entire world and destruction by sucking the land dry. And sometimes everything gets done allegedly for the sake of sustainable development (there is such a UN programme).”

According to the President, under the Paris Agreement Belarus fully honours its commitments and even exceeds them, “We provide invaluable ecosystem services to our continent by preserving a unique source of oxygen — natural swamps, forests, lungs of Europe. We develop green energy and nuclear energy and minimise climate change risks. It is paradoxical that in response we get new economic sanctions, international trade barriers, and restrictions on access to technologies. And we’re not the only ones.

It is time to admit that green agenda is meaningless amid confrontation. It demands respect for the sovereignty of countries and unconditional fairness. Furthermore, it is inadmissible to pressure political opponents with sanctions while simultaneously demanding that they implement solutions that are costly for the national economies.

SUMMIT RESULTS

Countries participating in the 28th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) decided to create a Loss and Damage Compensation Fund to help poor and developing countries cope with the consequences of climate change. The United Arab Emirates, as the summit organiser, said it would contribute \$100 million. The fund will be replenished every four years, with contributions coming from a ‘wide range of sources’, including grants and concessional loans.

The Belarusian Head of State also answered questions from representatives of foreign media on the sidelines of the summit

The President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko said that to solve climate problems it is necessary to stop all wars and conflicts on the planet.

“Everyone looks for sources of funding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. They are easy to find. Firstly, it is necessary to stop wars and conflicts on the planet and everything that goes with it. And we will find about \$5 trillion. “It is five times as much as what we are trying to find today in order to reduce emissions,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

Speaking about prospects of the establishment of peace in Ukraine, the Belarusian leader referred to the speech of his Brazilian counterpart. In particular, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva pointed out that \$2 trillion spent on weapons last year should have been spent on fighting hunger and climate change instead of wars.

“If all the leading world powers, key players, who are interested in ending the war in Ukraine, think like Brazil does, then there will be no war,” Aleksandr Lukashenko is convinced.

During the interview, co-operation between Belarus and Africa was also touched upon (the Head of State called this a new trend for our country), issues of hydrocarbon production and the Middle East crisis.

By the way, Belarus plans to increase exports to African countries by at least 2.5 times in 2024. Support points include Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Equatorial Guinea.

Solutions, on which the purity of the entire atmosphere, all the ground waters, and the world ocean depends. And another point. How can one expect costly and effective climate preservation measures from countries and nations that have yet to recover from colonial oppression?”

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that Belarus calls on everyone who is obliged to take on the burden of historical responsibility: Belarus encourages everyone, who has to undertake the burden of historical responsibility: **first**, to make a commensurate contribution to the resolution of climate security issues after centuries of a thoughtless attitude to nature; **second**, to step up support for developing countries and transition-economy countries; **third**, to stop expressing ‘concern’ and to start acting for the sake of preserving life on Earth.

“We have no moral right to live only for our own selves. We have to look beyond the horizon. We have to respect nature laws and create the foundation for continuation of the human race here and now. On our planet. We have and will have no other home. And in conclusion. All the speakers, particularly those, who spoke here first, expressed concern about sources of funding. Come on! Even reporters, who are here, can tell you where you can find money.

In order to answer this question, one has to look at recent history. An example. In order to destroy Iraq and Afghanistan and ‘do good’ to these nations, an estimated amount of \$1.5–2 trillion has been spent. Iraq and Afghanistan cost about \$2 trillion to the aggressor. Can you calculate how much money has been spent on protecting these countries? How many people died? It cannot be calculated in U.S. dollars. A war is going on in Ukraine now. It will cost more than \$1.5–2 trillion. It will cost \$5 trillion if a peace agreement is achieved soon. Why is peace absent in this part of the planet today? Because the speakers, who spoke first, talk about peace, talk about a clean planet. They care about grandchildren, and yet they have started and are waging the scariest war on the planet. How much will the slaughter in the Middle East cost? What if a war begins in the Pacific? It will cost trillions upon trillions of U.S. dollars. So let’s spend them on cleaning the planet. And we won’t have to look for this money, as we say, ‘around the corner’,” the President of Belarus believes.

In conclusion, Aleksandr Lukashenko called on his colleagues to take decisive action, “It has been said here by the people, who spoke at the beginning, that 80 percent of pollution on the planet comes from 20 leading countries... Mister chairman, instead of concern let’s use the declaration to write down our demand for them to at least halve their atmospheric emissions... And let’s act. If we don’t start acting, nature will force us to live according to its own laws.”

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Belarus will always be a reliable partner for China

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing

The Belarusian leader arrived in the Chinese capital from the UAE, where he was visiting the World Summit on Climate Change.

“I am glad to have this opportunity and discuss topical issues of co-operation with you in a friendly atmosphere and express our points of view on various problems of international relations, as it has always been the case between us. **The development of comprehensive and all-weather strategic co-operation between Belarus and China is determined by the similarity of our ideologies and the very logic of international events and processes that are taking place today,**” Aleksandr Lukashenko said. “Our meeting on March 1st [2023] was in many ways pivotal and set the momentum for the whole year. Since March, more than 120 mutual visits have been carried out. Those are various visits. What is most pleasing is that the visits are related to co-operation in the manufacturing sector, trade and economy.”

The Head of the Belarusian State stressed that the historic rise in relations had given a powerful impetus to the deepening of co-operation in traditional areas and launched new vectors and mechanisms of co-operation.

“Belarus has been a reliable partner for China and will remain so. I don’t think anyone in China needs to be convinced of this. All this has happened before my eyes for the last 30 years, and even way back. I came to China for the first time as a member of parliament,” the Belarusian leader said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko also noted his long-term acquaintance with Xi Jinping and joint work to advance bilateral relations.

Aleksandr Lukashenko thanked Xi Jinping for the meeting, noting that the Chinese leader has recently had a very busy schedule: a huge number of international meetings, not to mention domestic policy events in China itself.

The President of Belarus drew attention to the fact that speed is very important in the implementation of co-operation plans, “Time is very compressed today. It is so compressed that sometimes we fall behind. It’s not just China, Belarus... This is happening around in the world. The one who is the first to reach their goal will be at the top.”

The Belarusian leader expressed support for the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, put forward earlier by the Chinese leader.

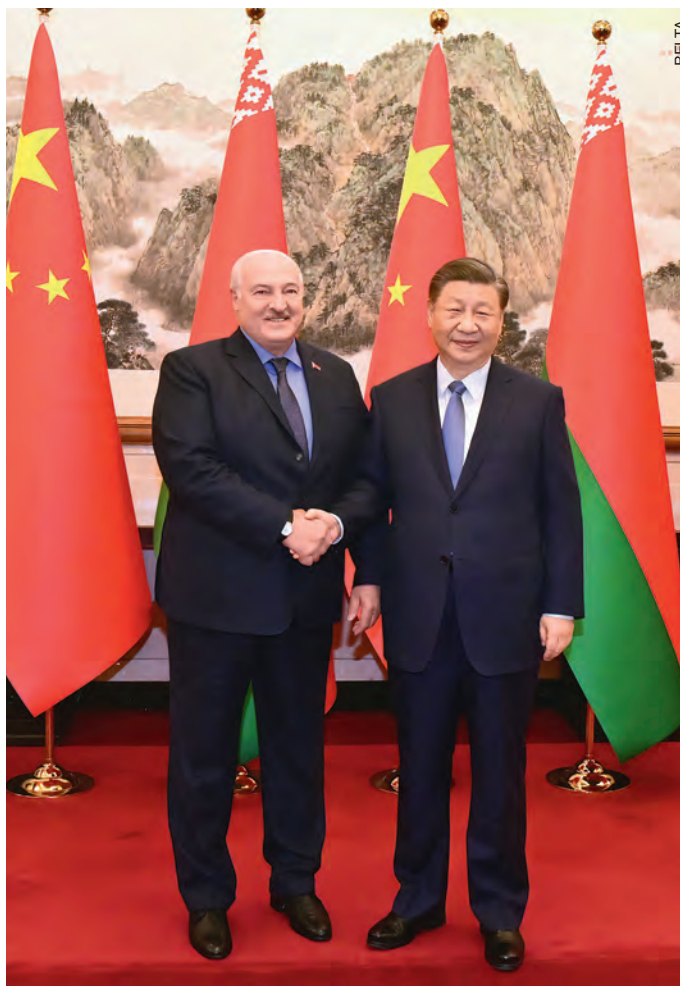
“I came to the conclusion a long time ago that the Belt and Road Initiative is no longer a concept today. It is already a practice. In progress. No one can argue with this today, and no one can find even a trifle to criticise. The most important thing is that you have defined the common destiny for humankind as the goal. Unlike Western countries that are trying to tear everything apart, you have set the single goal for all. Who can argue with that? No one. The world will be grateful to Great China for this.

