



Stefania Stanyuta should have celebrated her 115th birthday

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Those who create unique objects are called master craftsmen for a reason

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The Zhirovichi monastery is now one of the main centres of Belarusian Orthodoxy — experiencing a period of prosperity

The holy place of Zhirovichi

The agro-town of Zhirovichi which is one of Belarus' major centres of Orthodoxy is hardly recognisable nowadays: in the year of the 550th anniversary of the appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God and the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Holy Dormition Stavropegic Monastery. Large-scale improvements have affected not only the latter but also the local area, which boasts a rich history. → 7



Last week, Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko chaired a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in the format of a video conference. It had a full agenda, focusing on the life and economy of the five Eurasian member-states during and after the pandemic, the strategy of the EAEU for the next five years, and international co-operation. Special attention was paid to the draft *Strategic Directions for Developing the Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025*. In general, the document was approved by all participants of the summit, but it was not finally adopted. The strategy will be finalised and discussed at the next summit scheduled for autumn.

No secrets

Speaking at the opening of the session, Aleksandr Lukashenko touched on its regulations. "Since the form of our conversation is appropriate, there are suggestions: to initially hold our meeting in a traditional way — such as its narrow and expanded format, with a pause between them, to organise everything as it was. Otherwise, we can unite a narrow and expanded sessions — especially since there are no secrets — and hold a single meeting, without leaving any of the delegations outside it," the Belarusian President said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the idea, as did Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian. After the common decision was made, Moldovan President Igor Dodon joined the video format. Initially, as a representative of the observer state in the EAEU, he was expected to participate only in an extended part of the summit.

Find consensus

At the beginning of the meeting, Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that the issue of pricing for gas transportation services on the common EAEU market remains unresolved. He said, "The issue of prices for gas transportation services on the common EAEU market remains unsettled. We have not been able to come up with a final mutually acceptable solution for many years. And the issue becomes even more important. Today we should reach a much-needed consensus."

Speaking about the agenda, he remarked that the approval of the *Strategic Directions for Developing the Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025* is on top of that. "This document is a plan of action aimed at deepening our relations and a sort of turning point on the way to the restoration and acceleration of economic development in our countries," the President of Belarus said.

According to him, the current situation in the world and in post-Soviet countries is constantly changing. In spite of that, it is obvious that the perception of this situation in the majority of countries is beginning to change drastically. "Long quarantines and the self-isolation of the population showed that even the superpow-



ers do not have a margin of safety allowing them to prevent a decline in their national economies for a long time in terms of closed borders and non-functioning enterprises," Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised.

The President remarked that experts often make negative short-term forecasts for some states and even continents. In their words, the food issue is one of the most serious problems. "Therefore, today it is very important for us to find ways to preserve the agricultural and manufacturing industries of our countries while taking all measures to protect our people. We hope that Russia, as a locomotive of our integration association, will correlate any measures taken to resume economic growth with our agreements to ensure free access for goods to markets in the EAEU," he added.

Basis for integration

The Russian President noted that the draft *Strategic Directions*

Important issues on joint agenda

for *Developing the Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025* has been practically agreed, with the exception of one point concerning gas transportation tariffs. During his speech, Vladimir Putin put forward additional conditions for the supply of gas contrary to the previously signed documents.

"As for the single tariff suggested by our Armenian and Belarusian friends on gas transportation and transit services, we

energy market with non-discriminatory principles of operation should be one of the foundations of our integration. Without it, there can be no qualitative progress for integration. Without it, it is impossible to ensure a level-playing field for all members of the union," Mr. Pashinyan said. In his opinion, the *Strategic Directions for Developing the Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025* are of special importance.

there: i.e. Kyrgyzstan's proposal to create a financial institution within the Union — the EAEU Development Institute.

In the end, the EAEU leaders came to a consensus: the draft document was mostly approved, but not finally adopted; it will be finalised taking into account a number of proposals from the parties. In autumn, the heads of the EAEU member-states will have an opportunity to discuss the final version of the document in person. The next session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council is scheduled to be held in Minsk. This proposal was made by the President of Belarus.

He said, "I would suggest that we consider today's meeting as an extraterritorial one. Taking into account the presidency of Belarus in the EAEU, I very much look forward to a meeting of the EAEU heads of state in a face-to-face format and would suggest that it be held in Minsk at a time convenient for you."

The participants of the meeting agreed with the Belarusian Head of State's proposal and the date of the event will be set in due course.

Face-to-face meeting

The importance of this document was also noted by the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. At the same time, according to him, it's necessary to discuss a number of issues further and adopt the document during a face-to-face meeting.

"While generally supporting the document, I believe that there are some issues that require additional discussion and elaboration. Given the particular importance of this document, which lays down the basis of integration for years to come, it seems appropriate to discuss it further and to adopt it during a face-to-face meeting. Sooner or later we will see each other in person," he said.

The President of Kyrgyzstan, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, also noted that the *Strategic Directions for Developing the Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025* need to be finalised since some initiatives are not reflected

ADDITION

 Cuba has expressed its desire to obtain observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union. The country has shown interest in co-operation with the EAEU almost since its establishment. Since 2018, the Cuban Government has been liaising with the EEC on the basis of a memorandum of understanding. The issue has already been discussed by the Commission twice and it was put on the agenda during the video conference. Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan do not object, but the common verdict was that additional consultations are needed.

Based on materials of belta.by and sb.by



By Yevgeny Kononovich

CEC registered 15 initiative groups for nominating candidates to the post of the President of Belarus

On May 21st, the next stage of the election campaign — the collection of voter signatures in support of the nomination of Presidential candidates — was launched in the country. So far, fifteen people are applying for the highest state

Election-2020: voter signature collection

post. This is the number of the initiative groups registered by the Central Commission on Elections and Holding Republican Referenda. Each of the applicants, in order to become a candidate for President, needs to collect at least 100,000 voter signatures in support.

A total of 55 applications for registration of initiative groups were submitted to the CEC. Some of the appeals were considered on May 15th. For the rest, decisions were made at meetings on May 19th and 20th. As a result, the initiative groups of temporarily unemployed Viktor Babariko, deputy of the House of Representatives Oleg Gaidukevich, farmer Yury Gantsevich, individual entrepreneur and chairman of the 'For Freedom Movement' hu-

man rights and educational association Yury Gubarevich, co-chairman of the 'Govori Pravdu' (Tell the Truth) national research and education association Andrei Dmitriyev, individual entrepreneur Anna Kanopatskaya, were registered, as well as director of a private trading enterprise Natalia Kisel, chief accountant of the Housing and Construction Consumer Co-operative No.791 Olga Kovalkova, acting chairman of the United Civil Party Nikolai Kozlov, President Aleksandr Lukashenko, retiree Vladimir Nepomniashchikh, make-up and tattoo artist Aleksandr Tabolich, temporarily unemployed Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, individual entrepreneur Valery Tsepkalov, and director of S58 Technologies Sergei Cherechen.

From May 21st to June 19th inclusive, members of initiative groups will collect voter signatures in support of their candidates. As the Central Election Commission explained, applicants have the right to organise pickets for the collection of signatures in all places except those that are prohibited by local executive bodies. Signatures can also be collected at places of residence, while it is recommended that members of initiative groups have personal protective equipment — masks and gloves. Documents for registering a Presidential candidate must be submitted to the CEC from June 20th to July 4th while registration itself will take place from July 5th to July 14th. After this, the period of election campaigning begins.

Being able to stand up for oneself

Why Belarus needs rocket style weapons and what are the further plans of the domestic defence industry? The President familiarised himself with the developments of the enterprises of the State Military Industrial Committee at the pilot test area of the OKB TSP research and manufacturing company in Machulishchi.

Belarus is a peace-loving country and does not view any state as an adversary. Our country condemns any military conflict while adhering to the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes. This is the essence of the military doctrine we adopt. At the same time, we are ready and, most importantly, we can defend our national interests.

The President learnt about developments of the enterprises of the State Military Industrial Committee at the pilot test area of the OKB TSP research and manufacturing company in Machulishchi. Aleksandr Lukashenko set the tone for the conversation even while on his way from the helicopter,

“It would be nice if all states cancelled wars. But so far no one has, despite epidemics, pandemics and hysteria. Nobody has cancelled the war. And, unfortunately, it is necessary to prepare for it in peacetime. We can’t do otherwise. If we do not prepare now, God forbid, of course, then the bitter fruits will be reaped later.”

