



Unique medicine based on anti-COVID plasma has been developed by our experts

4



Belarusian Railways resumed passenger traffic between Belarus and Russia

5

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Delegates from the Belynichi District (Mogilev Region) during a regional meeting for participants of the 6th Belarusian People's Congress

Unity! Development! Independence!

The 6th Belarusian People's Congress has begun its work in Minsk today, under the slogan of 'Unity! Development! Independence!'. The traditional large-scale forum is the main socio-political event of a five-year period. However, the current meeting is radically different from previous ones: it will outline guidelines for the development of our society and state for many years to come. → 2



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Delegates from all regions of the country have gathered in the Palace of the Republic: 2,700 are in attendance in total. These are people of different

The 6th Belarusian People's Congress has begun its work in Minsk today, under the slogan of 'Unity! Development! Independence!'. The traditional large-scale forum is the main socio-political event of a five-year period. However, the current meeting is radically different from previous ones: it will outline guidelines for the development of our society and state for many years to come.

ages, professions and social statuses, all chosen by our citizens. Behind them are many thousands of Belarusian people and labour collectives. Previously, the main aims of the country's further development and a range of issues proposed by people at dialogue platforms were discussed in the Belarusian regions. A whole range of opinions that exist

in the Republic today on various aspects of our life will be presented at the forum.

Accordingly, the participants will discuss the main provisions for the programme of socio-economic development of Belarus for 2021-2025 and the direction of the socio-political development of the country.

Nature is an absolute priority

The protection of natural areas, development of the hydrometeorological service and a careful attitude to nature was the focus of attention last week at the Palace of Independence. Aleksandr Lukashenko was reported to by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Andrei Khudyk. The President stressed, "For me, nature is an absolute priority. Life is possible only if nature is there. The worse we treat nature, the worse our life is. Therefore, I have paid and will continue paying serious attention to environmental protection."



Taking care of our natural beauty

The country pays close attention to the issues surrounding environmental protection and respect for nature. It is largely due to this fact that, in the 2020 Environmental Performance Index, Belarus was among the top 50 countries (49th out of 180), ahead of all the other members of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Taking care of the environment is an important topic not only for the whole country, but also personally for the Head of State. That is why, as the Belarusian leader explained, such close attention is paid in the country

to the cleanliness, order and the landscaping of both large and small cities.

Andrei Khudyk, in turn, noted that the personal attitude of the Head of State towards nature and the constant monitoring of environmental protection facilitate the work of the department, especially when comparing the situation with neighbouring countries.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection is now responsible for such aspects as hydrometeorological activities, geology and subsoil exploration, waste management, and restoring order on

land. In terms of the use of secondary material resources, Belarus leads in the CIS and EAEU. By 2025, it is planned to reach 64 percent with the use of municipal waste. Nine out of ten reservoirs have an environmental status rating of 'good' or higher. The total area of specially protected nature reserves has now reached 9 percent of the country's total territory.

Accurate forecast

Another issue on the agenda was hydrometeorology. Aleksandr Lukashenko noted that work on this has improved and forecasts are now more accurate.

According to the Ministry, in recent years, the country has significantly improved its hydrometeorological activities. In particular, a complex of meteorological and aerological observations were put into operation in the military camp in Uruchye, new meteorological stations and complexes were created, some systems at the Republican Centre for Hydrometeorology, Control of Radioactive Contamination and Environmental Monitoring (Belhydromet) were modernised,

and now data updates are carried out in continuous ten-minute mode. Thanks to this, the accuracy of weather forecasts has significantly increased: for the next day, 98.2 percent, three- and six-day forecasts are now as much as 97.3 percent. At the same time, the validity of storm warnings for dangerous meteorological events is 100 percent.

Later, Andrei Khudyk noted that the validity of daily weather forecasts in Belarus is the best in the post-Soviet space.

A well protected border



Loyev border commandant's office. An order to protect the state border is actioned.

