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Partners search for reserves for progress

By Vasily Kharitonov

International meetings at Palace of Independence see Alexander Lukashenko meet First Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Yaqub Eyyubov, then the Governor of the Kursk Region of Russia, Alexander Mikhailov

Azerbaijan is one of the few countries with which goods turnover not only remained stable last year but actually grew, despite conditions of global crisis. The



Yaqub Eyyubov President assured Yaqub Eyyubov of Minsk's readiness to develop co-operation with Baku in all directions, as has been proven by actions. Azerbaijan has various joint ventures producing Belarusian goods, including tractors, lorries and lifts. Lo-

calisation of resources and components has reached almost half share and Mr. Lukashenko has promised his Azerbaijani colleague, Ilham Aliyev, that necessary technologies will eventually be fully transferred.

Minsk hopes for more such interaction and joint production, to which Baku is showing interest. In addition to sharing economic interests, we are connected by almost identical views on the international agenda and offer mutual support on political issues.

Contacts with the Russian Federation are evident from figures, since Belarus was visited by more than 30 Russian delegations last year, from across the regions. Intensity of interaction is ever growing, promoting interstate Union development.

The dynamics of co-operation are positive, including with the Kursk Region, where mutual goods turnover rose by 10 percent last year, to reach \$250 million. The head of the region has now made five official vis-



Alexander Mikhailov its to Belarus, with the first producing a modest goal of just \$100 million.

Chatting to the Governor of the Kursk Region, Alexander Mikhailov, the President noted that current trade in goods covers a wide spectrum of products used

by the public and manufacturers. He offered, "Thinking about our long term relations, Belarusian and Kursk enterprises should be linked more closely, developing a uniform industrial chain. We already know how to do so and have many joint ventures working successfully."

Minsk considers that there are many directions for possible co-operation and Mr. Mikhailov agreed, noting that dynamics of bilateral trade are sure to develop further.

Fully legitimate citizens

A tour of the historical Council of the Republic building (once home to the National Library), congratulations from the Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament, Mikhail Myasnikov, flowers and gifts: in this manner will members of the *We Are Citizens of Belarus!* BRSM Youth Union campaign recall their first steps into adult life

By Lyudmila Gladkova

Young girls touch their braids and curls while the boys adjust their ties: all appear a little anxious. It's understandable, since it's not an every day occurrence to join senators, telling them about yourself — especially when you're just 14 years old. Of course, they too are

likely to remember receiving their first passport.

The meeting at the Council of the Republic was a gift to the Youth Union for Constitution Day: a custom launched in 2004, as the First Secretary of the BRSM Youth Union's Central Committee, Andrey Belyakov, explains. He tells us, "We like to focus on this impor-



Time has come to be a responsible citizen

tant event in a teenager's life, giving it due status and solemnity, so that youngsters feel their shift to becoming 'legitimate' citizens and un-

derstand that, on receiving this 'ticket' into adult life, they bear responsibility for their own destiny and that of their country."

The *We Are Citizens of Belarus!* campaign is held countrywide, concluding on March 15th: Constitution Day.

Higher school at the highest level

By Veronika Artemieva

Head of Education Department of Council of Europe, Sjur Bergan, rates Belarus' chance of joining Bologna Process as 'high'

Mr. Bergan was part of a recent delegation from Bologna visiting Minsk. He noted that the visit would not have been made had Belarus' potential membership been unlikely. A number of meetings took place with representatives of Belarusian institutions of higher education (rectors and students) and there was a meeting with the Minister for Education, Mikhail Zhuravkov.

Mr. Bergan explained that the delegation sought information on Belarus' higher education system, which he already views as having competent experts who have offered their opinions in a 'friendly and open' manner. He believes that much has changed for the better



Belarusian State University: a high school leader countrywide

over the past three years, since Belarus submitted its first application.

Speaking about recent improvements, Mr. Zhuravkov underlined that students are now more involved in universities' decision making process, noting that it's common practice at most establishments these days. "In particular, the share of young representatives on

university councils has increased considerably," he emphasised. Mr. Zhuravkov added that international experts tend to note that Belarus is 'ready' to join the Bologna Process.

He stressed that no Bologna Process members comply with every principle, all having their own peculiarities. "However, by and large, we aspire to fulfil every requirement



of this international document," commented the Minister. He notes that Bologna requirements are not compulsory, being only recommendations in the move to create a uniform educational space.

The Minsk seminar set out further recommendations for Belarus regarding a system of qualifications, and student participation in the management of institutions of higher education, as well as the maintenance of high quality education. A final list of recommendations will be defined at a session of the Monitoring Group on the Bologna Process, which will take place in Riga. These will then be transferred to the Conference of Ministers of Education, hosted this year by Yerevan, where an official decision on Belarus' accession will be made.

Attention from abroad ever growing

By Vladimir Velikhov

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Germany to Belarus, Wolfram Maas, emphasises desire for further co-operation with Belarus, speaking at House of Friendship evening dedicated to 23rd anniversary of Belarusian-German diplomatic relations

According to the Ambassador, Belarus-Germany relations have existed for over 90 years, having most recently resumed in 1992, when Germany was among the first to officially acknowledge Belarus' independence and open an embassy in Minsk.

The anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations is a good opportunity to recall the past, although Mr. Maas underlines the importance of being 'focused on the future'. He admitted that his expectations for bilateral relations are high and yet to be met, but that 'relations between our countries have never been easy'. He noted, "The main thing is that we see progress in our bilateral co-operation."

In his opinion, interaction between our two nations is better than it was two years ago. "It's not my achievement, being attributable to attention towards Belarus increasing. I always do my best to improve approaches to bilateral relations; we'll step up efforts to intensify relations between our states," he added.

Concert dedicated to ancient tradition

By Olga Grigorieva

Authentic songs from Heavenly Empire sound at Yuánxiàojié Chinese Lantern Festival, held at Belarusian State University's lyceum

The Chinese Lantern Festival signifies the close of the traditional lunar calendar New Year and was marked by a concert involving teachers and students of the Republican Confucius Institute of Chinese Studies of the BSU, as well as young pupils studying Chinese. The audience was delighted by theatrical scenes with national flavour and saw the traditional Chinese martial art of Wushu.

'Each person has the right to choose their own path to church'

Belarus has obviously managed to preserve interfaith peace and mutual understanding, notes President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko with confidence, speaking with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin

By Veniamin Mikheev

"My policy on this issue and that of the entire Belarusian state relies on one thesis: every person has the right to choose his path to God, and to the Church. It is our right and no one can infringe upon it. We prevent attempts to favour one church over another or to destabilise the interfaith situation in Belarus," the President underlined.

Mr. Lukashenko emphasised that, as far as interfaith co-operation is concerned, the situation in Belarus relies on absolute peace and understanding. "I can openly say that we are proud of this," noted the President. Today, Belarus is home to representatives of about 30 religious denominations, with the largest being the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. "They play a huge role in preserving interfaith peace and co-operation in Belarus. Their role is invaluable," the Belarusian Head of State stressed.

Over the past 20 years, the number of Roman Catholic parishes in Belarus has almost quadrupled, with the state providing over 300 buildings and religious sites. According to the President, the needs of the Roman Catholic Church in church buildings are satis-



Alexander Lukashenko and Pietro Parolin, beside the Immaculate Heart of Mary icon

fied by almost 98 percent in Belarus. "Other religious denominations in Belarus cannot boast such a level and, perhaps, this level is hardly evident in other countries," added the Belarusian leader.

Mr. Lukashenko commented on the training of Catholic priests, expressing his eagerness to have more local Catholic priests in Belarus. "We understand that this is not solely a Vatican issue. In

order to have Catholic priests of Belarusian origin we need to train them in Belarus," he admitted, adding that he has initiated the construction of an educational academy in Belarus. Meanwhile, a number of issues continue to require resolution, to benefit the Catholic community and Belarusian society," stressed the President.

The Vatican Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin,

conveyed greetings from the Pope of Rome to the Belarusian President. He noted that his visit aims to bolster contacts with Belarusian public administration bodies. "I'm glad to hear that Belarus is happy with the role played by the Roman Catholic community in the life of the country," said the Cardinal.