The so-called ‘club of missile-bearing countries’ comprises only about a dozen states. The development of appropriate weapons and the overall strengthening of the army costs a lot of money. Nevertheless, the combat effectiveness of the Armed Forces remains one of the paramount issues. Aleksandr Lukashenko believes that it’s impossible to save on defence,

“Our strategic task in the field of defence is to cause irreparable damage to our enemy [in the case of military aggression from outside]. We should demonstrate that we are capable of doing it now, so that those who, God forbid, are contemplating attacking us, will realise that we can re-

not do that. We must focus on what is possible. Therefore, we are creating the appropriate missile production.”

Of course, one should not discount traditional weapons: small arms, armoured vehicles and air defence equipment. However, the President was more interested in how the



‘Buk-MB2K’ air defence system

to the general public in 2015. Since then, the complex has been constantly improved at a swift pace, confirmed to reporters by the Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee, Roman Golovchenko,

The enterprise is now working on the localisation of the main element to this: two types of missiles with a range of 50 to 200km and 120 to 300km. The deadline for the creation of the latter, alas, has not been met. Nevertheless, the developers assure us that the first prototype could appear in September.

“We need our own rocket,” the Head of State insisted. “We cannot depend on other countries for weapons.”

The ‘Shershen’ anti-tank guided missile system, the ‘Sapfir’ grenade launcher, the ‘Buk-MB2K’ air defence system — developed in Belarus (also called the ‘Tsitadel’), the ‘Uragan-M’ modernised multiple launch rocket system, which has managed to successfully pass firing range tests: the Head of State asked about each weapon in detail. Moreover, he even placed his signature on the first anti-aircraft guided missile of domestic production, designed for the ‘Tsitadel’ (its launch took place on February 19th this year).

In conclusion, the President emphasised that the most important thing is not to rest on one’s laurels. “If you have already started then continue. However, of course, cost should be considered.”

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

spond adequately. The best response from the point of view of weaponry today is missiles and high-precision weapons.”

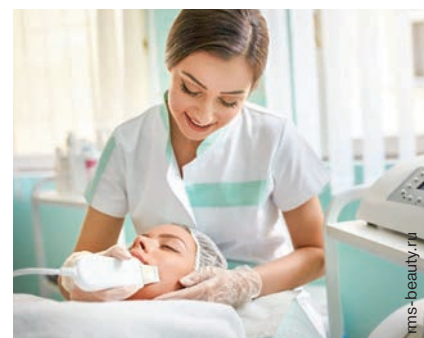
Aleksandr Lukashenko once again emphasised that we are not going to invade foreign states, and there is no such ‘interest’ in us from other countries, “Therefore, it makes no sense for us to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear weapons. We can-

state programme for the development of missile production for 2017-2020 is being implemented and what are the problematic issues in this regard.

In the past few years, the rocket science industry in our country has always been associated with the ‘Polonez’ multiple launch rocket system. For the first time, this weapon — gentle in name, but formidable in nature — was presented

“The range of use of ‘Polonez-M’ was increased from 200 to 300 kilometres. The creation of new types of ammunition for this system continues. This was also reported in detail to the President. The work is very complicated. This is actually space or aerospace technology.”

The firepower of this missile system is really impressive: one combat vehicle in one hit covers an area of up to 400 sq.km.



Without excessive intervention

The Healthcare Ministry has prepared a draft executive order of the Government ‘On the List of Procedures (Tests, Manipulations) Concerning Licensed Works and Services in Healthcare’. A similar document was passed by the Council of Ministers in March 2011 and has not been amended since then. However, new methods and equipment have been introduced in the medical sphere during this time — which cannot but require new regulatory tools. The President agreed but strictly pointed out that innovations in any case should not lead to overregulation of the system.

Aleksandr Lukashenko explained his interest in the topic, “The issue pertains to licenses, permissions, pro-

Quality guaranteed

Improving the licensing of medical activities and the epidemiological situation in the country were in focus of attention of the report made to the Head of State by Healthcare Minister Vladimir Karanik and Presidential Aide Aleksandr Kosinets

hibitions. Some time ago, it was seriously raised by the business community and ordinary people — especially those who wanted to perform licensed procedures. Since then, we have made many steps to settle issues concerning permissions and other things, give more freedom to people, to society, and the business community. I am keeping an eye on these matters.”

As Vladimir Karanik announced, the draft authors proceeded from the fact that it is necessary to develop the market for medical services while preserving the safety of citizens. In his talk to journalists later, he explained, “The main approach is that we should not hinder the development of medical services, but the requirements for patient safety should be strictly observed. This approach is implemented

in the resolution. The President carefully reviewed the proposed options, what applies to medical services and what changes have occurred in licensing. The Head of State supported this document.”

Mr. Karanik noted that medical activities have long been licensed in Belarus, and now we have decided to distinguish SPA services more clearly: when they are domestic, and when they are medical.

Necessary to fight for people’s lives

During the meeting, the epidemiological situation in the country was discussed. According to the Head of State, this is not the time to relax, but the data confirms that the situation has been improving steadily. “I am regularly updated. I am monitoring the situation. In no way we should

let ourselves relax yet. We need to fight for people’s lives. Our doctors are doing a great job, and the Healthcare Ministry is organising this work well. The most important thing is that you are learning from everyday experience,” he stressed.

Aleksandr Lukashenko pointed out that Vitebsk and Minsk, which confronted the virus first, have reported decreasing numbers of new cases. “Minsk and Vitebsk were the first to grapple with the problem, especially Vitebsk, and now they are emerging from this. You can see that more beds are being vacated,” he said. Therefore, according to the Head of State, it is necessary to gradually return to normal specialised work those medical institutions that were previously focused on receiving patients with pneumonia and COVID-19.

The President added that the country chose the right strategy that focuses on treating pneumonia, regardless whether it is caused by the coronavirus or something else. “It was the right decision. Now we can see that the number of pneumonia cases, thank God, is on the decline,” he said.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

Modern and reliable



New level of relations

In Q1, trade between Belarus and Uzbekistan increased 1.5 times to total \$53.8m — as mentioned during a video conference meeting between Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Dvornik, and the Deputy Prime Minister — Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, Sardor Umurzakov

According to Vladimir Dvornik, the video conference demonstrates the mutual interest of Belarus and Uzbekistan in continuing contacts and developing co-operation in all areas. The active political dialogue established in recent years between the presidents of Belarus and Uzbekistan has taken the range of Belarus-Uzbekistan relations to a qualitatively new level.

In 2019, bilateral trade reached \$239m, up 1.5 times year-on-year. The positive trend was maintained in January-March 2020. Mutual trade amounted to \$53.8m, up 54.1 percent year-on-year.

The Belarus-Uzbekistan road map on co-operation is a framework document for trade and economic liaisons, approved by the prime ministers of the two countries on November 2nd, 2018. The road map includes 158 measures, more than a third of which have already been implemented.

The deputy prime ministers discussed the progress made in updating the road map, taking into account the agreements reached during the official visit of Uzbekistan's President to Belarus. The parties also considered issues of interregional co-operation, interaction in transport and logistics, agriculture, food and light industries.

Based on materials of belta.by



Belkommunmash to deliver 20 model 43303 trolleybuses to St. Petersburg. The vehicles have been leased by Gorelektrotrans, the city electric transport company from Russia.

The supply contest was won together with Promagroleasing-Tsentr JSC and the first shipments are planned for May. In June, trolleybuses will be already humming along the city's routes after the initial start-up work.

"Today we are the only manufacturer of trolleybuses in the post-Soviet space. All other plants have either ceased to exist or do not produce articulated trolleybuses," said Oleg Bytsko, the Director of the Science and Technology Manufacturing Centre and chief designer at Belkommunmash. "The trolleybus is based on the body of the E433 electric bus and has a similar look. We have changed the configuration of the equipment to that of one of the classic trolleybus." According



BELTA

to him, this vehicle is meant for major cities where there are large passenger flows.