The President has approved the decision on the protection of the state border and outlined prospects for the border agency's activities

Aleksandr Lukashenko received the Chairman of the State Border Committee, Anatoly Lappo, with a report, to positively assess the organisation's work, "We must admit that the level of protection from our border guards and their responsibility exceeds any border force in the world. We understand that the border is a mirror, the face of any state. It's easy to see that there's no such protection of the state border anywhere else in the world. The protection of the state border should be maintained at this level."

A test for border staff

Last year was difficult for our border guards. Describing it, the Head of State said openly: that was a test, especially for people in uniform. In short, the test was passed.

There were many risks, such as illegal migration, drug trafficking, smuggling and countering terrorist aims. The territory of Belarus was still used for the transit of illegal migrants from disadvantaged regions to the EU.

Our border guards coped with all those threats successfully, as confirmed by the figures. The total number of violators of legislation on the state border

has more than halved. The border service agencies, in co-operation with other agencies, revealed and suppressed 12 drug trafficking channels. 45 individuals likely to be involved in extremist activities, were also detected.

"The fact is that here, in the west, we protect not only Belarus but also the borders of the Union State."

Therefore, we draw serious attention to the protection of the state border," the President emphasised.

Constant availability

The army and border troops have long felt that the country must be thoroughly

defended. The Head of State recalled that the state had to pay special attention to the issue of ensuring security last year,

"We've never resorted to military threats and have no plans to do so. As before, we want to be an island of security in Europe and a country which promotes only peaceful initiatives. This is our perspective. However, if there are those who do not agree with us, we'll have to answer them. History teaches us that we should always be ready to respond to any provocation."

Infrastructure development was another topic of discussion. It was also in fo-

cus of the talks relating to security. A new border outpost, Derazhichi, was created in the Loyev District, in addition to two manoeuvre groups in the Grodno border group and the Polotsk border guard. The staffing level of about 50 active border divisions has been increased. Border control offices in the Latvian and Ukrainian directions have also been strengthened.

This year, work will continue to improve the engineering and technical equipment at the borders, as well as to bring the locations of the units closer to them.

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Supreme factor of sovereignty and independence

By Dmitry Kryat, Dmitry Umpirovich, Varvara Morozova

The power of tradition

Diplomas and certificates are the result of a long and painstaking work. Highly qualified specialists in their fields have worked towards them for years or even decades, collecting and summarising material for research. The President addressed the scientists invited to the Palace of Independence, “At this time in Belarus, it is a tradition to sum up the results of the academic year and present certificates to doctors of sciences and professors. They are always smart, talented and hardworking representatives of the scientific and pedagogical community. However, those here are only a small share. I congratulate you on the next important milestone in your careers and a new status that will open more opportunities for you and the state.”

The Head of State emphasised that the country now needs new breakthroughs, in efficient and innovative technologies. “This is a great chance to prove one’s worth for those who are really interested in the development of science and the fate of Belarus,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said, adding that the level of scientific development predetermines the country’s role in the political map of the world, and its economic and defence capabilities.

The President noted, “We live in a world of rapidly changing trends, knowledge and technologies. Strategic forecasts and the accuracy of expert assessments are today more crucial than ever.

We have set big goals for the five-year period: to significantly increase GDP, scientific research intensi-



ty and reach the same level of innovative development as the leading countries in Eastern Europe.

We intend to make significant progress in such areas as innovative healthcare, biotechnologies, national electric transport and smart cities. However, without you, the people of science, without your active participation in these projects, it’s impossible to achieve.”

With mentors’ support

The ceremony was attended not only by those who had received doctoral and professor qualifications but also by scientists who had made a significant contribution to the success of their colleagues and scientific advisors, a distinctive feature of the event.

The Head of State stated, “In this pragmatic age, the work of a mentor focused on establishing a scientific school and training young scientists is invaluable.”

Aleksandr Lukashenko also highlighted the importance of succession in experience sharing with younger generations. “I am very pleased that our older generation is teaching young people... The changing of generations is

in progress. It is important that we pass on to young people the knowledge that we have accumulated over the years,” he said.