On meeting Mr. Parolin, Mr. Lukashenko gave him a hand-made icon of the Im-

maculate Heart of Mary, to be passed to the Pope, made with ancient Belarusian 'Sozh filigree'. Mr. Lukashenko noted that the icon's value lies in it having been created by ordinary people. "This testifies to our interfaith peace and concord," said the President.

The Vatican Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin arrived by regular, rather than charter, flight. He immediately spoke to journalists, not-

ing that his visit represents that of the Vatican and Holy Father in recognising Belarus as a nation and the Catholic church in Belarus. Speaking of the role of Belarus for Vatican diplomacy, especially in regard to events in Ukraine, the Cardinal named Belarus as a key venue for settling the Ukrainian crisis, referring to Minsk negotiations and agreements. According to the Cardinal, 'the Holy See wants to settle this crisis very much, and Belarus is playing a vital role in doing so.'

Pietro Parolin underlined the importance of his visit to Minsk, expressing hope that it will support diplomatic efforts by Belarusian authorities in gaining a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Ukraine. He added, "The visit to Belarus is of special meaning at this moment, taking into account the Ukrainian situation and the role which authorities in Minsk want to play in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis through negotiation. I think that my presence can, to some extent, support the efforts of local authorities."

Speaking of the Ukrainian conflict, he noted that the Vatican is closely monitoring the situation, and that he has met Ukrainian bishops to discuss events.

Enhancing competitiveness on demanding world market

By Vladimir Khromov

Government considers Belarus' socio-economic development until 2020

Guided by the law on state forecasting, the proposed programme is based on the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030, and inspired by the governmental programme for 2015, aiming to enhance the quality of life for the population.

Belarus' Prime Minister, Andrei Kobyakov, has praised the concept's goal of enhancing the country's global competitiveness through modernisation of enterprises, raising the efficiency of production and logistics through innovation. He underlines, "We need to stimulate economic competitiveness wisely; competition and innovations are mutually supportive." Of course, human potential should also be used to the uttermost.

Mr. Kobyakov is keen to see economic management evolve, bringing



about better corporate management, improving training for executives and optimising the use of state property. He notes that privatisation isn't always a guarantee of success and that each case should be decided individually.

In the production sphere, high-tech innovation and efficiency are watchwords of the programme, with focus on promoting the use of local resources. These approaches should be a priority at all levels: local and regional. Traditional manufacturing (enterprises in operation for at least a

decade) boast huge potential, according to the PM, but may benefit from new management styles.

The service sphere is also ripe for development, stresses the PM, saying, "We're a transit country yet are ranked only 99th out of 160 countries for logistical development. We are losing out on potential income from this activity." He is keen to promote the Silk Road transnational transport corridor, as suggested by Chinese colleagues. He is convinced that progress would bring positive dividends in foreign trade turnover and is eager to ensure that the programme tackles potential obstacles to the growth of transport infrastructure, including expansion of aviation and rail electrification. He believes that new, science-intensive services with high value-added are the way forward, including educational, medical, consulting and information services.

Proposals voiced at a recent Government session will be taken into account in elaborating the concept.

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Production lines are working, but definitely more is required

Industrial enterprises seeking new paths to promote their goods abroad

By Veniamin Mikheev

President Lukashenko has expressed his concern over Industry Ministry enterprises, which account for one fifth of national industrial production and which rely on exporting almost half of their goods. He noted recent discussion of modern economic trends, saying, "We've agreed to eradicate all red tape and excessive approval requirements; we'll take the necessary decisions to ensure fulfilment." The Industry Minister and other related members of Government are to be among the first to report on the progress and fulfilment of instructions.

Directors of Belarus' largest enterprises attended a meeting on the manufacturing sector, at which the Head of State underlined his desire to know about future plans and measures being taken to ensure efficient operation of companies, and their workers. "We don't need to discuss the difficult situation of today, or to hear what you are going to do on the day after tomorrow. Rather, I need concrete results," emphasised Mr. Lukashenko.

The Government aims to improve the work of the industrial sector. In particular,



Such enterprises as Minsk Automobile Works stand as an example of technical re-equipment

Prime Minister Andrei Kobryakov noted at the gathering of Minsk's industrial elite that he encourages enterprises to seek new paths in promoting goods abroad. He added that industrial production problems affect domestic economic growth, asserting that the pre-

vious year's achievements have failed to be matched due to production levels dropping off.

Mr. Kobryakov believes that, in order to be competitive, and to produce goods in demand abroad, enterprises should adjust their methods, looking beyond traditional

markets and responding to new openings. He emphasised, "All companies working under normal global market conditions should address this task. Belarus is working under these conditions, being a member of the Eurasian Economic Union; meanwhile, the Russian Fed-

eration is a WTO member so, de-facto, we're working under WTO conditions."

The PM visited two Minsk enterprises: Regula Ltd. and Minsk Automobile Works — the Management Company of BelautoMAZ Holding JSC. He met the heads of other enter-

prises in the capital to see how measures adopted by the Government to stabilise industrial production are being carried out, and with what success.

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Kobryakov noted that strategic development of Belarusian industry is ensured by such enterprises as Regula, which receives \$40,000 per kilogramme of manufactured produce. It achieves minimum material and energy consumption, alongside maximum intellectual capacity. He added, "This doesn't mean that we should ignore our flagships, such as MAZ and MTZ. The most important thing is to determine how to survive under existing difficult conditions when traditional sales markets for domestic goods have reduced and it's necessary to find new markets. We need to know where, how and what should be done in order to sell more abroad, with good results."

The session was attended by representatives of the Council of Ministers, alongside ministers of Economy, Industry, Architecture and Construction, and Energy. Heads of concerns, local authorities and representatives of industrial enterprises from across Minsk also took part.

Diverse interaction: from space to agriculture

By Svetlana Savelieva

Vladimir Gusakov, Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Belarus, notes that 12 scientific programmes are planned within the Union State for 2015-2016

Six diverse programmes are already being implemented across the Union State: dealing with such spheres as space exploration and agriculture. Mr. Gusakov stresses that collaboration with Russian colleagues has always been essential to Belarusian scientists, being beneficial to both sides. He emphasises, "Interaction and joint programmes are useful to Belarus and Russia. Without exaggeration, we may see breakthroughs in several directions."

The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus recently hosted a session of the Belarus-Russia Union State Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Budget and Finances, looking at preparation and the implementation of Union State programmes. Deputies also visited scientific and practical centres affiliated to the NAS of Belarus.

Price and quality always guaranteed by the brand

Modernisation enables Belarusian oil processing companies to enter foreign markets

By Galina Tikhonova

Speaking at the launch of a Belarusian Beloil refuelling station in the Smolensk Region, H.E. Mr. Nikolai Kutsko, who heads the Belarusian Embassy to Russia — stated that Russian consumers now have access to high quality Belarusian light-oil products. He noted, "Belarusian oil processing enterprises are being modernised. Certainly, it is a costly process but we have been ahead of Russian manufacturers of oil products for some time. We've entered the European market, so presenting our merchandise in Russia is not difficult. Price and quality are the main factors for our presence on the Russian market."

In recent times, Russians have been showing greater appreciation of Belarusian products and services. The sale of Belarusian fuel (initially by wholesale and now in retail) looks promising. According to Mr. Kutsko, housing construction is



Belarusian refuelling station in the Smolensk Region

another example of successful partnership. "We are building the Vitebsk Quarter in Smolensk: a system of 13 houses. We are constructing Malinovka and Minsk Park in Kaluga, and other projects," he said.

The project to create a network of automobile refuelling stations

in Russia under the Belarusian BelOil brand is being implemented by European Trading Company JSC. At present, stations operate 100km apart, on the A141 motorway, owned by a major Russian oil trading company, but using the Belarusian trademark and merchandise.

Imported for personal use

By Veronika Nikitina

State Customs Committee changes approach towards determination of goods imported for personal use

The Customs Committee has passed a ruling on 35 groups of items liable to importation fees if purchased more than once every three years. From March 31st, items for kitchens, bathrooms and lavatories will be classed within this sphere, alongside telephones, prams, air conditioners and boat motors. Its website also provides information on items which may be imported once every two years without duties, and the permitted volumes: e.g. up to four solo motorcycles, and the same amount of summer and winter tyres for each vehicle owned. A document proving the presence of an automobile in the home country must be shown to customs.