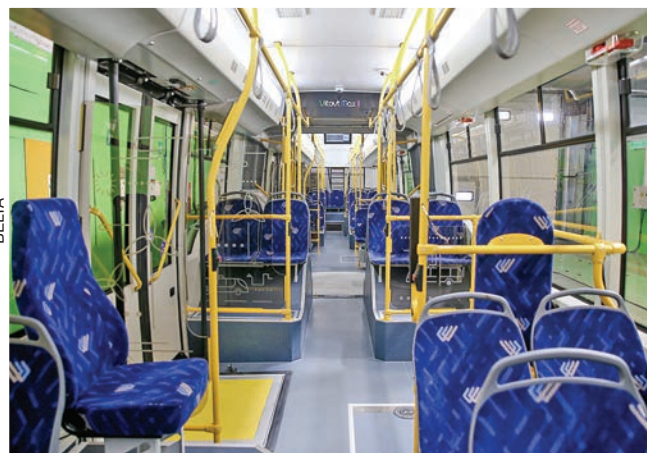
The trolleybus version takes into account the features of passenger transport in this Russian region. It has more than 40 seats and can transport 162 passengers. There are also three folding seats and a heated seat for a conductor.

The low-floor trolleybus is equipped with a body tilting system and a folding ramp (platform) for people in wheelchairs. The CCTV system has 12 cameras. The bus features a Wi-Fi-router and USB sockets.

The trolleybus is equipped with an electronic travel payment control system, a passenger traffic counting system, the 'Speaking City' radio information system for passengers with disabilities, a rapid passenger information module (two media complexes with two monitors each).

According to the company, this is the first purchase of such vehicles by St. Petersburg in the past eight years. Over the last three years, the city has purchased 35 Belkommunmash model 32100D trolleybuses and 16 of 321 type.

Based on materials of belta.by



No unnecessary contacts

By Ilya Kryzhevich

Timely idea

The Drive&Pay mobile app makes it possible to pay for fuel without leaving the car: a smartphone and Internet access are required. Sergei Kamornikov, the Deputy General Director of Belorusneft for Providing Hydrocarbon Raw Materials and Selling Products, explains the simplicity of the application.

"At a gas station's petrol pump, the customer inserts the nozzle into the tank. Then they open the app, select the station where they are and the number of the pump. The system recognises the operation itself and then you only need to confirm the volume of litres or the sum to be paid. Then the funds are debited and the fuel supply begins. A driver does not need to go to the cashier or return for change. There's also no need to work out exactly how much fuel will fit in the tank, because any returns due to the card are done automatically within a few seconds," he says.

No less important is the following point: even if a customer accidentally left a card at home, refuelling is also possible; the app also enables users to remotely refuel the cars of relatives and friends if necessary.

This function is not new: the app became available to customers back in 2018, when it began to be tested. Today, its application has been expanded to all the company's gas stations. Belorusneft even calculated the number of subscribers: Drive&Pay is already used by more than

123,000 customers at its stations. WebPay was chosen as the payment system.

In practice

We visited a Belorusneft fuelling station in Minsk to try to fuel a car online. We decided to download the app on the road. It is easy to download after a quick search in the AppStore and Google Play. After a simple registration, you can attach a payment card and a loyalty card to your account (if available).

While still on the road, the app can tell you the nearest station and set your route. After you have decided on a fuelling station and reached it, you can safely pay for fuel. Select the appropriate column in the app, and you're done: the process has started. Quick, easy, and even if you forgot your map at home, there is no trouble. You will still have to get out of the car as the app will not insert the nozzle into the tank for you but you don't have to approach the cashier: the system authorises the payment remotely. Your purchase history is saved in the app, which allows you to track your expenses. The app languages are Russian and English.

It is worth noting an important point that the function appeared in a timely manner and will help maintain social distancing.

The possibility of online refuelling via a mobile app has become available at all Belorusneft stations as part of the trend aimed at social distancing.

Payment is performed without contact with a cashier and many users have already appreciated the advantages of the service.



Aleksandr Kushner

Turning to food-related issues

Belarus is among the world leaders in the Global Food Security Index

According to UN, the coronavirus pandemic which has paralysed the economies of entire countries and regions, may lead to global famine. As part of the *Expert Environment* joint project of BelTA and the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Research (BISR), analysts tried to figure out what the world and our country are anticipating regarding food security.

As international ratings and assessments indicate, Belarus is improving the effectiveness of food security and *The Economist* states that our country is ranked 36th in this area, while being among the leaders in terms of avail-



ability of food to the population. The Vice-Rector on Scientific Work at the Belarusian State Economic University, Doctor of Economic Sciences — Professor Aleksei Bykov — explains, “Our national economic complex, which is tied to agriculture, is the largest and most deeply integrated. It accounts for about 18-20 percent of Belarusian GDP — speaking of agriculture, food and distribution networks.”

Aleksei Bogdanov, the Head of the Main Department of Foreign Economic Activity at the Agriculture and Food Min-

istry, adds that Belarusian producers are trying to focus on diversification, avoiding a single sales market. “Last year, our food was exported to 104 countries, dairy foods to 55 countries, and meat to 25 countries. The Ministry is actively working to open new markets in terms of veterinary and sanitary access,” he notes.

Gordei Gusakov — who supervises scientific work at the Institute for Systems Research in the Agro-Industrial Complex of the National Academy of Sciences — believes that the risk of food shortages in the world is exaggerated. The main problem will not be in production volumes, but rather in prices.

Experts also touched on the topic of GMO products. Most of the world’s scientific community does not see the



Vladimir Ulakhovich, Chairman of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

Food security is actually a rating of the state’s competitiveness today. Belarus performs well in this regard.

Aleksei Avdonin, BISR analyst:

The pandemic has broken the logistics chains. In some regions, there are many resources and agricultural products but it’s impossible to deliver them.



problem in GMOs and, perhaps, in the future such products will help neutralise the global problems of hunger, drought and climate change.

Another, although subjective, factor affecting the global agricultural market is the weather. The host of *Meteo-guide* programme at the ONT TV Channel, former head of weather forecasting at the Belarusian Hydrometeorological Service — Dmitry Ryabov — comments, “A joint report was issued by meteorologists and leading experts in this field stating that, in 2020, especially in summer, several natural disasters are expected. These will be primarily droughts which increase fire hazards. We must be ready for this.”

Over the past decade, Belarus has been consistently working to improve the quality of its food.

Based on materials of belta.by



Anton Dudare-nok, BISR analyst:

According to global estimates, the global food situation is generally good. Last year’s harvest is sufficient and the problem is rooted in the logistics and socio-economic consequences of quarantine restrictions.

Truth of pure water



Iron removal stations in 1,461 settlements: by 2025, the whole country will be provided with water from underground sources

By Oksana Nevmerzhtskaya

“The water we drink today is absolutely safe. Where deferrization stations are installed, it complies with the best international standards in terms of chemical, physical and bacteriological composition,” noted Oleg Konon, Belvodokanal’s General Director. “By 2025, we plan to complete the transfer of Minsk to water supply from underground sources.”

Significant plans for the construction of water deferrization stations are also connected with the provision of clean drinking water to the rural population. The commissioning of such stations in 1,461 settlements is envisaged by the *Clean Water* state programme for 2021–2025. In recent years, 272 deferrization stations have been built, all in rural areas. Their construction is financed in almost equal shares from the funds of the Republican and regional budgets. Last year, about \$10.5m (equivalent) from the Republican budget and more than \$11.5m from local budgets was spent on the construction of 248 stations. A similar amount in the same proportions is provided for the current year. Moreover, Belvodokanal state-owned enterprise, established at the end of last year and uniting all enterprises of the water supply and sewage system, works closely with international financial organisations to implement projects in the field of water supply and sanitation. This includes the reconstruction of water supply systems of settlements, water treatment facilities, alongside the construction of biogas complexes and deferrization stations.

ECONOMY

NEWS IN BRIEF



Medieval sword found on the banks of the Berezina River in Bobruisk

Such swords were used in the Middle Ages — from the second half of the 11th to the 13th century. They have already been found in Grodno and Novogrudok. There are seven swords of this period in the Republic. However, this is the first time that such a weapon has been discovered in the Mogilev Region. Despite the fact that part of the blade is missing, the sword is well preserved. The main task now is its restoration and conservation. After this, it will be possible to study the find in more detail. Often decoration or marks were applied to such weapons. This will help us to more accurately determine the date the sword was made and determine to whom it could belong. After the procedures and more thorough research, the artefact will take its place in the permanent exhibition of the Bobruisk Museum of Local Lore.