We would like to see China a powerful country. We would like to see it grow. This is not only our interest. It is the interest of the whole planet, because a huge number of talented hardworking people live here [in China],” the Head of the Belarusian State said.

tant agreements in favour of the dynamic development of Chinese-Belarusian relations. At every stage, we reach new agreements. Over the course of the year, political mutual trust and international co-operation are strengthened. There are new results of co-operation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative,” the Chinese leader said.

At the end of the negotiations, the two leaders exchanged gifts and continued their conversation over a working lunch.

Aleksandr Lukashenko gifted Xi Jinping several pieces of artwork symbolising Belarus and Belarus-China friendship. Among the gifts was an artistic panel *My Belarus* depicting beautiful Belarusian nature and cosy houses nestling between



The President of the People’s Republic of China stated that 10 years ago the Belt and Road Initiative was a concept. Now more than 140 countries and international organisations have joined co-operation within its framework.

Xi Jinping stressed that under the strong leadership of its President, Belarus has managed to overcome the impact of various negative factors, to maintain social harmony and stability, to ensure economic recovery and growth, which has laid a solid foundation for further development.

“For China, maintaining stability and long-term development is very important. We have made great strides in this work. In today’s world, titanic changes are taking place, new risks and challenges are emerging. Much of what is happening is unexpected for us. The Chinese side is ready, together with Belarusian partners, to strengthen strategic co-operation in the name of creating a community with a shared future for mankind,” the Chinese leader said.

oak forests and lakes. The bottom of the panel shows ears of corn, flax flowers and cornflowers symbolising the beauty and rich heritage of the Belarusian nation.

The sculptural composition *Belarus-China Friendship. The Road and Belt Project* is also symbolic. It reflects links between the history and modernity showing a transition from camel caravans to high-speed trains. The symbolic globe is held by the *Hands of Friendship*.

In addition to the artwork, the Head of State presented his Chinese counterpart with an exclusive chocolate set and a basket of Belarusian products.

One of Xi Jinping’s gifts to Aleksandr Lukashenko was a silk painting depicting Chinese mountain landscapes.

In total, Aleksandr Lukashenko and Xi Jinping talked for more than three hours. After negotiations between the leaders of the two countries, a meeting was held at the level of Deputy Prime Ministers. Aleksandr Lukashenko suggested such a meeting during the negotiations with Xi Jinping.

The hosting country willingly accepted the proposal. The agreements of the leaders are discussed and implemented.

Taking part in the meeting were Belarus’ First Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Snopkov and China’s Deputy Prime Minister Liu Guozhong.

Aleksandr Lukashenko visited Peking University on the same day. The university hosted a meeting with the Secretary of the Party Committee of Peking University, Chairman of the Pedagogical Council, Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Commission of the National People’s Congress Hao Ping.

“The President of China and I are long-standing friends. We have the same views on the situation in the world and global prospects. After our meeting, negotiations have continued at the level of Deputy Prime Ministers. All our great ambitions and agreements should be put to practice, they should be translated into specific projects. On the instructions of Xi Jinping and on my instructions, the vice premiers are doing exactly this,” the Belarusian leader said.

The President also stated the need to strengthen communication between the peoples of the two countries. According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, student exchange issues were also discussed at the meeting with Xi Jinping.

“We need to scale up student exchange programmes. We need to expand co-operation beyond biotechnologies into chemistry, physics, mathematics... China is interested in this kind of co-operation,” the President noted.

Hao Ping recalled that he was part of the Chinese delegation during the state visit of the Chinese President to Belarus in 2015. He was deputy education minister back then. He cherishes the memories of the hospitality and the warm welcome that he saw in Minsk.

While visiting the university, the Head of State also took part in a training session and a friendly match with the university’s hockey team.

“Many of our hockey players have not slept through the night. Our university has hosted more than 70 Heads of State and government at different times. This is however probably the first time a foreign Head of State will play a hockey match with our students,” Hao Ping emphasised at a meeting with Aleksandr Lukashenko.

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After negotiations between the leaders of the two countries, a meeting was held at the level of Deputy Prime Ministers

“We have a lot of experience. We know what our countries need. We have done a lot in this regard. Furthermore, we decided a long time ago that we would co-operate and live in friendship with China. As I said, this friendship is more than 30 years old. We have never turned from this path either to the left or to the right,” the President of Belarus stated.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, in turn, said that the Chinese side is ready, together with Belarusian partners, to strengthen strategic co-operation in the name of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

“My great friend, I am very glad to see you again. As part of your state visit to China in late February and early March of this year, we reached impor-

Photo courtesy of the Telegram channel Pul Penvogo

Energy is one of the key aspects in the economy. That's why it receives a lot of attention at the highest government level. Moreover, the emphasis is on involving in the use of local fuels (LF), replacing imported fuels and saving budget funds. However, it is also a matter of rational use of the raw materials given to us by nature. "It's painful to see when we have a huge amount of biological resources that can be used as fuel simply disappear. Therefore, it is now extremely important to intensify work on the use of our own resources in order to depend as little as possible on imports and reduce the cost of manufactured products," the words spoken by the President at a meeting on the efficiency of using local fuel and energy resources in August 2016 are still relevant. During this time, a number of decisions related to the use of local fuels were made at the level of the Head of State, and numerous pilot projects were implemented. As a result, today, through the use of LF, about 3.5 billion tonnes of standard fuel are saved per year.

Annual consumption of pellets by industrial boiler houses in the country may increase by 220 thousand tonnes



Warmth in green tones

By Maria Druk

Use it for the needs of the country

The window of opportunity was prompted by sanctions. Due to the illegitimate actions of partners from unfriendly countries, for some time the issue arose with the export of woodworking products, including pellets, a valuable and environmentally friendly raw material for boiler houses, to the now familiar EU market. Let us remind you that new production facilities for the production of fuel pellets began to be built en masse in 2019 in the country's forestry enterprises to increase the efficiency of use of forest raw materials after a corresponding order from the President. The first results inspired a number of private enterprises to join the issue. But then we had to look for new buyers — and at the same time look at consumption in the domestic market from a new angle. As a result, the Council of Ministers recently adopted Resolution No. 716, which approved a set of measures to increase the use of wood pellets.

At the recent Belarusian Energy and Environmental Forum, Vitaly Kretsky, Deputy Chairman of Gosstandart and Director of the Energy Effectiveness Department, drew attention to the fact that the potential for involving pellets in the country's energy complex is great. So, today, according to him, enterprises use about 13 thousand tonnes of it. At the same time, by the end of the year, the country's forestry enterprises alone will be able to produce almost 30 times more. According to the representative of the State Committee for Standardisation of Belarus (Gosstandart) the efficiency of using pellets is obvious: heat transfer is high, practically no ash is formed during combustion, and the

automatic operation of the equipment is attractive for work on the periphery.

"On individual energy sources with a capacity of up to 1 MW, especially those that operate using firewood, savings only on operating personnel are four times due to a reduction in wage costs," Vitaly Kretsky emphasised.

Considering this factor, among other things, the department, which headed the working group created under the Council of Ministers to develop measures to increase the consumption of pellets by the energy sector, prepared a set of measures to increase the use of wood pellets. It is approved by the government.