The State Customs Committee is keen to eradicate the repeated duty free importation of goods for 'personal use' while allowing genuine buyers the chance to purchase appliances which tend to only last five years: microwave ovens, refrigerators and baths for instance. Tyres tend to need replacing every two years.

Passing works to good hands

Our nation undoubtedly owns a large amount of property including readily obtainable assets. However, these assets, whilst often profitable, also bring their own diverse problems.

By Vladimir Velikhov

For many of these properties it would be beneficial to find new owners although suitable candidates are not easy to find. The Deputy Chairman of the State Property Committee, Alexey Vasiliev, at the final session of the committee admitted that investment activity is currently low. Last year, the state assets of 13 joint stock companies were sold and only one enterprise was sold as a single entity generating around \$42m. The new owners expressed their willingness to invest another \$73m in the business. In theory, almost any business can be privatised but in practise there are obstacles to the successful transfer from state to private ownership.

Buyers are primarily interested in price, which is a costly and time-consuming thing to set in itself. The issue of who will buy a business can cause difficulties at the preliminary negotiation stage. On hearing the price, a potential buyer can easily change their mind. Whilst it would be advisable to calculate the value of all state assets, enterprises can currently exist under the state 'wing' without any market assessment and the process of valuation would itself be costly. In short, selective privatisation has its advantages: investors are offered a wide choice of production facilities. However, the

lack of their fixed price is a major difficulty. Sales of state-run assets at auctions, popular in 2011, were stopped for a variety of different reasons and consequently the process of privatisation has slowed.

The problem of state property management is acute. Many assets truly resemble a suitcase without a handle: it's impossible to throw them away. However, the budget is no longer able to bear the burden. At present, the state owns assets in 1,846 joint stock companies — partially or completely. Dividends come from less than 30 percent of them and amount to Br5.43 trillion. Br3.5 trillion of this accounts for the top ten of the most profitable enterprises, with Belaruskali in the lead contributing Br2.6 trillion. Others demonstrate a poorer performance: some barely make ends meet and others generate minor profits. Some enterprises are a greater strain on the budget: last year, 279 joint stock companies received state support — consuming Br2.32 trillion. Disturbingly, their appetite is growing: in 2012, just 117 joint stock companies received state aid of Br567bn.

The State Property Committee recognises the problem and has already developed a mechanism to assess companies quickly, so that potential buyers can receive a prompt costing. New ways to deal



Investments into Henkel Bautechnik in the Minsk Region totalled \$10m

with the transfer of complicated assets to businesses are planned, among them is securities trust management and the rental of enterprises. These are new mechanisms but have already been tested: 8 Marta JSC has taken on trust management over Rechitsa Textile JSC (which was run by the state). Several pilot projects are in the pipeline. If these new instruments prove their efficiency in the Belarusian market they will be widely used.

The privatisation history of 109 enterprises sold in 2011-2014 has

dispelled the myth of individual owners as exploitative. The companies work well in private hands, although they demonstrate varied success: profits and losses interchange depending on the market situation. 62 percent of them however are running at a profit, lower than the overall national figure of course, as not all successful companies were offered for sale. Time will be needed to put them in order, most importantly, these enterprises receive no state support. With this in mind, privatisation truly has its positive side.

Italian industrial zone to appear in Brest

By Vladimir Vetrov

Session of the Belarusian-Italian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Co-operation to take place next January

Belarus' Deputy Foreign Minister, Yelena Kupchina, announced that, after Belarusian-Italian inter-ministerial consultations, the first session of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Co-operation between the two countries is to take place in January 2016. Ms. Kupchina noted the considerable increase in trade turnover between the two countries and expressed hope that there's still potential for growth in this direction. "We've planned January 2016 as a good time for the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Co-operation," she said.

According to the Deputy Foreign Minister, Italy has traditionally been an important trading partner for Belarus. Last year, Belarus-Italy trade approached \$2.2bn. "This is a good figure. Belarusian exports to Italy have also significantly risen by 12 percent, exceeding \$1bn. However, we foresee much greater potential in the future."

The consultations in Minsk also tackled the issue of the establishment of an Italian industrial area in Brest's free economic zone. "We expect a delegation of Italian business groups to visit Minsk and Brest, and hope that it will make a good contribution to the Intergovernmental Commission session," added Ms. Kupchina.

In turn, Benedetto Della Vedova, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of the Italian Foreign Ministry, noted that investment is a vital aspect of the bilateral relationships. "In this case we can speak of investments as a way of transferring Italian advanced technologies and know-how to the Republic of Belarus. By bringing Italian equipment and machine tools to your country, we aim to promote the modernisation of the Belarusian economy while also creating new jobs," he said. Mr. Della Vedova stressed that this will help increase exports of goods from Belarus to Russia, as well as to other CIS states and EU countries.

In expectation of fair roaming

By Irina Sudas

Phone roaming charges to fall within Eurasian Economic Union

At present, Belarusian phone subscribers pay high rates for phone calls when travelling abroad: a one minute call to Belarus from Russia (depending on the mobile operator) costs at least Br21,000 (88 Russian Roubles). Affiliated companies operate across the three states, with simultaneous networks in Russia and Belarus (MTS), and Russia and Kazakhstan (Beeline).

However, roaming tariffs are several times higher than the charge for 'home' calls.

Only around 25 percent of travellers buy local sim-cards while 40 percent switch to roaming; choosing the simplest, with no Internet access or special options (to keep costs down). Many only call home in cases of emergency. In fact, if tariffs were to be cut, it seems unlikely that operators would lose money, as the volume of calls would rise significantly, serving mutual interests. In the European Union, interstate roaming has been lifted,

resulting in more revenue for operators, due to the increased volume of services used.

The Acting Director of the Antimonopoly Regulation Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission, Alexander Kurilchik, explains, "Operators are expected to voluntarily reduce roaming fees over time, making them comparable with domestic charges, and unifying them across the Eurasian Economic Union. A project of fair roaming principles is ready, reflecting foreign experience and ensuring the economic feasibility of tariffs,

while cutting expenditure and offering equal access to all subscribers."

The plan to reduce roaming prices is to be co-ordinated with the Eurasian Economic Union's mobile operators throughout this year, with tariffs reduced in stages. Full roaming 'equality' is unlikely to occur until about 2020, but antimonopoly bodies are ready to impose fines on mobile operators where unfair tariffs are levied.

In late 2014, Russia's Federal Antimonopoly Service asked operators to cut roaming



prices to match those charged domestically for subscribers (i.e. a 3-5 fold reduction). Unsurprisingly, some operators are reluctant to comply, citing such reasons as rising foreign currency exchange rates. Nevertheless, the Eurasian Eco-

nomic Union's antimonopoly agencies aim to reduce tariffs, planning to gather representatives of EU states, Turkey and Egypt (popular tourist destinations, including for Belarusians) to discuss possible ways forward.

Kilobytes for school electronic diaries

An electronic diary sounds attractive. There is no chance to add another 10 marks or tear out the page inviting parents to school.

By Anna Artemeva

With this new idea, the teacher has ultimate control. All the pupil has to do is to study. But when will electronic diaries and class registers be a daily reality?

According to the Deputy Director of the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR) and co-author of the programme *Electronic School*, Pavel Lis, both documents are ready to be used. He explains, "The essence of a school diary is organisation. If a pupil has forgotten to write down their homework, or the page was lost, the electronic version is available." He described how schools using the devices in trials recorded an average increase in progress of 1.5 points.

The fact that schools are interested in the introduction of electronic documents is confirmed by the number of visitors to the website schools. by. Last month there were up

to 400,000 hits. However, of the 1,600 registered schools, only 35 actually implemented electronic documents. Some registered merely out of interest and to make use of the site within school. Others plan to use the system with selected classes. Many prefer to remain with the traditional method of keeping books in their hands.

There is optimism however as far as the project is concerned, as it is being used in diverse places such as Zaslavl, Rechitsa, Grodno and Soligorsk. There are a considerable number of educational institutions who have freely chosen to use the *Electronic School* and who were not participants of the experiment. Pavel Lis considers this good evidence to prove that the financial cost of realising the project will not hinder its development. There has been some discussion as to whether the system is too complicated for teachers to understand. Pavel points out that teachers are highly educated intel-



Electronic School, Electronic Diary project being implemented at Minsk's Gymnasium #40.