The unique nesting place of a colony of common gulls — registered in the Red Book — is revealed in Brest

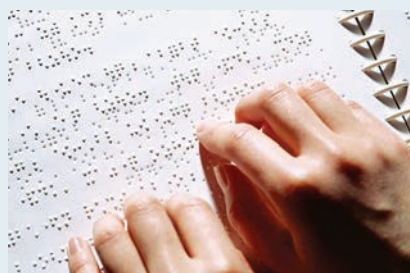
A colony of three pairs of common gulls have nested in a rookery. This has not yet been mentioned in the literature.



The birds settle at a great height (22m) in living trees. The nests can swing on the branches up to 2m, but this does not prevent them from laying eggs. The common gull is considered a northern bird. Its habitat encompasses the northern polar regions. In Belarus, the species is mainly seen in the Vitebsk Poozerie (lake area). Nevertheless, common gulls are gradually settling in the south of the country and have reached the latitudes of the city of Brest. The appearance of the Red Book birds is one of the indicators of the ecological compatibility of this region. The colony of common gulls will certainly be among its top places in its uniqueness.

Belarus joins the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled

The relevant law comes into force on June 3rd. The document intends to facilitate access for blind and visually impaired persons to cultural and other information, to develop international inter-library co-operation and popularise works of Belarusian authors. In line with the law, libraries, educational institutions and public associations for



people with disabilities have the right to conduct cross-border exchanges of works in accessible formats. The Marrakesh Treaty is one of the international treaties in the field of copyright, functioning under the aegis of the World Intellectual Property Organisation. More than 60 countries, including Russia, the USA and the EU, have already acceded to the Marrakesh Treaty.

A plane from the Great Patriotic War will be recreated near Mogilev

The collection of exhibits at the open-air museum at the Mogilev Agroforestry College will soon be supplemented by a fighter. College students and teachers will recreate the La-5 fighter from the time of the Great Patriotic War based on the An-2 ‘crop-duster’, using drawings. Full historical accuracy cannot be allowed. La-5 was wooden, and for the new exhibit, metal and plastic will be used in the casing so that it can be exposed to the open air. The line of German defence passed through the site of the college in 1944. Now almost everything that was here 75 years ago has been restored: a German pillbox, trenches, a dugout and an observation tower. Moreover, there is a tank, several guns and a model of an airplane that bombed the fortifica-



tions during the liberation of Mogilev. The plans are to reconstruct all the equipment, which took part in the liberation of the city from Nazi occupation in June 1944.

Sanatorium choice — at hand

If you have not yet thought about all possible options for where and how to holiday, then you are lucky. Many states still have their borders closed and not all domestic travel agencies are operating yet. Moreover, some health resorts have taken a break. Is there a single way out in this situation: relax on the tarmac, in a city apartment or at best in a holiday cottage?

By Alina Kasel

Safety is the key

This year, it seems those who wanted to travel far have a poor choice: holidaying domestically looks the best option.

The Republican Centre for Health Improvement and Spa Treatment has announced that 105 health resorts are now functioning in the country — for 28,000 guests. There are also over 200 recuperation organisations (146 of them are stationary camps) — for 10,000. As for their performance, in the current conditions, due to the closure of borders, in April, exports of services were almost reduced to zero, though the year began well: in Q1, exports of services rose by about 4 percent, while open sales of vouchers increased by 8 percent.

Meanwhile, in April, fewer guests came and, since May 1st, the situation has changed: all categories of citizens are not being sent for recuperation under the permits of the Republican Centre until the epidemiological situation stabilises and improves. At the same time, some health resorts still operate and have available rooms: these organisations that are not subordinate to the Republican Centre and individually decide on whether to suspend or close their services for a particular period.

At the moment, 60 percent of all sanatoriums are closed and the websites of some of them say that this will last until May 30th. However, no precise answer is provided by them on when they'll start receiving guests. The situation is not simple and it should be settled with a focussed approach and united efforts. This season, health resorts do not rely only on foreign tourists: i.e. last year, 595,000 vouchers went on sale, of which 242,000 were purchased by foreigners.

The Republican Centre states that, at the moment, vouchers are not being sold in the usual volumes — until the epidemiological situation normalises. However, the risks are minimised when coming to health resorts: plans for actions to counteract the occurrence and spread of infection have been developed. These might affect occupancy but benefit safety.

Find a place

Our resorts offer discounts, additional services and all sorts of treats. For example, if you want to go the Priozerny resort, near Lake Naroch, then you can enjoy a discount of 10 percent in June — for a stay without treatment: the minimum price per day is about \$32 (in equivalent) and includes



food (buffet), accommodation, cultural and entertainment activities. If medical treatment is added, then the voucher will cost \$35 per day. Additionally, trips are available: with a discount, a voucher will cost \$18.5 per day for them — including a set of different procedures. Children under 2 years old are welcomed free of charge. The Head of Marketing Department — Sergei Nekhyvadovich — tells us that booking is open and our citizens have taken advantage of it. Of course, guests from Russia and the Baltic States would normally come, but it is not clear when they will be able to leave their countries. Up to now, capacity is at 10 percent.

“We previously worked with weekend tours, and we continue to do so now — offering about 10 different programmes: various spa treatments, a swimming pool with a sauna complex, and more. People arrive on Friday and leave on Sunday relaxed. The cheapest programme is \$68 for two nights (full service),” he explains.

In turn, Plissa in the Glubokoe District of the Vitebsk Region offers the ‘Unconcerned Isolation’ programme. In February, 320 people recuperated here on a weekend and only 30 are there now. Mostly, guests come from Minsk.

“Most often, individual houses, rather than rooms in the main building are chosen,” comments the Head of Booking Department, Alesya Sokolova. “To reduce the

amount of contact, room service is available: guests can get food in their rooms, while, in the aqua-zone, the visiting time for each family is strictly set. To make people relax more in the fresh air, bicycles are offered for rent. A couple will need to pay around \$55 per day and, in general, the price ranges from \$31 or higher — depending on requirements.”

Interestingly, here, all employees live on the site, in special houses. In this way, the management tried to minimise the risks.

In turn, in Zhuravushka, in the Myadel District, capacity is at about 40 percent, with reservations available for all the summer months: the average price for a room is \$20 per person, including accommodation, five meals a day (takeaway) and treatment. Prices have not been reduced, but a bonus system operates for those visiting for the second time.

In Ratomka's Yunost, 22 percent of places are occupied — mostly by Belarusians. There are also Russian guests who live here for a month and a half. In line with the loyalty programme, they are self-isolated without huge financial losses. The price per person starts from \$29 per day: three meals a day (buffet), an unlimited pool, a gym, doctor's consultations and a number of procedures. Different programmes are available, such as ‘Strengthening Immunity’ (from \$34 per person). In May, some vouchers are 30 percent cheaper.

Of course, all health resorts now actively monitor cleanliness, order and social distance, the health of employees and guests. This is a matter of both security and reputation. This year, our health resorts have every chance to assert themselves in their market, having won the trust of Belarusians.

Currently, the Republican Union of Tourist Organisations is developing programmes for intensive promotion of sanatorium-resort destinations — both domestically and abroad; these will be implemented as the epidemiological situation improves.



Alternative to beach holidays

New tourist sites and routes have been prepared for the beginning of the summer season in the Braslav District. Almost every guest to the area climbs the Mayak Mountain to admire the unique panorama of the Strusto and Snudy lakes. The Head of Tourism Department at the Braslav Lakes National Park, Yulia Pavlovskaya, has shared the good news that the local viewing platform is being reconstructed and, despite the epidemiological situation, the National Park is preparing to welcome more guests.

By Yelena Yasko

For this purpose, six new tourist parking lots — with tents and baths — have been prepared not far from Mayak, on the lakes' shores. New summerhouses, a sports ground with a shade canopy, a playground and changing booths will be installed at one of the main parking lots — Peretyag — where up to 200 tourists can stay at the same time. There is already a beach there, and guests will have access to two areas for cars.

Near the Drivyaty Recreation Centre, the National Park has created a new tourist route with photo zones and stands, as well as interactive training elements. For example, in a bird ‘canteen’, guests will learn in practice what is suitable as food and what is not. This tour route is equipped with parking lots of the general type: Molodezhnaya and Semeinaya, with 14 summerhouses.

Last year, the Braslav Lakes Park was visited by about 25,000 people, mostly in summer. Apparently, it is the secluded types of recreation that will enjoy suc-

cess this season, as opposed to spending time with the masses or at Drivyaty.