In particular, the document contains a list of facilities to which it is possible to supply pellets, including several large ones. We are talking, for example, about the possible reconstruction and modernisation of boilers for the use of pellets in 2024-2027 at a number of facilities of the Belarusian energy company Belenergo. A number of boiler houses in the housing and communal services system in the regions are also listed, the construction of which is planned in the next two years under the state programme called Energy Saving for the current five-year period.

Reserves for supply

Another point concerns the cost of pellets for enterprises, which affects the cost of the heat produced. The price will be fixed and subject to government regulation. They

intend to make profitability minimal, the Forestry Ministry assured.

The head of the industrial production department of the production and sales department of the Ministry of Forestry, Vladimir Shut, recalled that in 2017, the department's system had six small pellet plants with a total capacity of about 16,000 tonnes of pellets per year. In 2020, after the start of implementation of the President's instructions, production amounted to 187 thousand tonnes. Today, forestry enterprises have 21 factories capable of producing 350 thousand tonnes of pellets per year. They are mainly located in the Gomel, Minsk and Brest Regions, where there is a free resource of low-quality wood and sawmill waste. It is planned to commission another enterprise by the end of the year. As a result, the capacity of forestry enterprises will increase to 370 thousand tonnes.

The search for alternative markets is currently ongoing.

Vladimir Shut noted that at the end of July the Council of Ministers adopted Resolution No. 491, which introduced changes to the system of providing the population with solid fuels. Thus, the list has been supplemented with pellets — now up to 2 tonnes of them can be sold per household at fixed prices both in forestry producing enterprises and on branded trading platforms under the Forest House brand.

"This measure is also aimed at increasing consumption in the domestic market and will develop not only the utilisation of

our capacities, but also Belarusian factories for the production of boiler equipment," Vladimir Shut shared his opinion.

Demand for biofuels is growing

The Forestry Ministry recalled that the main consumers of wood fuel are housing and communal services organisations, which account for about 40 percent. Then the population with a share of about a quarter. The list of significant consumers also includes budgetary organisations, fuel supply organisations, and Energy Ministry organisations.

"We see that their demand for our products is growing every year. Thus, the total volume of wood fuel production in 2020 amounted to 8.8 million cubic metres. In 2022 there will already be 10.4 million cubic metres. Only during preparation for the upcoming heating season, forestry enterprises created reserves of wood fuel in their warehouses for housing and communal services organisations at the level of 700 thousand dense cubic metres.

As for the production of chopped firewood, the demand for which has been steadily growing since 2021 from the population and fuel supply organisations, the production of such products has been established in 82 forestry enterprises. In total, they can produce up to 150 thousand cubic metres of finished firewood per year. The largest number of such industries were created in the Gomel, Vitebsk and Brest Regions — 19, 16 and 15, respectively.

HOWEVER

According to the Department of Energy Efficiency of the State Standard, the share of local energy resources in the fuel balance in ten regions of Belarus is about 90 percent. In 75 districts — more than 65 percent. In the housing and communal services system alone, there are about 3.8 thousand boiler houses that provide multi-apartment housing stock with thermal energy using biofuel.



Expanding our path to Chinese marketplaces



Partnership relations between Belarus and China continue to develop dynamically, while trade and economic interaction is increasing. Belarusian goods are increasingly appearing on Chinese trading platforms thanks to the high level of bilateral co-operation. Thus, the day before, the National Pavilion of Belarus, operated by Industrial Park Great Stone, expanded its presence in the Chinese market through cooperation with two new sites, which, in turn, will be a significant addition to our country's export portfolio next year. First Deputy Director General of SZA O Industrial Park Development Company Kirill Koroteyev spoke in more detail about work in the Chinese market in an interview with *The MT*.

By Ilya Kryzhevich

Stable work

— The National Pavilion of Belarus continues to operate successfully in the Chinese market. How do you assess the level of sales of Belarusian products at the moment, and which products are in the lead?

— The National Pavilion of Belarus has been developing steadily since its commissioning in July 2022. As of the end of November, total sales ex-



Kirill Koroteyev

Time to expand

— It is known that the National Pavilion will work with two new Chinese platforms. What are your plans to promote Belarusian products there?

— Indeed, these are: the Taobao and Pinduoduo platforms. Different e-commerce platforms have different audiences with different purchasing habits. However, since Belarusian products, especially our food products, are what people

Adapted to the format

— As far as we know, the main sales format on Chinese platforms is streaming? How are bloggers selected to work for them?

— Working on Chinese platforms has its own specifics. For us, these are two formats: presentation of products on streams, as well as sales in online stores. At the same time, sales on platforms are mainly carried out through live broadcasts. Product targeting also occurs through filming and posting short videos on platforms. Belarusians working in Beijing and fluent in Chinese are invited to stream. Now we are constantly

TODAY THE NATIONAL PAVILION OPERATES ON THE FOLLOWING PLATFORMS:

- Jd.com
- Douyin
- Kuaishou
- Bilibili
- WeChat
- Weibo
- Xiaohongshu
- Tmall
- China Merchants Daojiahui

Two new sites will be added soon: Taobao and Pinduoduo.

Logistics issue

— How difficult is the issue of logistics for the supply of Belarusian goods today?

— There are still many difficulties. Firstly, our maritime transport is severely limited, line train schedules are very tight, and since the most traded goods are food products with a certain shelf life, this increases supply risks. In addition, Chinese customs also have high criteria for imported food products, and many products maintain high import thresholds.

Currently, cargo to China is mainly sent by rail via Russia. Despite the heavy workload in this direction, we have already agreed on the list of transportations with the Russian side. Under these agreements, it will be somewhat easier to ship goods. There are also Chinese dealers in China, to

whom Belarusian manufacturers have given the exclusive right to represent their products. Due to this, we can increase sales within the



ceeded ¥35 million, and the number of subscribers on all platforms was 2.2 million. We currently co-operate with 25 Belarusian factories: we buy high-quality Belarusian products for subsequent sale in China. Chinese consumers highly value our products and sales continue to grow. The best-selling items: drinking milk, milk powder, chocolate and candies with fillings. The taste and packaging of these products meet the needs of the huge consumer market in Greater China. Chinese consumers confirm the quality and reasonable price of Belarusian products. Recently, Belarusian linen products and crystal tableware appeared on the marketplaces of the National Pavilion, which were also liked by many Chinese consumers. There are also plans to gradually introduce Belarusian honey to the Chinese market; our dairy products have great potential.

| Douyin platform | |
|--|-----------------|
| Total number of orders | 612 548 |
| Total number of buyers | 459 462 |
| Total number of orders for 2023 | 453 623 |
| Total number of buyers for 2023 | 335 129 |
| All platforms | |
| Total sales (06/13/2022 - 11/22/2023) | \$ 5 148 165.04 |
| Total sales for 2023 (01/01/2023 - 11/22/2023) | \$ 3 910 493.97 |

need in everyday life, there is a huge demand for these product categories on different platforms. Given the promotion potential, we still plan to focus on food and at the same time continue to develop new Belarusian products to try to find acceptance in the Chinese market.

“We now forecast sales growth on the platform of our country's National Pavilion for next year to be around 20-25 percent”



looking for such Belarusian talents and hope that even more Belarusians will take part in the National Pavilion of Belarus project.

National Pavilion. We now forecast sales growth on the platform of our country's National Pavilion for next year to be around 20-25 percent.

Not everything is healthy that is expensive

The level of health care is an important indicator of public well-being. However, here is a paradox: in a number of Western countries with very advanced technologies in the field of healthcare, the achievements of medical science and practice extend only to a select few. More precisely, for those who can afford them. Various international organisations have been trying to solve the problem of such social injustice for years. However, the world is still missing one of the most important Sustainable Development Goals: universal health coverage. The reasons for this lag are more or less understandable in regions where the level of poverty is off the charts and there is simply nowhere, nothing and no one to treat. However, even in rich countries, highly qualified medical care is an unaffordable luxury for some. Indeed, in severe cases, insurance medicine can drive a person into debt that will have to be repaid throughout his life. Fortunately, Belarusians know about such stories only by hearsay. Our health is under state protection.