The theme of school electronic documents has been under discussion since 2000. Entrepreneurs tried to promote the product in Russia, Ukraine and in our own schools. Many appealed to the Ministry of Education for support, but frequently it was the question of a Russian product that required costly adaptation for our Belarusian educational system. As a result, the preference was given to a domestic product, which did not require adapting. The project was finally realised at the expense of an investor, but without the use of budgetary funds. Today, it is one of the most successful examples of state-private partnership. Similar projects are successfully running in Russia, Slovakia and Holland.

lectual professionals and cites a Minsk high school where over 40 teachers are using the system, having learned it with no difficulty. In this particular school, paper diaries and registers are already seen as old fashioned.

According to the author, network operators are ready to join this common cause, having already subsidised tariff plans of teachers with free Internet traffic for educational

resources, for using class registers and school diaries, and also for the sites recommended by the Ministry of Education.

As well as the developers, soon the service could become free for parents. Those who have paid in advance will get access to additional services. Pupils will have a self-education resource, while parents will be able to use analytics and forecast-

ing of their child's progress.

"The essence of forecasting is in setting a mark that parents want to see at the end of a term or a year," explained Pavel, "and the programme monitors the situation in each subject in real time. Depending on the level, the child's progress will be shown in different colours: red, orange or green. The first two are a sign to the parent that progress deviates from the set norm. The methodology of analysis is now in the process of consultation with the Ministry of Education. Such analysis is usual for those who enter grammar schools, colleges and universities. The site will give recommendations about gaps in knowledge. This service is currently under testing."

The possibilities of these electronic documents are limitless. For example, if a teacher wants to attach a video lesson or presentation to a pupil's homework it is now possible. Another matter is that the

question concerning storage of this content has not been solved yet. If everyone wanted to add videos, the space on the school server would quickly be filled. "This issue is being looked at now," says Pavel. "The solution could be to store additional information in a different place, for example in the Ministry of Education, where it would be reviewed. In this way, all the best work from teachers would be available to their colleagues."

The developers are working for the second year on the important issues of the safety of information, data encryption, reserve storage and copying. Mr. Lis is not afraid of the system being hacked, even if he was to admit that any gifted young hacker could decide to correct his mark in the electronic register or diary, the breach would contain information about time and address. This would constitute a cybercrime and would be a great risk for the sake of a better mark.

Keyhole heart surgery

By Yelena Semenova

Grodno's Regional Clinical Cardiology Centre conducts two progressive surgeries, with live transmission to Belarusian, Russian and Israeli colleagues

Only a few clinics worldwide, in the USA and Germany, are able to replace heart valves via keyhole surgery, using an incision of about 5cm. However, three years ago, the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre for Cardiology mastered the technique, followed by Grodno's Regional Clinical Cardiology Centre.

The two surgeries were performed in parallel, by two heart



surgeons. The Deputy Chief Physician of the Regional Cardiology Centre, Candidate of Medical Sciences Andrey Yanushko, notes that his work in this field is breaking new ground, using a prosthetic mitral valve, to allow the patient temporary reprieve. Being less invasive,

it minimises scar tissue and makes it easier to conduct a full transplantation when an organ becomes available. Research by foreign and domestic colleagues confirms that patients gain a higher survival rate thanks to valve insertion and enjoy a better quality of life as a result.

Sun will briefly disappear

On March 20th, Belarus will see the biggest solar eclipse since August 1999

This will actually be a partial eclipse, with approximately 70 percent of the sun hidden. This rare astronomical phenomenon is expected to last in the region of 2 minutes 50 seconds and will occur at 13.06pm.

Residents of several Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, and the Northern regions of Russia will be lucky enough to see the full solar eclipse. The town of Barentsburg will find itself in the very centre of the eclipse's path and, for fans of astronomy, will be turned into a place of pilgrimage. Tourists have already reserved all hotel and hostel rooms in the town. The full eclipse is expected here at 10.09am GMT.

This unusual event will even be seen at the North Pole with Venus



visible to the naked eye. According to scientists, the next occurrence of the phenomenon will be in 2033. Remarkably, an eclipse on the same day as the spring equinox has previously occurred only a dozen times in the history of mankind.

You can not only enjoy this exciting natural phenomenon from earth. The Nordavia Russian airline company is offering its passengers tickets for a special flight with views of the eclipse. Sales of the tickets were launched on March 4th; the cost of this unusual 4-hour flight over the Barents and Norwegian Seas is approximately 10,000 Russian Roubles.

Pilgrims pray for Rositsa

A memorial day for Catholic priests Antoni Leszczewicz and Jerzy Kaszyra was celebrated in the village of Rositsa in the Verkhnedvinsk District

By Sergey Golesnik

During punitive action in February 1943, the fascists burnt the two priests together with other inhabitants of the village. The Germans had offered the priests a chance to escape, but they chose to share the tragic fate of their parishioners. In 1999, Pope John Paul II announced that the Rositsa martyrs Jerzy and Antoni were to be beatified as part of the process of beginning sainthood. Since then, pilgrims from many countries have come to Rositsa to pray to them, and also to pay their respects to the memory of the 1,528 local residents killed that day. On this occasion, the memorial service in the Church of the Holy Trinity attracted more than 300 visitors from the Verkhnedvinsk District, from Minsk, Vitebsk, Polotsk, Glubokoe, Miory and Borisov. It was given special importance by the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio in Belarus Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti.



FACT

Several weeks after the Rositsa reprisals against civilians, a German officer came to Druya where the nuns had been sent at the insistence of Father Leszczewicz. He interrogated the sisters about what had happened in the village on February 16-18th, 1943. After the war, a document containing the memoirs of these escaped nuns arrived at the monastic offices in Rome. It was printed on a printing machine and had no return address. It was the first concrete evidence of the tragedy in Rositsa and it is still unknown who printed it and what aim they had in mind by sending it to the authorities in Rome.

Church from red brick

Today Rositsa is a small village located 10 kilometres from the Latvian border. At the start of the 20th century it was already the largest Catholic parish in the Vitebsk province.

In 1911, a new church with beautiful

tall towers was built but these were unfortunately destroyed in 1934 as a measure to reduce supposed enemy targets. The religious persecutions of the following year meant that the church was temporarily abandoned. In the autumn of 1941, the Druya monks sent Father Antoni Leszczewicz to Rositsa. A native of the Vilna region, he also had experience of missionary work in the Far East. 81-year-old Valentina Martsinkevich who lives in the neighbourhood of Rositsa recalls how he held services,

“For me Antoni was like a father. He taught us to pray, to obey our parents. I liked to go to his church where the organ played and where people sang songs.”

In the summer of 1942, the Roman Catholic priest Jerzy Kaszyra came to Rositsa. The life of priests, like all villagers, was hard. During the day the occupying forces were in charge, whilst at night there were partisans to deal with. From 1942, anyone caught engaged in partisan activity or co-operation was the subject of punitive reprisals. The monastic leaders recommended missionaries suspend any activity involving the rebellion groups but they refused to leave Rositsa.

In a fiery whirlwind

The punitive action known as ‘winter magic’ is considered to be one of

the bloodiest in the history of the Great Patriotic War. In it 10,000 people from the Verkhnedvinsk, Rossony and Sebezh districts died. During the action Waffen-SS, Nazi policemen and traitors burnt more than 400 villages. Rositsa, where members of punitive squad came on February 16th, 1943, became one of the first victims of the Osveya tragedy. Inhabitants of the village, including old men and nursing women were driven together into the cold church. A German officer allowed Father Jerzy and Father Antoni and the nuns helping them to leave the church freely. The priests insisted that the sisters went to Druya. On February 17th, the occupying Germans began to sort their captives into groups, some to be burnt and others to be sent to concentration work camps. The priest Leszczewicz was offered a place amongst the latter group but decided to remain among those people who were to be killed. On the following day, together with his other parishioners, Father Kaszyra was burnt. Valentina Martsinkevich describes her recollection of those days, “From the neighbouring village Klagishi where I lived, we could hear children and their mothers crying. We saw how Rositsa was burning. Every year on the eve of these events I cannot fall asleep. I remember the day and my heart breaks.”

Remember forever

In Rositsa I talked to pilgrims such as the priest Vyacheslav Adamovich who had brought a group of young people from Miory, he told me, “The places stained with the blood of martyrs draw believers. People come here to be established in the faith, and representatives of the clergy learn by the example of the Rositsa priests.”