The Head of the Sports and Tourism Sector at the District Executive Committee, Stanislav Ostanovko, reminded us that the Braslav District leads in the number of homesteads. There are about 300 of them, which is almost half of all those operating in the Vitebsk Region. Many offer their guests meals, including using food of their own production. Sports-oriented estates are also popular, providing tourists with bicycles and prepared routes in the

surrounding area. Almost all are located on lakes, which means that there are boats and fishing gear. At the same time, more than 2,000 tourists can be accommodated in the homesteads of the district. About 80 tourist sites can accommodate about a thousand more tourists.

Last year, the infrastructure of the district was perfected on the eve of the regional *Dozhinki* festival. The beautification of the city and district continues. Braslav residents are ready to provide a decent alternative to seaside recreation.

Revamped landmark complex in the Slonim District ready to welcome guests

The agro-town which is one of Belarus' major centres of Orthodoxy is hardly recognisable nowadays: in the year of the 550th anniversary of the appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God and the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Holy Dormition Stavropegic Monastery. Large-scale improvements have affected not only the latter but also the local area, which boasts a rich history.

By Tatiana Kondratieva

Vibrant holiday

The planned festive events dedicated to anniversaries had to be postponed due to the current epidemiological situation. However, the agro-town is ready to receive numerous guests and pilgrims: the celebrations will be held at the highest level if the situation is favourable. In the meantime, the celebration was held in a chamber setting: an all-night vigil and divine liturgy. Of course, all the necessary anti-epidemic precautions were observed.

"We are celebrating the holiday with great joy. It is important for us — brethren, teachers and students — to make sure that the monastery remains a place of spiritual peace for all who come here," said the Superior of the Holy Dormition Stavropegic Monastery in Zhirovichi, Archbishop of Novogrudok and Slonim Gury. He believes the assistance that the state has provided to the monastery for many years is important.

During his first visit to the Zhirovichi monastery, Aleksandr Lukashenko said that the monastery and religious schools will receive support, which was followed up. It was also evident during the preparation for the anniversary celebrations that many buildings of the monastery complex were reconstructed, repaired or restored. For example, the seminary buildings have been revamped, new guest rooms and a refectory have been built, repairs of the brothers' block are in full swing, new bells have been cast, sacred springs have been beautified and a monument to the Martyr Seraphim of Zhirovichi erected.



Miraculous appearance of the icon

Literary sources state that a miracle occurred 550 years ago on the site of the local agro-town of Zhirovichi, in the west of Belarus. Local shepherdesses climbed into the forest, attracted by the bright glow that came from the crown of a wild pear. In the branches, they discovered a small stone image of the Mother of God with a baby in her arms; it was the image which exuded the radiance. The children brought it to the owner of the nearest estate, Aleksandr Soltan, who latter hid the jasper icon in a casket and decided to show it to his guests the next day. To the landowner's surprise, the icon was not inside. After a while, the children found it again in the branches of the same pear tree. After making sure that he had witnessed a real miracle, Aleksandr Soltan ordered a wooden church to be built on the site where the icon was found. Later, a settlement began to form around the church: present Zhirovichi. There is also another mention of the acquisition of the icon after the fire of 1520 when the wooden church burned to the ground. The search for the icon in the ashes did not yield any results. Later, according to legend, the place where it was to be found was shown to village children by the Mother of God herself. In memory of this miracle, a stone cathedral was erected on the site of the burned-down church, consecrated in honour of the Repose of the Virgin, where the icon is kept. The same year is considered the time of the foundation of the Holy Dormition Zhirovichi Stavropegic Monastery. The miraculous appearance of the icon and the miracles it brought made Zhirovichi a place of pilgrimage.

The holy place of Zhirovichi



At the Holy Dormition Cathedral

THE MT REFERENCE

The Holy Dormition Zhirovichi Monastery is a male Stavropegic Monastery of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in the agro-town of Zhirovichi (Slonim District, Grodno Region). It's one of the main centres of Belarusian Orthodoxy and the country's largest architectural ensemble from the 17th-18th century. The monastery was founded in the 15th century, shortly after the appearance of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God, which is still kept at the main church of the complex: the Assumption Cathedral.

New image fits well

Dmitry Nagula, the Chairman of the Zhirovichi Village Executive Committee, observes with enthusiasm how his small homeland and an important area for believers are changing. "Over \$2,300,000 (in equivalent) has been allocated for the preparation of the Holy Dormition Zhirovichi Monastery for the celebration of these anniversaries. To date, the infrastructure of the agro-town has significantly improved. Five residential buildings were completely renovated and the hostel of the Agricultural College has been revamped. Landscaping of the areas of the institutions and organisations was performed and private households beautified their yards."

The central square of the village also looks wonderful: paving slabs have been laid on an area of 3,500 square metres, with benches and lighting. The pond was cleaned and a retaining wall with balustrades installed. There is a viewing platform that offers a beautiful view of the monastery complex and the bell tower. After reconstruction of the central square, a wonderful recreation area was formed where there are now private businesses. Shops, souvenir shops and pavilions attract guests' attention. A food pavilion was opened nearby. The agro-town has become much prettier.



The monument to Martyr Seraphim of Zhirovichi

Churches of the monastery

There are five churches on the monastery site, including the Holy Cross Exaltation Church — unique for Eastern Europe. Its entire interior space is occupied by a staircase: the first of the 28 steps is located at the entrance door, and the topmost one lies at the foot of the altar. Each church of the monastery complex is unique in its own way. The Holy Dormition Cathedral is viewed as the main one, as its altar is on the site of the discovery of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God.



PRESIDENT'S CONGRATULATION

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, has sent greetings on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God and the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Holy Dormition Stavropegic Monastery. The Head of State stressed that the acheiropoietos image of the Mother of God in granite stone is one of Belarus' main Orthodox relics, revered all over the world. His message reads: 'Acknowledging the importance of spirituality in the formation of the traditions of the Belarusian people and the preservation of its cultural legacy, the state has provided comprehensive assistance in the restoration of the monastery in Zhirovichi. The tireless prayers of monks instil kindness and love, hope and generosity in people's hearts and unite us in the face of our ordeals'. The President expressed the confidence that the monastery will remain a leading centre of Orthodox enlightenment, cherish national traditions of inclusiveness and religious tolerance and help promote ethnic and religious accord and stability in the society. "I wish you strong health, unshakeable faith and every success for the sake of the noble ideals of Christianity and the prosperity of the Belarusian nation," Aleksandr Lukashenko concluded.

According to the President's press service



A record drop in Eurozone GDP

Introduced in March measures to curb the epidemic of coronavirus in the first quarter led to a record drop in Eurozone GDP

According to preliminary estimates from Eurostat, the decrease was 3.8 percent compared to the previous period and 3.2 percent in annual terms. GDP of the EU decreased by 3.3 percent QoQ and 2.6 percent — in annual. In the quarterly comparison it is the sharpest decline since the inception of the single currency and since 1995, that is, in the entire history of observations.

France's gross domestic product in the first quarter shrank by 5.8 percent, its most since at least 1949, knocked down by containment measures meant to mitigate the coronavirus crisis.

The GDP contraction was even bigger than figures recorded in the first quarter of 2009, a 1.6 percent decline during the global financial crisis, and in the second quarter of 1968 — a time of unrest when 10 million French workers went on a general strike — a 5.3 percent decline.

Spanish GDP declined by 5.2 percent in the first quarter of 2020, compared with a growth of 0.6 percent in the same quarter last year, according to preliminary data from the National Statistics Institute. This figure is to be the largest fall since records began in 1949. On average, analysts had expected a 4 percent quarterly decline for both French and Spanish GDP.

German monthly retail sales plunged at their fastest level since 2007 as shops remained closed and turnover fell dramatically in individual retail trade branches. Retail sales in March fell by 5.6 percent versus an expected 7.3 percent decline. On an annualised basis, the country's retail sales fell by 2.8 percent in March versus an increase of 6.5 percent in February, data from the Statistical Office Destatis showed.

Ways to revive tourism

Europe, the world's biggest tourist destination, is struggling to restart normal life after months of total economic and social lockdown

In the next few weeks, cafes and restaurants are due to open in most European countries, and hotels and beaches are scheduled to follow suit by mid-June.