In international rankings, Belarus is ahead of many Western countries in terms of accessibility and quality of healthcare services



| Basic health service coverage index | |
|--|----|
| by patient capacity and access to them | |
| According to WHO data for 2021 | |
| Belarus | 98 |
| Switzerland | 97 |
| Sweden | 96 |
| Finland | 95 |
| France | 95 |
| Germany | 95 |
| Spain | 93 |
| Lithuania | 94 |
| Iceland | 91 |
| Italy | 90 |
| Estonia | 90 |
| Greece | 89 |
| Poland | 88 |
| Latvia | 88 |
| Ireland | 87 |
| Luxembourg | 84 |

By Tatiana Shchedrenok

As Americans, for example, joke, in the USA it's good to make money and not get sick, but if you get sick, it's better to emigrate. An interesting judgment, especially considering that US doctors are among the most highly qualified specialists in the world. However, medicine in the United States is first and foremost a business. A country of declared equal opportunities, unfortunately, does not guarantee universal access to health care services. The person will be taken care of strictly within the framework of his insurance policy. Each type of insurance has its own tariff plan with a corresponding range of services. From 'economy' to 'platinum' options. Whichever one can afford. For everything that is 'outside the tariff' you will have to pay. Of course, not every American is able to afford premium-level insurance that can cover, say, an expensive operation or long-term and complex treatment. While no one is immune from serious health problems.

Health experts say the crazy prices for medical services in the United States are the result of distorted pricing. Medicine in America is perhaps the most inflation-prone area. The uncontrolled race for profit gives rise to ever new methods of increasing it. The state interferes minimally in these issues. The medical billing system alone is a labyrinth. Administrative costs for personnel and software are growing by leaps and bounds, increasing the zeros in insurance policies. In addition, the so-called 'defensive'

| Maternal mortality rate | |
|--|------|
| per 100,000 live births | |
| UN Sustainable Development Goals data 2020 | |
| Belarus | 1.1 |
| Poland | 2.0 |
| Iceland | 2.7 |
| Spain | 3.6 |
| Sweden | 4.5 |
| Netherlands | 4.3 |
| Italy | 4.8 |
| Ireland | 5.0 |
| Estonia | 5.2 |
| Austria | 5.2 |
| France | 7.9 |
| Switzerland | 7.4 |
| Finland | 8.3 |
| Lithuania | 8.7 |
| UK | 9.8 |
| Canada | 11.0 |
| Portugal | 11.8 |
| Latvia | 18.3 |
| USA | 21.1 |

principle of providing health care services raises the tariff bar. It is common practice for doctors to order many unnecessary additional examinations in order to prevent possible lawsuits from patients and insurance companies in case of error.

The astronomical cost of health care does not equate to its affordability. Only certain categories of citizens can count on government policies like Medicare and Medicaid in the United States. As they say, if you're drowning, you're on your own. COVID-19 is a good example. Let us recall that despite the statements of the federal authorities about the highest preparedness for any epidemics, the 'viral' story showed a slightly different picture. Western health care, and not

just in the United States, simply stalled when faced with an emergency situation. There simply weren't enough places in the hospitals of American and European clinics. The patients were placed wherever necessary. Specialists barely had time to consult patients over the phone. Life-saving equipment became the subject of speculation. The panic and excitement that took over society at that moment was a natural result. It is unprofitable to keep a 'spare' staff of doctors, medicines, and ventilators for 'every firefighter' in an insurance system of medical services concentrated in private hands. Who will pay for this? The goal of a business is to make a profit, and not to increase costs and financial risks. The result of the 'commercial' approach is an incredible number of people getting sick and dying during the pandemic.

For comparison, the domestic healthcare system survived the battle with COVID-19 and proved its viability even in such a difficult situation. Despite the crazy workload on doctors, everyone who needed it received professional help. The bed capacity was urgently repurposed for the red zone. Other specialised specialists came to the aid of the therapists. However, the planned treatment of the remaining patients did not stop. In Belarusian clinics it was not the financial situation that was saved, but lives. By prioritising the general over the specific in social issues, Belarus is closer than many others to the UN goal of universal health coverage. In particular, according to the index of accessibility of healthcare servic-

es, according to the latest WHO data, Belarus is ahead of many EU countries and the USA.

The national health care system is unique in its own way. Every Belarusian, regardless of income, has the opportunity to receive any type of medical care free of charge — from primary to the most high-tech and expensive. For example, according to statistics on the number of organ transplants per 1 million population, Belarus is a leader not only in the post-Soviet space, but is also ahead of many European countries. No other country in the world can boast such a wide range of free and high-quality medical services.

Achievements in the field of maternal and child health, innovative approaches to the treatment of complex diseases in our country are not an object of purchase and sale, but the property of the entire society. However, the patient's path to high technology begins at the local level. As WHO has analysed, in a number of countries, primary health care is simply a disaster. This is understandable: these services are more difficult to convert into profit. Meanwhile, international experts argue that the majority (up to 90 percent) of essential health interventions can be carried out through the primary health care system. Therefore, special attention is paid to its development in Belarus. As they say, this is a matter of policy of government priorities. The economic effect of the medical business is immediate. Investments in the health of citizens, and therefore in the future of the country, are a strategic task.

| Infant mortality rate | |
|--|-----|
| per 100,000 live births | |
| UN Sustainable Development Goals data 2019 | |
| Belarus | 2.4 |
| Spain | 2.6 |
| Italy | 2.7 |
| Belgium | 2.7 |
| Ireland | 2.8 |
| Austria | 2.8 |
| Lithuania | 3.0 |
| Portugal | 3.1 |
| Latvia | 3.1 |
| Germany | 3.2 |
| Greece | 3.3 |
| Switzerland | 3.6 |
| UK | 3.7 |
| France | 3.8 |
| Poland | 3.8 |
| Canada | 4.2 |
| USA | 5.6 |



Eleonora Kachalovskaya became the first Runner-Up of Miss Europe Continental 2023: we learned about all the secrets of preparing for the competition

The international beauty contest Miss Europe Continental was held in Naples. Girls from 57 countries participated. Miss Belarus 2023 Eleonora Kachalovskaya took second place. She brought the Slutsk belt and a book about Belarus to Italy, as well as her uniqueness and beauty.



Dress in the colours of Belarus

By Yelena Basikirskaya

Fifteen thousand beads and gems

It's difficult to express Eleonora's emotions. She admits that she made every effort to adequately represent her native country. The girl is already home. She says that she has been very tired in recent days, but it was worth it.

- I was wondering how I would work in the new realities. I dreamed that everything would go perfectly, I set myself up for good things, and even before the trip I gave myself a directive: to gain experience first. Experience of communicating with people, experience of the European scene.

Preparing for the competition was not easy. In Naples, for example, the finalists actively rehearsed and talked with journalists. The show began with a ceremony on the red carpet, and after that the girls appeared before the audience in cocktail dresses, swimsuits and evening dresses.

"This is a resounding victory! *Eleonora and I were in touch every hour, right up to the final stage. She called at two in the morning with great news. Emotions are running high!*" *Director of the National Beauty School Bozena Jeremic shared her emotions.*

Miss and her team have been preparing for the performance for several weeks. First of all, they worked on the outfits.

"A Belarusian designer who represents a domestic brand collaborated with us. The main dress for Eleonora is blue, floor-length. With this shade they

tried to emphasise the culture of blue-eyed Belarus, its rivers and lakes," Bozena Jeremic explains.

The final outfit was created especially for the girl. An airy, elegant dress in which they tried to reflect the history of a blue-eyed country. This is completely handmade, designer Yegor Kirichenko noted,

PROFILE

- Eleonora Kachalovskaya is 23 years old.
- She graduated from Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts and is studying by correspondence to become a psychologist at the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University, and works as a manager of a modelling agency at the National School of Beauty.
- The beauty is a thoughtful person, she plays sports, travels around the country.
- She tries not to rush time and especially not to get ahead of it. Because she is sure it's pointless.

"We took the Art Deco style of the late 1930s as a basis. Geometric strict lines were complemented with shiny fabric and one and a half thousand beads and gems. We completed it in record time — in just a week."