After divine service, the pilgrims join a procession with lighted candles to the place of martyrdom.

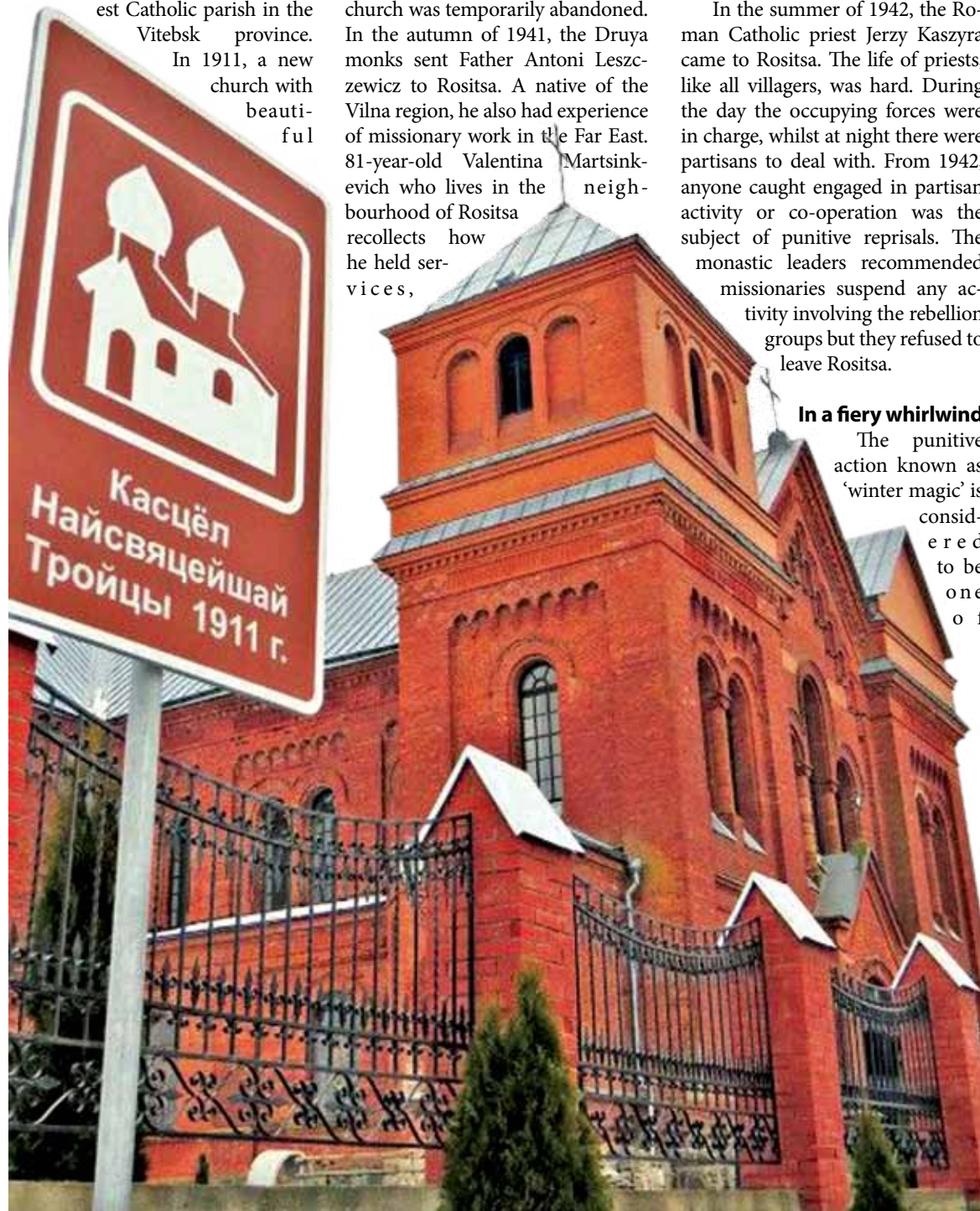
I spoke to Irina Zhernosek, the author of a book devoted to the Rositsa tragedy. She spoke of her work on the artistic-historical novel *Thy Will Be Done* where she met with eyewitnesses such as the Nun Yadviga Virshuta who escaped from Rositsa. She also talked to Anna Zhuravleva whose mother was burnt before her eyes. The book published in 2004 is a heartfelt response to the tragic history of our native land.

A high cross is mounted on the place where the deaths occurred. Nearby the priest in charge of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Father Cheslav Kurechko (who is the ‘Person of Year of the Vitebsk Region-2013’) and Apostolic Nuncio in Belarus Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti said a prayer. The Archbishop gave the blessing of Pope Francis to the pilgrims: ‘We pray for peace and calmness in Belarus. We ask God to give us happiness and the strength to be not masters of people but to be part of our community. To remember the act of these martyrs as evidence of love for the Lord, their native land and its people.’

The inhabitants of Rositsa are always glad to have visitors. On the road to the memorial there are green thujas plants, symbols of life, while prickly blackthorn and red barberries remind us of their sufferings.

TODAY

Rositsa church returned to life in the late 1980s. The decayed roof was repaired, new benches were brought. In the main sanctuary the artist Valerian Yanushkevich created the icon of the martyrs Jerzy and Antoni. While the towers of the church have not regained their initial shape, being lower, they are in good condition and the church and community is thriving.





Care, not paperwork, say French health workers

Thousands of French health practitioners took to the streets of Paris to protest against a bill aimed at reforming the country's health system

The French Government is pushing for reform aimed at making it easier for low earners to get access to a doctor, risking the ire of medics who complain the new funding arrangements will leave them out of pocket.

"Practitioners are against the bill, one that is only based on ideology and which is going through without the approval of health prac-

tioners," said general practitioner Claude Regnier.

The standard current practice in France is to pay 23 Euros up-front for a consultation and be reimbursed by the public health insurance fund later, an arrangement the Socialist Government argues puts many low-earners off going to the doctor.

The plans for reform would

make visits free for the patient at the point of use and would require the general practitioner's office to seek payment from the fund afterwards.

Practitioners argue this will raise their administrative workload and lead to late payments for their services.

"We are protesting against the health bill. There are many things in

it apart from the funding aspect, but there is more, it's global. We want to be able to care for patients correctly, practice real medicine and not just administrative tasks," said general practitioner, Laurence Bique.

French Health Minister Marisol Touraine said the government would create a specific guarantee mechanism to ensure doctors were paid.

Back to the battlefield for Napoleon's hat

An unhappy trip down memory lane for Napoleon's hat, as it left for Waterloo for the bicentenary commemorations of the battle which led to his demise as Emperor of the French in 1815

The iconic two-cornered head-piece will be on display from March 21st to July 31st at the Wellington Museum in Belgium. Last year another of Napoleon's hats fetched 1.9 million Euros at auction. It is believed to be just one of 19 of his hats still in existence.

Napoleon declared himself Emperor in 1804 and wages war against European powers, conquering much of the continent before his exile and then defeat in 1815.

New Japan bullet train route links Tokyo with Kanazawa

Japan has launched a new bullet train service linking Tokyo with Kanazawa

Operating at speeds of up to 260 kilometres an hour it will cut travel times to the ancient city by more than an hour to two hours and 28 minutes.

"Whether it's for business or tourism we hope to create a new type of mindset and improve the areas involved," said East Japan Railway CEO Testuro Tomita.

"For those areas in the countryside, we hope to improve their economies and make them more active. So for all these problems that Japan has, we hope to help solve them. We hope to be the trigger," Tomita added.

Egypt's new capital will be solar powered, says Housing Minister

Egypt plans to build a new administrative capital east of Cairo within the next seven years costing the equivalent of 43 billion Euros

The country's Housing Minister Mostafa Madbouh told an international investment summit in Sharm el-Sheik that the plans for the new city include an airport and one million housing units.

"The dependency, to a large extent, will be on renewable energy," explained Madbouh. "Ninety square kilometres of solar power fields will generate electricity for the city. We are talking about a global city. Our vision is one of the uttermost quality."

The Minister said he expected the population of greater Cairo, already one of the world's busiest cities, to double from 20 million within 40 years.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Apple Watch may spark global gold rush

Gold dealers may be running their hands with glee over the new Apple Watch



The Cupertino-based firm may consume up to 746 metric tonnes of the precious metal per year in the production of its new luxury gadget. That equates to roughly one-third of gold's total annual global mine supply.