Rome's museums, galleries and archaeological sites began to reopen from May 18th, on a gradual basis. The first major museum to reopen in Rome was La Galleria Nazionale, or GNAM, Italy's national museum of modern art which opened its doors, along with the Elliott Erwitt show at WeGil.

This was followed by the reopening of three of Rome's most important municipal museums: the Capitoline Museums, Palazzo delle Esposizioni (with its *Jim Dine* show) and Museo di Roma-Palazzo Braschi (with the *Canova*

exhibition extended until June 21st).

Venice's gondolas glided across the Grand Canal once more as Italy's lockdown eased, taking the odd local from one side to the other as they wait for tourists to return. Wearing not only their famous blue and white striped t-shirts but also gloves and masks, the gondoliers helped passengers climb into the boats, where tape had been used to mark the social distancing spaces people must keep on board.

"It's good news, a sign of everyone's desire to get back to normal as soon as possible, but without ever lowering our guard in order to defeat the virus once and for all," said Giovanni Giusto, the City Councillor for the Protection of Traditions.

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of

Belgium have also reopened their doors to visitors following lockdown measures imposed in March by the Government.

As governments across Europe try to salvage what they can of the tourist season, Greece has reopened the Acropolis, as well as all of its outdoor archaeological sites. However, this summer will be different. Only a limited number of tourists will be allowed on the Acropolis and they will have to respect social distancing rules. The site can host around 2,000 people at the same time and the use of masks is strongly advised.

Alongside the Acropolis, around 200 archaeological sites have opened up all over Greece. Museums, however, will have to wait until June 15th.

Remains of giant creatures

In Mexico, at the construction site of the new airport, the remains of about 60 mammoths were found

Almost all individuals are the Columbian mammoths (*Mammuthus columbi*), said Francisco Sánchez Nava, an employee of the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico. This is one of the largest representatives of the elephant family that existed on the Earth. Their mass could reach 10 tonnes, and height — 4 metres.

According to palaeontologists, the Columbian mammoths, extinct about 11.5 thousand years ago, were descendants of the southern mammoths (*Mammuthus meridionalis*), which

came to North America about 1.5 million years ago.

About 30 archaeologists are currently working at the airport construction site.

In the end of 2018, the Mammoth Museum was opened in the municipality of Tultepec, which is located next to the would-be airport. In 2019, archaeologists discovered two traps for mammoths in Tultepec, dug more than 15 thousand years ago, in which there were more than 800 bones belonging to at least 14 mammoths.



US statehood referendum

Puerto Rico's Governor Wanda Vázquez announced that she will hold a nonbinding referendum in November to decide whether Puerto Rico should become a US state

For the first time in the island's history, the referendum will ask a single, simple question: should Puerto Rico be immediately admitted as a US state?

It's an answer that requires approval from US Congress and a question that outraged the island's small group of independence supporters and members of the main opposition Popular Democratic Party, which supports the status quo. But it's a gamble that members of the Governor's pro-statehood party are confident will pay off given that Puerto Rico has struggled to obtain federal funds for hurricanes Irma and Maria, a string of recent strong earthquakes and

the coronavirus pandemic amid growing complaints that the island does not receive fair and equal treatment.

Previous referendums have presented voters with more than one question or various options, including independence or upholding the current territorial status, but none have been so direct as the one scheduled to be held during the November 3rd general elections.

In a 2017 referendum, more than half a million Puerto Ricans voted for US statehood. "Our people will have the opportunity once and for all to define our future," Wanda Vázquez said. "It's never too late to be treated as equals."

Stefania's day

In May, Stefania Mikhailovna Stanyuta should have celebrated her 115th birthday. People's Artiste of Belarus and the USSR — from the memories of her colleagues and relatives.

They say in the Yanka Kupala Theatre that 'all theatre-goers went to see her on the stage and several generations of spectators can consider themselves to be her contemporaries'. The great Stefania Mikhailovna Stanyuta lived a rich and eventful life: she saw the Tsar, remembered the Great Patriotic War, lived in post-war Minsk and witnessed the years of the formation of a new sovereign state. Many tried to unravel the secret of her liveliness, youth and incredible human charm. But it was simple to the point of genius: to avoid bad things and do what you love. Moreover, Stefania Mikhailovna was very fond of young people. She willingly shared the secrets of her acting profession, always supporting those who took their first steps in the theatre. Today, this generation of Kupala Theatre actors already bear the title of 'people's' and 'honoured', devoting themselves to the public — as Ms. Stanyuta herself once said!

The legendary artist — in rare archival photographs and memoirs of her colleagues and relatives.



By Yuliana Leonovich

Zinaida Zubkova, People's Artiste of Belarus:

There are actresses who walk in, knock on the door and make demands. Stefania Mikhailovna was not at all like that. What was she like? Charming! More than anything else, she loved theatre and life. She was pleased with every day no matter what. She always told us: 'Girls, if you've woken up, there's already a reason for joy'. Maybe because she loved this world so much, she was set to live for 95 years... Even when she didn't have any performances, she went to the Kupala Theatre: 'Girls, I've brought you cognac and baked a cake'. She could not imagine any other life than theatre. We loved her very much. I remember that on the day when the play 'Avdei Passion' was staged at the theatre (Stefania Mikhailovna was no longer playing, she was ill), in the scene where I read the prayer — alone, in front of the curtain — the tears rolled down my face, though this has never happened before. And after the performance, her son Sasha came to us and said that Stefania had passed away. And then I realised that these were not my tears. They were the tears of Stefania Mikhailovna Stanyuta.

Viktor Manaev, People's Artiste of Belarus:

To live such a long life — almost a century! How much has happened during this time: revolution, war, loss of loved ones... Remaining such a bright person is the most important thing in life. When I came to the theatre as a boy, Ms. Stanyuta was still young — about seventy years old. We managed to work together for almost 20 years. When we were rehearsing the 'Harold and Maude' performance, she joked that both of us need to be young: 'I'm not 80 anymore, but you are not 18 either'. She was very positive and knew how to see only the good in everything. She never even raised her voice to anyone. She gave only attention, love and smiles. After the performance, she would come, give some of her home-made gifts and kiss us: 'Congratulations on the premiere!' She also seemed to be always somehow shy of her popularity. She often used to say: 'I didn't do anything special; there are artistes who are much more talented than me. It's just that they're all in another world, so a little bit of the love for them is transmitted to me'.



The Belarusian State Archives of Films, Photographs and Sound Recordings, from the archives of the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre and open Internet sources



would be wonderful. I remember I once came to the Kupala Theatre, walking along the corridor I met Ms. Stanyuta. I rushed up to her right away, and she, laughing, turned her cheek and said: 'Lesha, sometimes I feel like an icon. They're kissing me like an icon'. 'That's right, Stefania Mikhailovna', I answered, 'You have long been a living symbol of Belarus'. And at the beginning of her career, and throughout her life, she had one title — Stanyuta.

Svetlana Sukhovei, Honoured Artiste of Belarus:

Real recognition came to Stefania Mikhailovna after the film 'Farewell', based on Valentin Rasputin's novel 'Farewell to Matura'. This picture made her a star. But she took it very calmly and thanked God that it happened. Moreover, Stefania Mikhailovna was a person with great inner dignity and did not allow herself to stoop to a show-down. She generally reacted to everything with childlike spontaneity. She was always teaching me: 'Baby, never be envious!'

Melitina Stanyuta, a multiple winner of the world and European rhythmic gymnastics championships, the great-granddaughter of the actress:

I went to her house as if to a museum, in which everything could be touched. She had a very interesting flat, she did a lot of things with her own hands: beads, masks, crafts. I didn't see her on stage, for me she was just a relative, just a great-grandmother with whom we often walked around the park, fed homeless cats and celebrated New Year together... My grandmother loved to dance all her life. Even at the age of seventy she could easily do the splits. It's likely her talents were transferred to me. Rhythmic gymnastics is a very feminine sport requiring suppleness and acting. You could say I've realised her dream. In general, I have been for a very long time — for many years! — a 'great-granddaughter of Stefania Stanyuta'. I understood that this surname must be carried responsibly and with dignity.