Eleonora teaches fashion shows at the National Beauty School. She is fluent in this art, plus she honed her skills at the National Beauty Pageant. But even despite this, I studied with other teachers in order to adopt their experience and style.

Talent school

During her preparation, Miss took master classes on hairstyles and makeup. This was necessary because for several days, when our participant was in Naples, she got ready for rehearsals and various trips on her own. By the way, other world beauty contests have the same practice. Only before the finals do specialists get down to business.

In addition, Eleonora studied with English tutors and honed her choreography.

A lot of effort was put into this victory. Second place in an international competition is very pleasing, Bozhena Jeremic explains,

"The contest is objective. We are proud of the success of Eleonora and the entire team from the National Beauty School. By the way, our beauty brought national souvenirs to Naples — the Slutsk belt and a book about Belarus. The whole world will know about our symbols."

By the way, the last high-profile victory of Belarusian beauties on the world podium was in 2018, when Maria Vasilevich entered the top participants of the Miss World 2018 contest. The girl became the only representative of Europe in the top five. And now another star: Eleonora Kachalovskaya – first Runner-Up of Miss Europe Continental.

The National Beauty School does more than just prepare Miss Belarus participants for prestigious international competitions. There is an excellent workshop of talents in the modelling industry, Bozena Jeremic notes, "We have

approximately 360 students and approximately 100 models. We also deal with the aesthetic development and education of children. By these words we mean not only external, but also internal beauty, the correct ideological component, high moral qualities.

Of our adult pupils, the oldest is 70 years old. She does modelling professionally, goes on the catwalk, and earns money from it. We train our students in hairdressing, fashion shows, choreography, makeup and hairstyles. And professional models also take courses on the basics of law, labour, and etiquette."

Employees of the National School of Beauty develop original programmes on fashion shows, style, choreography,

photo posing and photo plastic surgery, as well as image and self-presentation. More than two thousand children and teenagers have been trained at the school, and over a thousand models have been trained here. A real talent factory!

Photos by Aleksei Ivanchenko and provided by the organizers of the international beauty contest



Global trends – 2024

The main risks and threats to the world and the global economy in the coming year

Traditionally, more and more materials with forecasts for the development of events in the coming year appear in the global information field in December. The attention of the public and specialists is largely focused on key tabloids (magazines, newspapers and studies). Their forecasts and assessments are important, since now the world is 'hooked' on the products of the so-called factories of the future or futuristic centres, which have become extremely popular in the West. The increased attention to them from the public is determined not by the bright, heightened fantasies of their oracles, but to a greater extent by the fact that Western elites, since the 70s of the 20th century, have moved to managing world processes by imposing their own models of the future.

By **Aleksei Avdonin**, an analyst with the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Research (BISR)

Battles for power

Something similar happened in mid-November 2023, when the British edition of *The Economist*, authored by Jerome Berthier, published a new magazine with a cover in the form of a graphic rebus called *The World Ahead 2024* (a forecast for 2024 in the form of riddles, drawings and symbols). After the publication of this issue, the entire public began to actively solve the proposed puzzle and look for hidden meanings. They tried to understand what the Rothschilds (the magazine belongs to this wealthy family) had planned for the whole world, what images of the future to expect.

We will not go into the details of deciphering the 'graffiti' data (there are now a lot of them freely available on the Internet, everyone can find and get 'vivid' impressions), we will just briefly explain what exactly the key trends *The Economist* expects in 2024.

The main trend will be associated with a series of elections in different countries.

Electoral cycles will affect more than 70 countries, home to over 4 billion people — more than half the world's population.

But the elections will not be simple and smooth; a very tough confrontation between various political forces is expected. Many saw in *The Economist's* drawing a prediction of such complex and acute battles between politicians for power, when some (old) elites will be replaced by others (young).

The second, most powerful trend, that will determine the course of events in 2024 will be the US elections.

A change is expected from the Democratic Party led by Joe Biden to the Republican Party represented by Donald Trump.

This event will inevitably lead to increased confrontation between the United States and China (on the cover, Trump and Xi go in different directions).

Dangerous competition

The growing disagreements between Washington and Beijing under Trump could develop into a new Cold War in the form of a sharp increase in technological rivalry between the United States and China (symbols of different technologies, new types of energy, auto production, energy, etc. are visible on the cover). And this will be **the third trend of 2024!**

The growing contradictions between the United States and China as the key economies of the world will lead to a weakening of the global economy, which may result in another collapse in the world stock and currency markets.

This fourth trend is confirmed by the statements of the Prime Minister of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Li Qiang on November 28th, 2023. He pointed out that the global economy faces a serious threat of fragmentation into separate trading blocs. This situation is leading to increasing obstacles to the operation of global production and supply chains, which is slowing down the global economy and plunging us into an era of strict protectionism.

na, which sharply cause high fever and are similar in symptoms to pneumonia and COVID-19. The World Health Organisation has demanded China provide important details about the situation.

It is highly likely that this lever of pressure will continue to be used by the West on China to weaken the investment attractiveness of the country, delay efforts and resources to eliminate diseases and create social tension and dissatisfaction in Chinese society.

Thus, scientists surveyed in November 2023 by the *Financial Times* indicated that floods and droughts are expected around the world at the beginning of 2024 due to the intensification of the natural phenomenon El Niño. This phenomenon will last until at least April 2024.

The head of the World Meteorological Organisation, Petteri Taalas, believes that 2023 will be the hottest year on Earth on record, and 2024 could be even warmer.

What about our region?

Western futurists (including from *The Economist*) predict further confrontation between Russia and Ukraine (read NATO). The National Bank of Ukraine in its forecast also expects hostilities until the end of 2024 and sees great risks of a prolonged war with a gradual decrease in the volume or loss of rhythm in the flow of international assistance, an increase in the state budget deficit and financing of the military campaign, and a drop in exports due to damage to port and energy infrastructure.

In such conditions, it will be extremely difficult for Zelensky to stay in power. A change in the political leader of Ukraine is expected — it is no coincidence that there is an hourglass on the cover (Zelensky's time is running out).

As for Russia, the key event here will be the upcoming elections of the President of the Russian Federation.

The British are being sarcastic, attributing the hourglass to Vladimir Putin — supposedly his time is also running out. But these are the British — they never liked strong power in Russia.

2024 will not be associated with the weakening of Moscow. On the contrary, the strengthening of central government, large-scale modernisation of the armed forces and the introduction of modern technologies are expected. All this will allow Russia to develop and advance its global foreign policy agenda.

Belarus, having made the right geopolitical choice in favour of the collective East (Russia and China), is now developing and has good economic growth rates. The well-being of the population of our country in 2024 will continue to grow, the security of society will be ensured, our people and state will not be ruined by the collective West.



At the end of November, the IMF indicated that the global economy was not gaining momentum and lowered its forecast for global GDP growth next year to 2.9 percent. The fund's experts expect that the economic decline will be associated with an increase in global inflation — up to 5.8 percent in 2024. Against this background, the IMF demanded that central banks maintain tight monetary policies — high lending rates will lead to further inhibition of business and investment.

Artificial intelligence attacks

The fifth trend of 2024 may be the next waves of unpredictable socio-economic upheavals, including due to epidemics/pandemics, as well as the rapid development and introduction of artificial intelligence into the global economy and production processes (on the cover on the centre left in the form of the all-seeing eye and human brains, connected by wires).

In particular, in November, China was overwhelmed by a wave of destructive propaganda from Western media about the rapid spread of unknown mysterious respiratory diseases among children in Chi-

In terms of artificial intelligence, many predict an increase in its threats to humanity. The desire to minimise costs leads to the widespread introduction of AI in the design and development of new products and services, which inevitably leads to the dismissal of numerous engineering personnel, creative workers and others.

The sixth trend may be a situation when states will no longer be able to cope with the cascade of socio-economic problems (unemployment, protests, terror, sabotage of elites and intelligentsia) and will smoothly hand over the reins of power to large corporations and banks.

Warmer, even warmer...