The watch will come in three varieties — the entry level 'Sports' model, the mid-tier 'Apple Watch' and the upper end 'Apple Watch Edition' which the company says will be made of 18k (75 percent pure) gold and is estimated to retail from anywhere between \$4,000 and \$10,000.

Shooting for the starts — British soprano plans a live concert from space

British soprano Sarah Brightman is training for the gig of her life and preparing for a unique performance: a live concert from space

The fifty-four year old is to travel next September as one of a three-person team to the International Space Station in a Soyuz rocket. The singer was assessed for suitability for the trip in 2012 and since then has undergone gruelling training.

She has reportedly paid 49 million Euros for the privilege. "The training, it's hard, I mean there is no denying that and it's probably not for everybody. But I'm learning huge amounts just about myself doing it, what I'm capable of," said Brightman.

Brightman, who even has her own space logo, plans to perform a song not yet chosen once on the ISS, accompanied by an orchestra back on Earth.

She's been working with her ex-husband, composer of hit musicals including *Cats* and *Phantom of the*



Opera. One of her early hits *I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper* might fit the bill.

Whatever song she chooses, the one-time star of *Phantom of the*

Opera will be hoping to emulate the stratospheric success of astronaut but albeit amateur singer Chris Hadfield and his rendition of the David Bowie hit *Space Oddity*.

Music for all

Modest Vasily Rainchik sees himself as a backstage musician, with no desire to shine like a star on stage. The People's Artiste of Belarus, well-known composer and musician, whose name is connected with legendary ensemble *Verasy*, turns 65 on March 7th.

By Irina Svirko

Absolute hearing

Vasily graduated from his conservatory twice: as a pianist and as a composer. His ear for music is such that he can compose musical compositions of any complexity without even approaching a piano. However, it took time for his musical abilities to be revealed.

In Shklov, where his family lived, the opening of a music school was a great event, with all parents eager to enrol their children. Vasily, aged 10, had no special desire to study music but his father bought a beautiful button accordion for him and his mother refused to hear dissent. His music teachers said that he had no potential, resulting in his father donating the accordion to the music school. However, Vasily's rhythmic talent became apparent during his first dictation in a solfeggio lesson, when he had no difficulty in transcribing a melody into notes. His teacher could scarcely believe what had happened.

True talent lay in the piano

Musicians still tell stories of how Vasily performed jazz as a student, although it was not a genre welcomed within academic walls. Nevertheless, even his professors sometimes applauded. Rainchik played with fellow student Igor Palivoda, who later became a member of 'golden' *Pesnyary*. They improvised impressively, using hundreds of melodies in a single composition, playing two grand pianos with humour and skill. Once, they even performed before an international conference of musicologists, inspiring huge admiration!

Rainchik also played in restaurants, such as the well-known Stone Flower, earning more money than most students enjoy.

Sell out success

After performing at the Fifth All-Union Competition of Variety Artists in 1974, Rainchik's group, *Verasy*, began gaining popularity across the USSR. Tickets for con-

certs sold out immediately, as did the band's records. Even the artistes themselves hardly managed to get a copy! Their greatest hits included such classics as *I Live at Grandmother's*, *Blizzard*, *Carnival*, *Robin*, *Caravan*, *Music for All*, *Farewell Ball of Love*, and *White Sail*.

After playing at the Olimpiyskiy Stadium, in Moscow, Vasily met the Minister of Culture of the USSR, Demichev, who praised the band for its European flavour.



Verasy band and Dean Reed



Vasily Rainchik is still in the 'creative' ranks

He asked whether Rainchik needed anything and he answered 'money for instruments' which resulted in *Verasy* being able to afford the best instruments in the

world. More than \$70,000 arrived from Moscow on one occasion (later claimed by the BSSR Minister of Culture, who argued that other bands also needed help).

The *Verasy* artistes were highly paid: enough to buy a car in a single month. Of course, they worked hard and did their best, performing live rather than recording albums. They often gave 20 concerts in one city, filling each sports palace.

Rock'n'roll with an American flavour

Verasy met well-known American Dean Reed, exchanging phone numbers at a festival in Bulgaria after Dean praised their work. Blacklisted in the USA for campaigning

for peace and human rights, the singer, actor and director attended as guest of honour. Later, during a tour of the German Democratic Republic, Rainchik and Tikhanovich were promenading in Berlin when they remembered that Dean Reed lived nearby. They called upon him, which brought about Reed's invitation for the group to accompany him in performing several concerts for those building the Baikal-Amur motorway. *Verasy* brought back recordings of Dean's songs so that only one joint rehearsal was needed a few months later, in Moscow. In the late 1970s, it was sensation to accompany an American and sing in English, playing rock'n'roll! The tour was a great success!

Truly professional lessons always arrive in time

Famous Cypriot singer, composer and producer Alex Panayi to teach vocal techniques to *Uzari & Maimuna* who'll represent Belarus at *Eurovision-2015*



By Yekaterina Knyazeva

The famous musician will visit Belarus in the next few weeks to begin lessons with *Uzari & Maimuna*, as well as coaching the backing vocalists: Denis Lis and Yuri Seleznev. The Belarusian TV and Radio Company has worked with Alex for several years now. The Cypriot is well known as a voice coach for such artists as Helena Papanizou (the *Eurovision-2005* winner from Greece),

Russia's Tolmachevy sisters and the Belarusian participants of the European contest, Alena Lanskaya and Teo. With previous successful collaborations in mind, the Belarusian company has again invited Mr. Panayi to assist the musicians.

In addition, the Belarusian duo will receive PR support with foreign media. The Swiss specialist Katherine Lockett will become their international PR manager, after working with Belarusian TV and radio last year.

Family trees now ready for online exploration

St. Petersburg boasts more than two million ancient parish registers, many with direct bearing on Belarus and Belarusians

By Tatiana Borisova

Nikolay Nikolaev, who heads the Department of Rare Books at the Russian National Library, is an expert on the history of Belarusians in St. Petersburg. He tells us that a huge community of Belarus-born figures lived in the city from the 19th century, including writers Yan Barshchevsky and Yanka Kupala, teacher Bronislav Epimakh-Shipila, and linguist Evfimy Darsky. More than 150 buildings in the historical centre were designed by architects from Belarus, and Belarus-film Studio first launched in the Russian city.



Well-known Minsk ethnographer and blogger Vadim Zelenkov has been researching archives in St. Petersburg, finding information on his grandmother, Sofia Ivanovna, who attended Bestuzhev Courses in 1914.

Some documents are yet to be placed online in Minsk and Grodno, explains Denis Liseychikov, the Deputy Director of the National Historical Archives of Belarus. He laments that the server lacks capacity to hold

all the documents in electronic form. He explains, "The National Historical Archives of Belarus has over a million units of storage, dating from 1391 to the 1930s. Of these, about 10 percent are related to genealogy and only a small share is scanned; papers used more often and, because of that, having suffered decay. However, work continues. This year, we'll try to create an Internet inventory of all dossiers stored in the Archives."

In good company of muses and friends

Dmitry Hvorostovsky introduces his creative project in Minsk

By Eleonora Skuratova

The International *Hvorostovsky and Friends* Festival has been held in Moscow and St. Petersburg since 2005, praised by musical critics worldwide. This year, Minsk has hosted the successful and prestigious project, which unites and promotes various genres of classical art: instrumental music, opera and ballet.

The Minsk festival programme featured three cultural events. The first was a piano evening with the Belarusian State Philharmonic Society, featuring Boris Berezovsky — one of the most celebrated pianists globally. Aged 40, he has lived in London and Holland for the past 20 years, and now resides in Brussels,

although he was born and grew up in Moscow. He received his training at the Moscow Conservatory's Piano Department, chaired by Eliso Virsaladze. In Minsk, Mr. Berezovsky played compositions from various epochs and in a variety of styles, including works by Strauss, Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Grieg.

The Palace of the Republic hosted a concert by People's Artist of Russia Dmitry Hvorostovsky, singing, for the first time, alongside young soloists Marina and Miriam Costa-Jackson, from the Metropolitan Opera of New York. The sisters studied under leading American and Italian masters. Critics have said of Miriam, who has been studying since she was 12, that she 'sings from the heart, and only



Opera singer and People's Artist of Russia Dmitry Hvorostovsky during a concert

then with her voice'. Marina has won many musical competitions, and is a member of the American Academy of Vocal Arts.