Stanyuta — this surname must be carried responsibly and with dignity

Nikolai Pinigin, Director and Artistic Leader of the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre:

She was the kindest person I knew. She has never said a bad word to anyone. Sometimes during rehearsals, she came up on me quietly and put candy in my pocket. I was just a boy for her, a young director. In 1986, she played with Viktor Manaev in the play 'Harold and Maude' — about the fascination of a young guy with an 80 year old woman. It seems to me that the role of Maude very accurately expressed her essence. Like her character, in life of Stefania Mikhailovna was very lively, cheerful and enthusiastic. But then the character of Manaev saw on Maude's hand the number of the concentration camp... Ms. Stanyuta also saw a lot. I remember there were evening rehearsals and during the breaks she sometimes talked about her life: as she saw Tsar Nikolai II, met Lenin, later Stalin at the Decades of Belarusian Art in Moscow... After the premiere of the play,



she invited us to drink champagne several times in a row. We — five or seven of us — took a taxi and drove to her house. We drove past Svobody Square and she told us that it was there that they'd met Nikolai II.

Aleksei Dudarev, playwright:

I always smile when I think of her. She was a very lively person who had no enemies at all. The fact that Stefania Mikhailovna was talented, and even brilliant is understandable. But the most interesting is that with age, she only became better and more beautiful. If she had lived to see her 115 years today, I'm sure she

Revival of folk crafts

In November 2020, a new fourth item may appear in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List: 'Forest Beekeeping Culture of Belarus and Poland'. The Head of State asked that conditions be created for the revival of folk crafts in our country. Is it possible to make a craft profitable and how have they coped with the task of producing our own musical instruments? This special project by the TV News Agency, aired on the Belarus 1 TV Channel further explores this topic.

Residents of the Polesie town of Ivanovo are offended when they are compared with the famous Russian 'city of brides'. If a queue appears here, then it's only for real craftsmen, for example, coopers. The Director of the Ivanovo children's school of decorative applied and folk arts, Natalia Gatsevich, tells us, "Our school opened on September 1st, 2000, with the goal of reviving a very old and half-forgotten craft. We have a village, Rylovichi, where a hundred years ago they made coopered bowls in almost every yard."

Now 97 pupils study at the school, including 89 boys. Yuri Novik, a young cooper and laureate of the President's Special Fund to Support Talented Youth, demonstrates how to make a barrel, a bowl for dough and a tub for honey and butter. He says that he studied at Kobrin College, "There I worked as a master craftsman and I'm a carver by profession. I was taught how to create coopered dishes. This should definitely not be forgotten. We always return to our roots."

The efforts to maintain cooperage did not go unnoticed: in 2009, the school staff were awarded a special prize 'For Spiritual Revival'. This is one of the highest and most honourable awards that a craftsman can receive for their work. Established in 1997, it's personally bestowed by the President. Another form of award that a craftsman can apply for is the 'Folk Craftsman' honorary title of the Republic of Belarus.

But if the coopers from Ivanovo are just learning, then the master manufacturing folk instruments from Pinsk, Ruslan Makarevich, already knows what to do. He says that every nation has its own musical instrument, "But they all resemble domra. However, there's nowhere with anything like ours. It is usually known as a Russian folk instrument."

Ruslan Makarevich could not invite guests to his own workshop a couple of years ago: for many years, the craftsman made hand-made balalaikas, which cost thousands of Roubles, at home. However, he was supported by Aleksandr Lukashenko and he doesn't hide this gratitude, "Thanks to the President, they gave us this location. Thank you so much!"

In 2018, Aleksandr Lukashenko heard how the domra created by the Polesie master sounds at the presentation of Belarusian sports equipment and musical instruments at BelExpo and instructed them to continue their work and prepare pupils.

"You should create a school. At present, you are alone, but you should have more helpers in order to continue to restore... For me, it is not the quantity that matters, but the pupils themselves. It's important there are more people like you, who are really devoted to this. Find such guys, this is vital," said the President.

Belarus is represented by three elements in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. These are the 'Kalyady Tsars' rites (Christmas Tsars), 'Yurievsky Khorovod' (Yuriev Round Dance) and the Budslav Fest. Now there is a study of the inclusion of the fourth element in the list: 'Forest Beekeeping Culture'.

Now Ruslan Makarevich works with his partner Nikolai. A third assistant has recently appeared. The workshop is now working on a large state order for balalaikas and domras.

Another musical instrument craftsman, Aleksandr Surba, works in Minsk. He is the Dean of the Faculty of Traditional Belarusian Culture and Contemporary Art at the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts. He shows us a woodworking room, "Here students are taught the basics of making musical in-



Over the past five years, the State List of Intangible Historical and Cultural Values of Belarus has almost doubled. Now it boasts 143 elements, with 15 new items being added to it in 2020 alone.

In November 2017, during a working visit to the Gomel Region, Aleksandr Lukashenko visited Buda-Koshelevo. In the district House of Culture, the President was shown a traditional loom. In a conversation with the craftsman, the President emphasised that previously, in every village house and even in the cities, people could do something with their own hands and the craft school should be developed, "It's good that we are creating conditions for them to revive. There are many talented and capable people. But talent needs to be developed. Folk art cannot be lost. Especially for those who can work with their own hands."

In 1992, the Belarusian Union of Folk Artists was founded, which currently unites more than 700 people. From the very beginning, this creative association was headed by Yevgeny Sakhuta, Doctor of Arts. He recalls, "The first thing we did was to recall old craftsmen who were giving up their skills and were not in demand. They were surprised that their previous works, which had been seen as rural backwardness, turned out to be very useful nowadays. Who could they teach? Youngsters, of course!"

In the village of Stankovo, in the Dzerzhinsk District, a well-known master in wooden mechanics, Andrei Martynyuk, works at the Centre of Culture and Folk Art. A holder of



struments — violins. The task was set by the President while the details were formulated by the Culture Ministry."

Aleksandr Surba has been making musical instruments for many years. His main interest is duda. But two years ago, on the personal instructions of the President, in just a few months, he made his first violin. To do this, first Aleksandr studied the topic in theory. Although we had our own masters and violin manufactories before, including one of the most famous in the 17th century, according to him, now there's a general shortage of musical instruments in Belarus, "And the state's strategy is to ensure that these are produced in the country in large numbers, enabling our children and students to play domestically-made instruments that meet international standards."

Historically, talented master craftsmen from all different areas lived in Belarus. Until the 16th century, the most developed crafts were carpentry, weaving, cooperage and straw weaving. For instance, Grodno was famous for its tanning industry while Minsk was known for processing metal products. However, in the process of industrialisation, manual craft, as elsewhere in the world, began to be replaced with industry. Nevertheless, Culture Minister Yuri Bondar recalls, "In the era of general reform, in the 1990s, our state used a very careful approach towards these issues. We have kept the craft centres and the youth employed there. 1,500 clubs are operating at craft centres. We are now seeing a growing interest in authentic, folk art worldwide."

of the Francysk Skaryna Medal, he makes watches and other complex mechanisms entirely from wood. "Personal satisfaction is already fading into the background. I want to do this for someone to see and to hear," explains the master.

The Director of the Centre of Culture, Lidia Drachinskaya, is involved in the promotion and sale of the works of its masters. She is convinced, "Why do this if nobody needs it?!" And if it is sold, then this is an incentive, which means that people are interested. So, the craftsman's new work will be even better. There are a lot of orders for the works made by Andrei Martynyuk!"

The Director of the Ivanovo children's school of decorative applied and folk arts, Natalia Gatsevich, says that her master-coopers are busy fulfilling orders for people, "Barrels and tubs for salting enjoy great popularity. People remember that taste of childhood and want to pass it on to their children."

One can distinguish a true master using one simple quality — the devotion to one's own work. Manual labour is still highly valued, and those who create unique objects are called master craftsmen for a reason. Belarusians really have something to be proud of.

Champion handball

Gomel handball players become four-time champions of Belarus

By Stanislav Galkovsky

The last match of the championship between the Gomel handball players and Minsk's BNTU-BELAZ turned out to be handball 'gold'. Before the decisive match, the main contenders for the championship had an equal number of points so the winners of the championship title were decided that evening (although the hosts were satisfied with a draw as they had the goal advantage). As a result, the Gomel women's team turned out to be stronger and won the fourth gold in their history.

Gomel could have won their new championship title even earlier, in Minsk. But at that meeting, the BNTU-BELAZ female handball players turned the tide and won with one goal difference. At the home venue, young girls from the city over the River Sozh rained down a hail of goals at the gates of their guests. The result of the first half was 16:9. The goal difference was 7 and one of the most prolific goal-scorers of the championship, Natalia Kotina, explained that they acted according to the plan, "This gap was achieved due to cool heads, discipline and concentration. We tried to keep the ball and not lose it. We tried to play our tried and tested combinations. In the second half, the advantage began to decline, but the coach told us not to look at the scoreboard, but just to score."