The pressure on the state as a form of social organisation in 2024 will increase under the influence of ever-increasing climate shocks (storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, abnormal heat, cold, etc.). And this is **the seventh trend.**

Invincible life

In memory of people's artist Leonid Shchemelev

He never depicted the war in a picturesque, ceremonial and elegantly heroic manner, just as he did not paint battle scenes, although Leonid Shchemelev, first an infantryman, then a cavalryman, had more than enough of them during the war years. Not fully understood for many years, he received real recognition and the title of People's Artist in his late adulthood.

And then he worked tirelessly for decades, coming to the workshop until his last days. Almost the same age as the century — some three years were not enough for him to reach the century mark! — in the history of Belarusian culture, Shchemelev stands on a par with the era, which, even if it was not kind to him, the artist himself, summing up the results, noted with satisfaction: he lived the way he wanted. He managed to say everything he wanted, he managed to do it. He managed to breathe the fill of the bittersweet air of existence.

By Irina Ovsepyan

Leonid Dmitrievich Shchemelev was born in 1923 in Vitebsk — at that time it was like being born in the famous Parisian La Roche: artists lived nearby all along the street. The first encounter with art took place at a fair, where, in the lean interwar period, his mother took things to sell or exchange for food. There, amid the bustle and hubbub of people, on the fence were hung 'malyavankas' — pieces of painted fabric that were hung on the walls for beauty and to escape the cold and dampness, marked with the naive brushes of amateur painters and the intoxicating smell of fresh paint: a bright, happy world of strange flowers and animals. The future artist received his first parting words from Yehuda Pen — the elderly master looked at the drawings and said that he needed to study.

Everything would probably have come true easily and joyfully, but war happened. In June 1941, Leonid Shchemelev's mother had a terrible dream: as if the entire sky over Vitebsk was covered by terrible black birds.



General Lev Dovator, 1975

And already on June 23rd, the defenceless city was shelled by German air bombs.

His father, a former non-commissioned officer in the tsarist army, went to a recruiting station — he left as part of a railway battalion, unarmed, with a skinny soldier's bag over his shoulders. He promised: wait, I'll be back soon. With these words, he disappeared into the smoke of war — one of the unknown soldiers, the memory of whom was frozen in grey obelisks at mass graves.

Young Leonid, his mother and pregnant sister managed to leave as the last echelon in a crowd of confused refugees; they came under bombing near Rudnya, then the survivors buried the dead and bandaged the wounded with whatever they had to. For a month, under constant air raids, the family, transferring from one evacuation train to another, reached Moscow, from where they could go deep into the rear. During the evacuation, he worked at a defence plant that produced fragmentation grenades: he helped the front as best he could, waiting for the mo-



My birth, 1967



Hard Years (Militia), 1964

ment when he himself was finally drafted into the army.

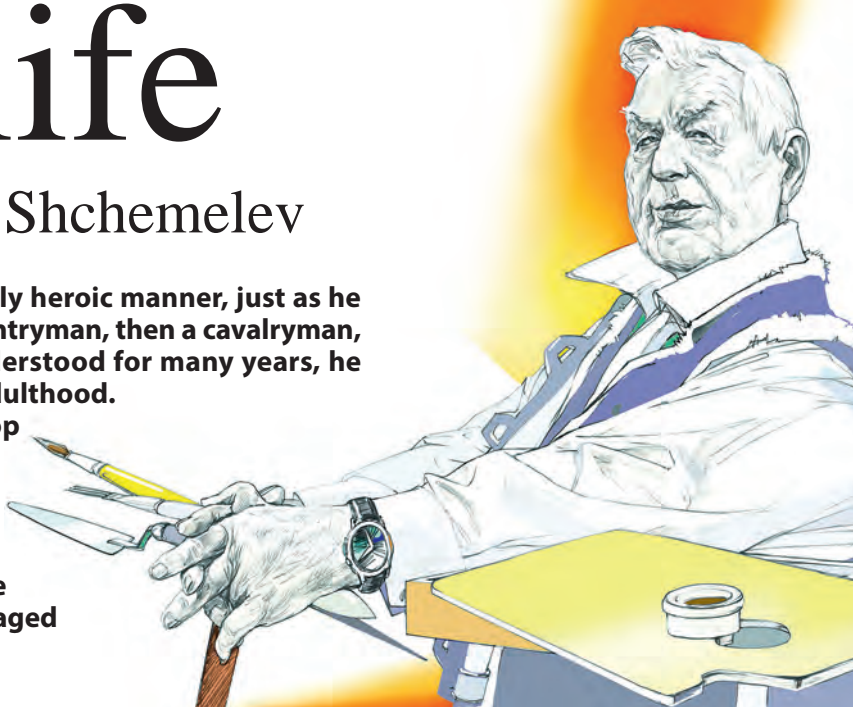
In December 1941, Shchemelev was finally mobilised and sent to sergeant school. He survived the battles on the Kursk Bulge and crossed the Dnieper River and Pripyat River under heavy fire during the famous Chernigov-Pripyat operation. The roads of war brought him to his native land, which he cleared of invaders. He was seriously wounded in the arm in the battle near Mozyr, and in the hospital he met a dashing cavalryman who began the war in the cavalry of the legendary Lev Dovator. Shchemelev, who loved horses since childhood, wrote a letter directly from his hospital room asking for a transfer to the cavalry — it was allowed. The end of the war found him in the Ukrainian Cossack Corps: guard sergeant Shchemelev was one of those who drove out Bandera's executioners and accomplices of the fascists from the forest caches.

In 1947, he entered the Minsk Art School; front-line soldiers were then accepted without any questions. Then — to the newly created Belarusian Theatre and Art Institute, where his real studies began. He was lucky, and seriously lucky: he became a student of the national artist Vitaly Tsvirko, a delicate, intelligent, caring mentor. Shchemelev was already 36 years old when he graduated, his diploma canvas *Wedding*, today a textbook, was torn to pieces by the defence commission — for the overly bright

and non-academic colours, the horses literally tearing from the canvas, as well as for the fact that the Soviet wedding cannot be like this... The intercession of Tsvirko, who was then the rector, did not help, but an influential Moscow guest was found who defended the artist. Perhaps his front-line past also played a role, which could not be ignored; one way or another, he was given a humiliating 3 grade and was still allowed to graduate.

For many years he received criticism from his contemporaries: either for excessive harshness and an excess of trench truth in his depiction of the Great Patriotic War, or, on the contrary, for a flourishing riot of colours, or for 'formalism', when a painter unlike anyone else again became a target for slander. In 1967, the Belarusian exhibition committee did not allow his painting *My Birth* to go to the All-Union Exhibition in Moscow, just as they did not allow Mikhail Savitsky's *Partisan Madonna* — the view of the war of these two creators seemed too strange and unusual. And only the kind guardian angel Alena Aladava, director of the National Art Museum of Belarus, ensured that the paintings went to the exhibition and received their well-deserved triumph, becoming icons of the 'severe style'.

For Shchemelev, the war was not at all the one shown in the movies — when, as the writer Yuri German aptly put it in his time, 'not a war, but a sight



As if in a dream, 1995

for sore eyes, if only I could fight for a century: cleanly, well-fed, and the commander was the head, but the fascists — exclusively dead'.

The war that he heard about years after the last shots had died down was completely different: in it, 18-year-old boys (how many of them passed through his department while serving in the infantry!) died, sometimes without having time to fire a single shot.

And yet, the main thing for Leonid Shchemelev was the understanding: life always defeats death.

That is why immersion in the depths of memory was replaced by a hymn to happiness, the ability to breathe and feel, a feeling of the preciousness and uniqueness of every moment on this earth. This life, rising up against death, all-conquering, full of jubilation, broke through in his broad flying strokes, in colours that were not in the limited palette of exemplary and sad functionaries from art.