Young Honoured Artist of Belarus Oksana Volkova, who is already famous on the world opera stage, joined Dmitry Hvorostovsky in singing an aria from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, in the role of Magdalena. Dmitry emphasises, "Recently, it's been interesting for me to work with

young artistes starting out on their career. Eminent singers are booked years ahead, while young artistes are much easier to schedule. Of course, it's also pleasant to be on stage with talented young people, who can surprise the audience, as well as myself."

Accompanied by the National Symphonic Orchestra of Belarus, artistes performed compositions by such geniuses as Mozart, Verdi, Gounod, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-

Korsakov. The concert was conducted by Honoured Artist of Russia Konstantin Orbelyan, who recently worked with Mr. Hvorostovsky on an album of military songs, devoted to the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory. "We recorded songs in some very interesting styles, which I love to listen to over and again," admits Dmitry. "Usually, I record an album and move on, but these songs continue to inspire me."

Great singer of thousand Madonnas

Leaving biggest legacy of canvases devoted to women



By Tatiana Borisova

Whether trained professional or amateur, few artists can truly surprise and astonish us, inspiring us to look anew. However, Belarusian Alexey Kuzmich was one such, listed in the *Divo* (Miracle) Book of Records and Achievements (the post-Soviet analogue of the Guinness Book of Records).

Divo mentions Mr. Kuzmich as having painted the largest number of works featuring the Madonna. Over his three decades of artistry, Alexey created 700 such works: a world record. In fact, he may have painted closer to a thousand images of Madonnas, but not all are officially recorded, being kept not only in museums but in private collections. "As an artist, the assertion of true beauty and God's presence inside us gives my life and creativity purpose," said Mr. Kuzmich.

His works reflected the cosmos

of the human soul so it's symbolic that a galaxy is named after him. Alexey received a certificate confirming so from Yuri Yelkhov: the famous Belarusian film operator, director, playwright and head of Universe Production Centre. He explains, "I believe this award to be higher than all other possible titles, since the galaxy will preserve the memory of Mr. Kuzmich for centuries."

It's no secret that his wife, Inessa, was the artist's muse and model, and his strictest judge. She says that Alexey occupied all living space with his cosmic energy. "Alexey considered that there is nothing more terrible for an artist than a state of quietness. He worked as if obsessed, with 'thermo-nuclear energy and plasma explosion' — as he loved to say. He painted in one breath, sometimes working on several pictures simultaneously — in-



vesting in them his whole soul. Alexey wished to bring kindness to the world through his pictures and was pleased to see that they cheered even the most heartsick. Being an artist, he always noticed this."

It's strange to speak of the master in the past tense but he sadly died in 2013, leaving us an artistic legacy always 'past perfect'. A gallery to Alexey Kuzmich has opened in his home village of Mokhro, in

the Brest Region's Ivanovo District, allowing schoolchildren, students and tourists to view his works in a peaceful atmosphere. On June 1st, 2015, fans, friends and family members will celebrate the 70th anniversary of his birth. By this date, Kuzmich junior will have released a book about his father and will have realised the artist's major dream: building a church to the Virgin Mary, filled with light and pictures.

Performances, exhibitions and shows

By Yekaterina Knyazeva

Interactive theatrical projects to contribute to the festive atmosphere of the Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk-2015

The 24th International Festival of Arts known as the *Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk* will be held from July 9th-13th. The traditional opening and closing concerts, the Day of the Union State (mostly dedicated to the Great Victory's 70th anniversary) and the international song contest will be the key events. In addition, the Vitebsk Cultural Centre aims to support the festive atmosphere in the city with additional cultural projects, such as a sequel to *The Doll Quarter* project. The latter was first presented in 2014 as a one-off event before the show in the Lyalka Puppet Theatre and was well received by the public. With this in mind, it's been decided to organise *On Seven Winds*, a festival of street theatres, musicians, artists and poets, to feature interactive performances, exhibitions and shows. The organisers hope that these planned events will help to reinforce the theme of the cultural capital, youth and artistry of the Year of Youth. Young residents and Vitebsk's guests will also enjoy participating in the international children's drawing competition.

'Dragons' first earning victory in the Baltic League

Tsmoki-Minsk women's basketball team reaches BWBL Final Four, in Riga, and claims victory

In the semi-finals, the Minskers faced Kazakhstani Okzhetpes; as favourites, they took a confident victory, despite some resistance in the second quarter, which led to Okzhetpes leaving for a break with a big, though not catastrophic gap. However, in the second half, Andrey Vavlev's 'dragons' left their opponents no chance, playing brilliantly and allowing their rivals only 14 points while forcing them to make 23 losses over 40 minutes of play. The Minsk team made 25 passes and attacked heavily. Curiously, but the best assistant among Tsmoki-Minsk players was not someone from nominal ball handlers, but Alla Muravskaya, claiming eight 'assists' and leading to her team's 20-point advantage by the beginning of the final quarter. Further on, they

didn't only increase this advantage but also kept forces of the team's leaders before the decisive fight.

The Belarusian women's basketball champion then met Latvian TTT, fresh from its defeat of Grodno Olympia (which took third place). Meanwhile, at first it could seem that the 'dragons' would easily win the final. The 'dragons' stormed through the first quarter, with a score of 16:2 and went for the first break with a 14-point advantage. Meanwhile, later the Latvians gradually clawed back their points, reducing the gap by half time. The Belarusian players made both technical errors and failed to throw well from outside the arch (only 1 of 11 shots reaching its target). As a result, TTT was just six points behind by the major break, and ap-



Tsmoki-Minsk forward Yulia Gaponova (in the background) in action proached closer afterwards, until they were only one point behind two and a half minutes before the final whistle.

Nevertheless, good defence and accurate shots from Gasper, Goro-

detskaya and Zyuzkova allowed the Minsk squad to pull ahead, scoring six points to its opponent's one and allowing the 'dragons', for the first time in history, to win gold medals in the Baltic League.

Throwers not left without medals



Yulia Leontyuk wins Cup tournament

By Igor Leshin

Belarusian athletes claim five medals at European Cup Winter Throwing, hosted by Portuguese Leiria

Yulia Leontyuk of Belarus has won the women's shot putt, with a result of 18.56m. Fans were thrilled by her struggle against Hungarian Anita Márton: the current European indoor champion. Anita took second place (17.59m) while Italian Chiara Rosa came third (17.38m) and Belarusian Yelena Abramchuk (Kopets) was ranked fifth (17.11m).

Belarusians also claimed two

medals in the U-23 category, with hammer thrower Yuri Vasilchenko winning silver; his 70.02m throw was his third and best, but failed to defeat Hungarian Bence Pastor's 72.94m result. Victoria Kolb of Belarus finished third in the shot putt, with a throw of 16.46m, behind Shanice Craft of Germany (17.16m) and Turkish winner Emel Dereci (17.45m).

On the final day of the U-23 competition, women's gold went to Yelena Soboleva in the hammer; her 69.95m throw was a personal best. Meanwhile, Alexander Kozlovsky earned bronze, throwing his javelin 73.39m: another personal record.

Fractions of a second behind

By Igor Grishin

Belarusian skier Sergey Dolidovich misses out on bronze medal by just 0.3 seconds, in 50km marathon at World Cup final, in Norwegian Oslo

Due to turn 42 on May 18th, Sergey skied dynamically in the last, downhill, stretch, but was obliged to be content with 4th place, 0.8 seconds behind the winner, Norwegian Sjur Røthe. Swiss Dario Cologna showed an identical time, with the gold medal decided only by photo finish. Bronze went to Norwegian Martin Johnsrud Sundby.

Belarusian ski veteran Sergey Dolidovich has been performing in the World Cup for 22 years, since 1993, and has taken part in six Olympic Games. His best Olympic result was 5th place in the 50km marathon, at the Sochi 2014 Games, aged almost 41, where he only narrowly missed out on a medal. His first and only victory in a World Cup stage was in March 2001, when he took bronze, and his best World Cup ranking was 31st place, during the 2000/01 season. Sergey Dolidovich has taken part



Sergey Dolidovich

in 11 successive World Championships (1995-2015), across 34 disciplines. His best result was 4th place in the 30km skiathlon in 2011, in Norwegian Holmenkollen.