It's important to point out that the champions played reliably in defence. For example, the main scorer from the BNTU-BELAZ, Maria Konoval, didn't manage to hit the goal even once. Goal-keeper Yulia Kuntsevich, playing her first

season for Gomel, showed excellent reactions and really helped the team. However, the most important innovation is the tall line players Stelmakh and Mokat from the Gomel squad. A year ago, the champions could not find a recipe against Minsk long throws but now this loophole has been closed. Irina Mokat explains, "Two Irinas, two line players. My height is 1.88m while Stelmakh is 1.92m. We play



in four hands. We try to act aggressively in attack, helped by our height. However, the most important thing is that the whole team work both in defence and in attack — we have a cool and professional team."

The Gomel female handball players and their coaching staff keenly felt the



loss of their head coach, Tomaž Čater — absent due to health reasons — but tried to reduce the game's risks. They focused on minimum rotation, with major players spending almost the entire match on court. The high pace was constantly changing and there was a lot of positional struggling. In handball like this, played with a long ball, the hosts looked preferable. Experienced Ukrainian, Anna Redka, led the championship game, "There was a great desire to win, so we didn't even feel any fatigue. I didn't think about strengths, the only thing I wanted, besides the desire to score, was not to make mistakes. Any loss can turn into a goal."

In the second half, Konstantin Sharovarov's trainees gave a real fight to the champions, though at a certain stage of the match the difference was as much as 10 goals — 26:16. However, the guests methodically narrowed the gap in the score. The crowd (despite the coronavirus, filled to capacity) anxious-

ly watched the figures on the scoreboard. Nervous tension increased and the intensity of the fight was clearly seen at the moment of Victoria Divak's injury. She broke through between two rivals, injured her back, but scored a goal. The handball player conveys the emotions of the moment, "I was throwing and felt a sharp back pain. I fell but the main thing in my head was whether I'd scored or not? I can't even raise my head. A doctor came running, saying: 'Goal!'"

Such goals secured victory and the final score stood at 29:27 in favour of the hosts. This is the Gomel team's fourth championship. A difficult season has preserved gold in the south-east of Belarus. Coach Aleksandr Madzharov admits that he set his trainees only to win, "We had to recover from the psychological blow that we'd received the day before in Minsk. We focused on experienced players. The target was to win. Even during timeouts, I told them that we are stronger! The title of champion is ours, meaning that everything has worked well. I'm proud of the girls!"

The Gorodnichanka handballers claimed bronze, while the women from Berestie closed the quartet of the strongest. The country's top scorer is Regina Kudryavtseva from BNTU-BELAZ, who scored 180 goals in a season.

Rivals named



By Irina Sergeeva

Host Belarus will face Russia, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Slovakia, Denmark and the UK in Group A in Minsk. Latvia will be the host of Group B that will also feature Canada, Finland, the United States, Germany, Norway, Italy and Kazakhstan. The matches will be played in Riga.

Proceeding from the rankings of the teams, the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) approved the groups for the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship due to take place in Minsk and Riga

The organisers are now working on the schedule for the tournament.

Apart from the group stage, Minsk will host two quarterfinals and semi-finals, as well as the finals and a bronze medal match.

This year's World Championship was planned to be held in Switzerland, but did not take place due to the new coronavirus pandemic.

The 2021 World Championship matches will be held at Minsk-Arena (with 15,086 seats) and Arena-Riga (10,300 seats).

The two countries will host the World Championship for the second time in their history. Last time Belarus hosted a world event was in 2014, Latvia — in 2006.

ARENA

● **Thomas Bach accepts Tokyo Olympics would have to be cancelled if not held in 2021**

Thomas Bach, the President of the International Olympic Committee, said the Tokyo Games could be cancelled if the competition could not be held in 2021.

"I understand that you cannot forever employ several thousand people in an organising committee of the Games. Also, you cannot change the schedule of international federations every year because athletes must have certainty," noted Thomas Bach.



● **Belarusian draughts players win silver and bronze at the international tournament**

The draughts tournament for boys and girls born after 2004 was held online.

In the girls' tournament, Belarusian Viktoria Nikolaeva won a silver medal, gaining 39 points. Her teammate Daria Nikiiforova climbed to the third step of the medals podium (35 points). The highest award was claimed by the athlete from the Netherlands, Lisa Scholtens (43 points). In total, 50 athletes from Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Estonia and Belarus took part in the event.



● **Viktor Goncharenko signs a new contract with PFC CSKA Moscow**

He will work as head coach until the end of the 2020/2021 season. Viktor Goncharenko, who is now 42 years old, headed the CSKA football players in December 2016. Under his leadership, the team held 129 matches, achieving 65 victories. CSKA won the Russian Super Cup in 2018, twice becoming silver medallists of the national championship (2017 and 2018). Before arriving in Moscow, Viktor Goncharenko successfully coached the Borisov BATE, and also worked in the clubs of the Russian Premier League: Kuban from Krasnodar, Ural from Yekaterinburg and Ufa.



SPORT

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Photo of the week

Over 200 varieties of lilac bloom in Central Botanical Garden of Belarus' National Academy of Sciences

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



On May 29th, 1920, Olga Solomova was born (in the village of Lasha in the Grodno District) — one of the organisers of the patriotic underground and partisan movement in the Bialystok Region during the Great

Patriotic War. She conducted campaigning among the population, organised underground Komsomol groups in partisan detachments and settlements. As part of the partisan brigade named after A. Nevsky, she carried out combat missions. She died in battle in 1944.

On May 30th, 1780, Yekaterina II and Austrian Emperor Joseph II laid the base of the church of St. Joseph in Mogilev. There is a legend that, during the laying of the foundation stone, a string of pearls was broken by Yekaterina II. The courtiers rushed to collect the scattered beads, but the Empress forbade it, saying: 'May the temple be beautiful, like this pearl'. The church was built according to the design of the famous architect



Nikolai Lvov, decorated with paintings and icons by the famous Russian portrait painter, Vladimir Borovikovsky. It was the first Belarusian monument created in the style of classicism. The St. Joseph Cathedral was destroyed in the 1930s.

May 31st is Chemists Day in the Republic of Belarus — a professional holiday for workers of the chemical industry. It's also celebrated on the last Sunday of May in Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. In

1966, the tradition was born to celebrate every Chemists Day under the sign of the chemical elements from the periodic system of D. Mendeleev.

May 31st is World No Tobacco Day. It was proclaimed in 1987 on the initiative of the World Health Organisation to draw attention to the spread of smoking in the world. The annual campaign serves as an occasion to publicise the harmful and deadly effects of tobacco use and second-hand smoke while helping reduce it.



June 1st is International Day for Protection of Children, established in 1949 by a decision of the session of the International Democratic Federation of Women. After 40 years in New York, representatives of 59 countries, including



the USSR, signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which confirms that children, due to their vulnerability, need special care and protection. This document confirms the need for legal and other protection of the child before and after their birth. The Day for Protection of Children is one of the oldest international days celebrated worldwide since 1950.

On June 2nd, 1970, the Lenin Prize was awarded to architects Yuri Gradov, Valentin Zankovich, Leonid Levin and sculptor Sergei Selikhanov for the creation of the Khatyn Memorial (1969). The Khatyn architectural and construction complex repeats the layout of the burnt village and consists of individual elements that reveal the tragedy of civilians in Belarus. It is a shrine to the national memory of the people of Belarus and a symbol of all the Belarusian villages burnt down by the Nazis.



June 2nd, 1955 is the official birthday of the Baikonur Cosmodrome, when the 5th Research Test Site was formed by the directive of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces. Baikonur is the first and largest spaceport in the world. It was



from here that the first artificial satellite and the first manned flight into space were launched. The site is located in Kazakhstan, its area is more than 6,700sq.km.

June 3rd is World Bicycle Day. It was announced by resolution of the UN General Assembly of April 12th, 2018. The document was co-authored by 56 states. It was no coincidence that the bicycle was awarded a special day by the UN. This is an affordable and environmentally-friendly mode of transport, its use facilitates a careful attitude towards the environment, maintaining health and developing sport. The bike has a 200-year-long history.