Real recognition for Shchemelev began only in the 1980s, when the bureaucratic quagmire around art gradually dried up. In 1982, the 59-year-old master received the State Prize of the BSSR for the cycle *My Land, Minsk Region*, a year later — the title of People's Artist. In the 1990-2000s, his talent reached the peak of its heyday — at a time when most people reach old age, manage to drink and write ten times, run into a dead end and waste all their creative capital, he creates easily and with pleasure, plunging into experiments and searches, then entering into a roll call with Marc Chagall, then going into memories.

Leonid Shchemelev's paintings live within the walls of the National Art Museum, a gallery named after him, which he himself actually founded, donating several dozen canvases to the state; they are stored in the Tretyakov Gallery and in the collections of other famous galleries on the planet. Thin-legged, long-maned horses race on his canvases; his paintings are inhabited and inhabited by the artist's loved ones — his beloved wife, children and household members, pets.

And he portrayed himself more than once — young, fit, full of vitality, ringing like a string... As if, having crossed the earthly boundary, he galloped into the endless sky.

Today, approximately 1.5 million tonnes of honey are produced in the world, and almost half of it is counterfeit. Honey is one of the ten most frequently counterfeited products. Honey sommeliers are called upon to protect its quality (and name!). Today our guest is Olga Gavrilik, Master of Technical Sciences, the first and so far the only certified honey and mead maker sommelier in Belarus and amateur beekeeper in the third generation.

We are in honey

We learned all the secrets of the work of the only honey sommelier in Belarus

By Natalia Tyshkevich



— Despite the fact that bees and honey, as you say, are built into your DNA, you did not come to the apiary right away.

— I started my career in the banking sector. Then I went into private business, where I started producing synthetic packaging from scratch. To understand the product and sell it successfully, I became a technologist in the chemical and meat processing industries. Although in my heart I felt like an entrepreneur. And then there was a boom in healthy eating. After conducting marketing research, I realised: honey is exactly what I need. Now my husband and I have our own apiary and a production facility for processing honey and bee products in the agro-town of Porechye, Grodno Region. There are also hives that only I work with.

— How did you become a honey sommelier?

— I accidentally saw a note on the Internet about honey sommelier. Then I found courses on sensory analysis of honey, organised by the Italian



FACT
According to experts, in Germany, on average, 1.2-1.3 kilogrammes of honey per year is consumed per person, in the USA and Belarus — 0.5 kilogrammes, in Japan — 0.4 kilogrammes, in Europe — approximately 0.7 kilogrammes, in Russia (according to various sources) — from 0.3 to 0.8 kilogrammes

and aroma. The aroma, by the way, may not coincide with the smell. And it is felt only when exhaling.

You can restore the functioning of your taste buds by eating a piece of green apple or rinsing your mouth with water. By tasting honey, you can also evaluate its consistency, size and condition of the crystals.

— Is crystallisation a sign of falsification?

— Vice versa. Real honey hardens quickly — a month after collection. If the product is not candied for a long time, then this is a bad sign. This may indicate possible heat treatment, which destroys beneficial substances. Fake honeys do not crystallise, maintaining a viscous, syrup-like consistency. The exception is the acacia and honeydew species.

HOWEVER

There are 20,000 species of bees in the world, but only seven of them are honeybees

— What strange honeys have you ever tried?

— There are a great many varieties of honey. Even more than honey plants. I have already tried about 300 types of it. In Italy, I liked ailanthus (popularly known as 'vinegar tree') honey. In it you can catch shades of hazelnuts, coconut, baked pear, and licorice candies.

From exotic New Zealand — manuka honey.

Dense, dark brown and... with a very specific taste and aroma: it smells strongly of medicine. Sakura honey is like our spring honey, collected when the gardens are in bloom.

Strawberry honey has an unusual and sharp taste. It is very bitter and spicy, somewhat reminiscent of Tabasco. In addition to the usual ones (floral and fruity, for example), the registry includes honey with the smell of wet dog fur — eucalyptus, with the aroma of menthol and freshly cut grass — linden.

Buckwheat has a very sweet and tart taste and a specific aroma — a blooming buckwheat field, grease, burnt sugar with notes of coffee and caramel.

— What honey is the most expensive in the world?

— Elvish, the price of 1 kilogrammes reaches €5000. Bees collect it from honey plants growing in the crevices of the Sarikair cave at a depth of 1800 metres.

— Which varieties are the rarest?

— Collected from honey plants that do not grow in large plantations. These are raspberry, dandelion, pumpkin, angelica, apple, and hawthorn honeys. It is very difficult to find honey from berry honey plants: strawberry, lingonberry, blueberry.

— Are there elite varieties of honey?

— Indeed, the elite includes varieties (both dark and light) containing over 80 percent fructose and glucose. These are heather, clover, buckwheat and linden honeys.

— How to check the naturalness of honey?

— The most important thing is to buy honey in trusted places, under a familiar brand or from your beekeeper. I am glad that in Belarus the problem of honey adulteration is not so acute: beekeeping has a high culture.

There are basic criteria that are inherent in natural honey. This is primarily the colour (depending on the type of honey) — from transparent to dark amber. Pleasant aroma without any foreign odours. And no smell of smoke. Sweet, pleasant, without a pronounced foreign aftertaste.

Homogeneous and consistency: without separation and foreign substances. A small layer, for example, may be present in buckwheat honey. And this is considered the norm: fructose sinks to the bottom, and glucose crystallises on top. And as a result — separation of honey in the jar.

Real honey dissolves in water without any residue. If sediment appears or impurities are noticeable, it is a fake.



Council for Research in Agriculture and Economics. In 2018, I flew to Bologna to study as a honey sommelier. The training took place in three stages. In 2021, I successfully passed the exams and became a member of the National Register of Experts in Sensory Analysis of Honey.

— What is the most popular honey in Belarus?

— Perhaps a multicomponent polyfloral meadow or forest plant. It is the most common and in demand. But monofloral honeys (that is, taken mainly from one type of plant) are rare in our country.

— What kind of honey do you like the most?

— Heather: dark amber, jelly-like, with a pronounced bitterness.

— But it is very rare.

— Yes, due to the decline in groundwater levels, the heathers dry out, the amount of nectar decreases, and it is difficult for the bee to work on this flower. I brought him to Italy for courses. It turned out to be identical to heather honey from Great Britain. In their country and in our country, one type of heather grows — calluna vulgaris.

— What is sensory analysis of honey?

— This is an analysis using the senses: sight, smell, taste and touch. Only hearing is not involved. The process is similar to wine tasting. It is no coincidence that 30 years ago it was invented by the French: wine connoisseur, engineer Gabriel Vache and scientist Michel Gonnet.

Honey, like wine, is poured into glasses. First, we visually evaluate its appearance: colour, brightness, presence of impurities, consistency. Then, to analyse the smell, stir and distribute it a little along the walls of the glass to release volatile substances. Cover the glass with your hand and hold it for a couple of seconds so that as many aromatic molecules as possible accumulate. Open it sharply and inhale. The strongest olfactory sensations occur in the first seconds: the receptors very quickly get used to the smell. We take the second breath after 20-30 seconds.

Then we taste it. If you hold your nose and taste the honey, you will not feel anything: there is no aroma. The sense of smell is a central part of our lives.

To assess the taste characteristics and aroma, 1-2 grams of honey is enough, which must be held between the tongue and the roof of the mouth for a couple of seconds. This will be the first taste. Having swallowed and exhaled, we get a retrozonal aftertaste—both taste

Life on the edge of the world

The station has internet and a sauna — Belarusian polar explorers talk about life in Antarctica and myths about themselves

By Inna Gorbatenko

Sweet home and fishing at the pole

For ten years, Belarusian polar explorers have been building their own modern Antarctic station. It has laboratory and living quarters, a medical block with an ultrasound machine and x-ray, a laundry room and a sauna. In short, everything to live comfortably in permafrost conditions.

Each expedition participant has a separate room with a heating and ventilation system.

The head of the Republican Centre for Polar Research, Vladimir Ryzhikov, says that desire alone is not enough to participate in the expedition. You need to go through a tough selection process. They check everything — from caries to chronic diseases. However, he hastened to dispel the popular myth that you need to get rid

of the appendix and wisdom teeth in advance. By the way, there is a surgeon on the team. Just in case.