Dolidovich has been helping coach the national team of Belarus while continuing to compete. In the overall World Cup standings, he has 58 points, placing him 82nd. Belarusian Mikhail Semenov (16 points) is 123rd, and Alexander Voronov (2) is 150th, among 159 scoring participants.

High speeds on Panevėžys cycling track

By Kirill Karin

Minsk cycle club wins eight prizes from the International Cycling Union (UCI), after its performance in Lithuanian Panevėžys: 4 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze

On the first day, our Belarusian team took the top three places in the individual pursuit, with Roman Tishkov, Yevgeny Akhramenko and Oleg Agievich leading their qualification round races, sending them into the final. In the decisive event, Akhramenko outstripped Tishkov, while Agievich took bronze over Ukrainian Vitaly Griniv. Minsker Roman Romanov came second in the scratch race, behind the Czech.

In the women's individual pursuit, Tatiana Sharakova set the pace, winning her qualification round and outstripping Lithuanian Vilija Sereikaitė in the final. Third place went to Lithuania's Edita Mazurevičiūtė.

In the omnium, our Belarusian squad again excelled, with Roman Tishkov gaining victories in all six races, held over two days. Minsk's Oleg Agievich finished third, just two points behind Ukrainian Roman Gladyshev. Yevgeny Akhramenko came fourth.

In the women's omnium, Tatiana Sharakova led in the scratch race, in the individual pursuit and in the flying lap. In the elimination round and the 500m time trial, the skilled athlete took second place, sending her into the final at the head of the all-round standings, with a large reserve of points, which she easily preserved.

We now boast a large quantity of rating points following the Panevėžys tournament.

Best marksmen gather in Arnhem

By Kirill Karin

Two bronze medals for Belarusian athletes, at European Air Rifle and Air Pistol Championship, hosted by Dutch Arnhem

One of the national team's leaders, Ilya Chergeiko, came third in the 10m Air Rifle, having finished the qualifying round in 4th position. Silver went to Italy's Niccolò Campriani while Bulgaria's Anton Rizov took gold, despite having come only sixth in the preliminary round.

In the 10m Air Rifle men's event, the Belarusian team of Yuri Shcherbatsevich, Vitaly Bubnovich and Ilya Chergeiko also claimed bronze; Italy took silver while Russia won the event.

In total, the Belarusian national team came 12th in the medal table, while Russia topped with eight medals.

Holiday of the week



Everything Best for Children campaign organised at Minsk's Nemo dolphinarium

Exhibitions

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM

20 Lenin Street

Until 30th March. *Da*

Vinci Inventions

Until 3rd May. *Mater Dei.*

Iconografia di un Amore

Until 31st July. *Art at Finger Tips*

NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 29th March. *Alternative*

Photography of Belarus:

Link of Times...

Until 4th June. *Nikolya*

Chocolate Museum

NATURE AND ECOLOGY MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 23rd March. *Magic Insects*

Until 9th June. *Exotic World*

MINSK CITY HISTORY MUSEUM

10 Revolyutsionnaya Street

Until 29th June. *From Me:* exhibition

by sculptor Vladimir Zhanov

FIRST RSDRP CONGRESS HOUSE-MUSEUM

31A Nezavisimosti Avenue

Until 12th April. *Vikings and*

MIKHAIL SAVITSKY

ART GALLERY

15 Svonody Square

Until 29th March. *City on the*

Edge of Starvation: Japanese

Urban Projects of the 1960s

ZASLAVIE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MUSEUM-RESERVE

4 Rynkovaya Street, Zaslavl

Until 5th April. *Mistress Doll:*

a Book of Fairytales

MIR CINEMA

4A Kozlov Street

Until 30th April. *Childhood*

as a Moment

Theatres

NATIONAL ACADEMIC BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square

20.03. Evening of One Act Operas in the Chamber

Hall: The Servant Turned Mistress. Kapellmeister

24.03. Musical Evenings in Bolshoi Theatre: Admirers

25 and 26.03. The Tsar Bride

BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myashnikov Street

20 and 25.03. Yunona and Avos

21.03. My Wife — A Liar; The Nutcracker

22.03. Giselle 24.03. Blue Cameo

26.03. Assol; A Glass of Water

MODERN ARTS THEATRE

5 Oktyabrskaya Street

20.03. Figaro.tut 21.03. Folks

22.03. Aybolit and Barmaley;

Comedy about Penny Pincher

YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street

20-22.03. The Seagull 24.03. Not Mine

25.03. Symon, the Musician

26.03. People of the Marsh

THEATRE-STUDIO OF FILM ACTORS

13 Pobediteley Avenue

20 and 21.03. Who Laughs Last

22 and 24.03. Pygmalion

23.03. Master and Margarita

25.03. The Battlefield

26.03. Robbery at Midnight

REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street

20.03. Eternal Song; Tours of the Gomel

City Youth Theatre: Jealousy

21 and 22.03. Tours of the Gomel City Youth

Theatre: Leopold the Cat's Birthday

22.03. Oscar and the Lady in Pink

24.03. One Square 25.03. Adams' Jokes

26.03. The White Angel with Black

Wings; The Sea Wolf

Kaleidoscope of history unveiled

March of decades and centuries past comes to life

March 20th. In 1872, a traveller, historian of natural study, professor and corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences — Vladislav Kotvich — was born in the Grodno Region.

March 21st. In 1840, a Belarusian poet, prose writer and publicist — Frantishkek Bogushevich — was born. He was a member of the 1863 Rebellion and a founder of the Belarusian literary language.

March 22nd. In 1911, a Belarusian poet and translator, Alexey Zaritsky, was born.

March 23rd. In 1915, an actress and an Honoured Artist of Belarus — Matrena Kuzmenko — was born. From 1950-1976, she worked at Belarus' State Russian Drama Theatre.

March 25th. In 1945, Ivan Yedeshko was born in the village of Stetsky of the Grodno District. He was a basketballer, an Honoured Master of Sports of the USSR, an Olympic champion (1972, Munich), a bronze winner of the 21st Olympics (1976, Montreal), a world, European and USSR champion. Since 1991, Belarus hosts a traditional international basket-

ball tournament for Yedeshko prizes.

March 26th. In 1900, Alexander Lizyukov was born in Gomel — a General Mayor and a USSR Hero. He heroically fought in 1941, in battles near Borisov and Soloviev bridge over the Dnieper. He died in a fight in 1942.



March 20th. In 1972, Poland's General Consulate opened in Minsk.

March 20th. In 1992, the establishment of Belarus' Armed Forces began on the basis of the former Belarusian Military District.

March 22nd. In 1943, fascists burnt Belarusian Khatyn and 149 of its residents — including 75 children. In 1969, a memorial complex to honour

fascism victims was established on the site of the village.

March 21st is the Earth Day — celebrated annually on the vernal equinox day following a decision of the UN General Assembly.

March 21st. In 1560, Gomel received its seal and emblem (featuring a cross).

March 22nd. In 1925, the district Red Army House (now known as the House of Officers of Belarus' Armed Forces) was established in Smolensk.

March 22nd. In 1936, production of kefir and acidophile drinks was launched at Belarus' Central Dairy Factory.

March 22nd. In 1940, the Republican Scientific Medical Library was set up.

March 22nd. In 1991, the

National Olympic Committee of Belarus was established.

March 23rd. In 1977, the first operation was conducted at Minsk's clinical hospital #9.

March 23rd. In 1990, Belarus' State Museum of Theatrical and Musical Culture was established. A branch of the Vladislav Golubok Parlour operates on its premises.

March 23rd. In 1999, the Interagency City Librarian Council was set up at the Minsk City Executive Committee's Cultural Department.

March 24th. In 1984, an electric train made the first test drive for Minsk metro's first line.

March 24th. In 1992, the Police Academy of Belarus' Interior Ministry was established.

March 25th. In 1935, a kolkhoz-sovkhoz theatre began its work in Mozyr; in 1938, it was reorganised into the Polesie Regional Drama Theatre.

March 25th. In 1966, the Engineering-Construction Institute was founded in Brest; since 1988, it was known as the Polytechnic Institute and, at present, it has the status of the Brest State Technical University.