For breakfast, the classics are porridge, sometimes pancakes, sandwiches with sausage or red fish. For lunch — soup and main course; for dinner they serve meat with side dishes (mashed potatoes, buckwheat, beans), and salads. The polar explorers took with them more than 100 kilogrammes of food. Canned food, canned goods, dried fruits, coffee and tea — everything that does not spoil is brought from Belarus. The rest — meat, vegetables



and fruits — was purchased along the way in Cape Town (South Africa).

Internet is available at the station. Not as fast as at home, but it is there, says Arthur Ivashko, a participant in three expeditions, “I saw a time when, on a six-month business trip, everyone was given 10 minutes to call home. Now there is unlimited Internet, we can communicate via video calling, correspond in instant messengers. Our Belarusian television also works, so we are always up to date with the news.”

Free time is rare in Antarctica. Entertainment includes books and table tennis. Fishing is not a hobby, but an important part of scientific research. They go fishing with ice traps, sometimes with fine-mesh nets. You can fish with a regular fishing rod, but lowering the hook to a depth of 50 metres and reeling it back in is a headache. The catch is inspected, photographed and stored for further study on the ‘mainland’.

Antarctica hardens people, Artur Ivashko says. Now he watches the *Titanic* film without nerves: a floating iceberg as tall as a house is a common thing for him. But the animals never cease to amaze. Seals are unique creatures: they can lie under the sun for days. That’s why polar explorers secretly call the day off seal day.

Four metres above the water

A cook works at the Antarctic station. The menu is high in calories, but traditional — it was developed by specialists to provide polar explorers with a balanced and healthy diet from a limited range of products.

They are trying to grow some crops right in Antarctica. A rich harvest of cucumbers and tomatoes still remains a dream, although our neighbours, the Russians, managed to grow watermelons. But basil, parsley, and dill often end up on the polar explorers’ table. The guys joke, they say, we should try to grow potatoes, like in *The Martian* film. But it is prohibited to bring animals (for example, chickens and dogs) to Antarctica — they can harm the continent’s biosphere.

What about the water? It would seem that there is snow all around, there shouldn’t be any problems with it. However, melted water does not contain macroelements useful for humans, explains Vladimir Ryzhikov, “It can only be used for household needs, and the mineral one is brought to the station. Water for cooking is obtained locally. There are many fresh lakes near our station. True, the ice thickness there is about four metres. You can’t get water without a drill.”



Our polar explorers continue to conquer the mysterious and inaccessible ice continent. For the next six months they will live in Antarctica, working in conditions of stormy winds and aggressive sun. But there are also advantages. For example, where else can you drink cola with a piece of century-old ice?

Summer in winter and the southernmost tan

Perhaps the most myths about Antarctica concern the weather. It really is unpredictable there: it can change dramatically several times a day. From sunny with a plus sign to frosty with a gale wind of 50

m/s. Everyone knows that Antarctica is very cold. But few people realise that the minimum temperature recorded on this continent is minus 89 degrees. Now summer has come — the gentlest time of the year, says Deputy Head of the Republican Centre for Polar Research Igor Pilshchikov, “But in cloudy weather there is no contrast, the sky and earth merge together, and it is difficult to navigate where you are. Sometimes such strong winds blow from the ice dome of the continent towards the sea that visibility is a maximum of three metres. On such days, the ‘Storm’ mode is introduced, during which it is forbidden to leave the station.”

Polar explorers, like us, navigate using GPS. Although they don’t rely heavily on electronics.



Special road signs help. There are them in Antarctica too, only different ones (wooden signal ones), they mark the main land routes of the expedition. The length of some reaches 100 kilometres. They stand at a distance of no more than 20 metres from each other, so as not to pass by in inclement weather.

The peculiarity of the continent is the very bright sun, which quickly heats everything around. On a polar day, the rocks heat up to 40 degrees.

CHILLING

The largest and oldest iceberg in the world broke aground and floated in Antarctica.

Its area is about 4000 square kilometres, and the thickness of the block is almost 400 metres. For comparison: the height of the longest skyscraper in Europe (The Shard in London) is 310 metres. Scientists believe that the iceberg decreased in size, therefore lost stability and began to move. Its movements are closely monitored using satellite images.

everything around. On a polar day, the rocks heat up to 40 degrees.

To the surprise of their relatives, polar explorers return from the expedition with a gorgeous southern tan. The fact is that Antarctica has an uneven ozone layer and strong ultraviolet radiation. Without protective cream, the skin burns instantly. It is impossible to be outdoors without glasses: the sun is so blinding that you can get a burn to the cornea.

Despite the difficult working conditions, some polar explorers come to Antarctica more than once or twice. The icy desert is said to have a special attraction and romance that is very difficult to resist.





Aleksey Matush

Photo of the week

The beginning of winter turned out to be snowy in Belarus. Schoolchildren from the agricultural town of Golovchin, Belynichi district, enthusiastically supported the national snow removal challenge.

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



December 1st World AIDS Day. It was proclaimed by the World Health Organisation. It is celebrated since 1988. This international day serves to strengthen organised efforts to combat the HIV and AIDS pandemic that is spreading throughout all regions of the world. AIDS is a serious condition that develops in a person against the background of severe immunodeficiency caused by a long course of HIV infection.

December 3rd is World Computer Graphics Day. The date was chosen due to the fact that it is the only one in the year that begins with a symbolic combination of symbols: 3D — December 3rd. At first, 3December (another name for the holiday) concerned only the creators of three-dimensional images, but gradually it covered all other industries related to computer graphics in general.



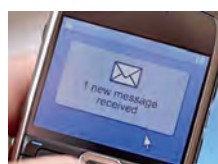
December 3rd is Lawyer's Day in Belarus. The legal profession is multifaceted and has numerous of specialisations:

lawyer, prosecutor, judge, investigator, human resources specialist, legal consultant, teacher, scientist. Lawyers are entrusted with an important mission to form the legal culture of society, respect for the Law, and the legal policy of the state.



On December 3rd, 1872, the beginning of the legend of the Flood was discovered on the fragment of one of the tablets with an excerpt from the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Textually, it was close to the biblical one, but 700 years older than it! *The Epic of Gilgamesh* poem, is one of the oldest surviving literary works in the world, the largest work written in cuneiform, one of the greatest works of literature of the Ancient East.

On December 3rd, 1875, the Moscow premiere of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 took place. The Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor was written by Pyotr Tchaikovsky in 1874–1875. This work remains one of the most popular piano concertos in world musical literature to this day. Tchaikovsky's First Concerto gained tremendous popularity even during his lifetime.



December 3rd, 1992, is considered the birthday of SMS — the world's first transmission of SMS messages took place. This event became

a milestone in the history of cellular communications. The ability to send short text messages later became widespread. The abbreviation SMS is now heard by most of the world's inhabitants and comes from the English term Short Message Service.

On December 4th, 1946, the first passenger car Moskvich-400 was assembled in Moscow. The four-seater car had a top speed of 90 km/h and, with the exception of some differences, was an almost exact copy of the German Opel Kadett K38. The initiator of the release of the new Soviet car was none other than Joseph Stalin. Over the years of production of Moskvich-400, a total of 216,006 sedans and 17,742 convertibles were produced.



December 5th is World Soil Day. It is celebrated to remind the world community of the importance of soil resources and the role they play in preserving ecosystems and increasing human well-being. The



factor of land fertility plays a key role in our lives. From this point of view, environmentalists and FAO representatives are concerned that about a third of the world's soil resources are degraded, and some are susceptible to desertification.

On December 5th, 1924, the Palekh art workshops were created in the ancient Russian village of Palekh. Modern Palekh is considered one of the recognised centres of lacquer miniatures. The Palekh residents created a new style of miniature writing, which is distinguished by its special subtlety of artistic techniques.



On December 7th–8th, 1963, the first official international competitions in rhythmic gymnastics, which were then called the European Cup, took place in Budapest. Since among the participants there were gymnasts not only from European countries, it was decided to consider these competitions the First World Championship in rhythmic gymnastics.