Obvious challenges

The ceremony of awarding certificates was formal, as usual. Afterwards, the President invited scientists to talk about pressing issues, as is also traditional. He proposed that they talk about their achievements and analyse their activities. A special request was voiced, which is actually a motto of modern Belarusian science: knowledge should be projected on today’s life and connected with topical tasks,



Not long ago, scientists celebrated their professional holiday, the Day of Belarusian Science. This traditional ceremony, in which the President awards doctoral and professorial certificates, occupies a special place in a series of events dedicated to the date. It’s an obvious sign of the state’s special attention to the scientific sphere. Such event has been recently held in the Palace of Independence. Addressing the scientists, Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised the importance of their work, “Science has long been not only an instrument of knowledge, but also a real productive force that determines progress in all spheres of human activity. Furthermore, it is the most important factor in strengthening our country’s independence and sovereignty.”

“Any science must be applied to reality, so that it benefits society.”

The events of the end of last year clearly showed that the training and education of young people should be taken more seriously. Teachers will play a major role in maintaining stability in the country. Young people differ; Aleksandr Lukashenko believes they think and perceive the world in their own way. The task of teachers is to teach young people to create, not destroy, including their own destinies, “I understand everything.

Everyone can have their own point of view, their own opinion. This opinion should be voiced. However, this should be done in the proper circumstances, without violating the law. Whatever the law is (and lawyers will support me), the law is the law. It must be followed.

If the law is bad, it must be changed in a dignified manner: not in street riots.”

With this in view, the Head of State asked teachers to work hard to protect young people from a bad future, “They will live when we pass away. Where and how

they will live depends now largely on us and teachers. This is not the case when university lecturers and students act as a separate force to disorganise society and destroy the system that we have been creating for a quarter of a century. This is very important.”

No way ahead without science

This is the conclusion of the Head of State; he summed up the conversation with this idea. He viewed the fact that this communication exists as extremely valuable and mutually enriching.

The President noted the importance of the applied nature of research of the scientists who were awarded diplomas and certificates. Support for science clearly remains among the state priorities.

“This is education. Therefore, I really appreciate this period of communication with you. I’m very grateful to you for this. Do be aware, as far as possible, we will support scientists. This is not because I’m such a philanthropist. No. This is because we’ll not advance in our modern world without science,” said Aleksandr Lukashenko, addressing those present.



Co-operation trending



Despite the difficulties related to the coronavirus pandemic, Belarus and Uzbekistan have increased their trade turnover

By Marta Astreiko

Leonid Marinich, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Uzbekistan, has been interviewed by the SB. Belarus Segodnya newspaper to comment on the results of 2020 co-operation with Uzbekistan — an important partner of our country in Central Asia — and promising areas of liaison.

— How did the pandemic affect co-operation with Uzbekistan in 2020?

— The coronavirus pandemic has introduced changes to our planned joint activities with Uzbekistan. At the same time, the

mutual desire of Belarus and Uzbekistan to consolidate the positions achieved in recent years has made it possible to achieve positive dynamics in trade and economic co-operation.

The Belarusian-Uzbek Agricultural Forum was held in February last year; it gathered over 800 participants and resulted in the conclusion of 30 contracts and agreements envisaging an opportunity to supply products from the Industry Ministry under leasing schemes and to implement joint projects in the agro-industrial complex.

Due to the pandemic, a number of bilateral events and meetings with Uzbek partners had to

be held in the format of video conferences — which did not affect their content and effectiveness.

— Has the presence of Belarusian goods in Uzbekistan increased?

— The range of Belarusian exports to Uzbekistan has significantly expanded to exceed 400 commodity items of export — including quarry equipment, bicycles, X-ray equipment, food, medicines and children’s toys.

At the end of the year, the volume of trade with Uzbekistan for the first time exceeded \$280m; five years ago (2015), it was just over \$65m. In 2020, Belarusian exports to Uzbekistan reached

\$237.5m — which is also the highest ever figure in mutual trade with Uzbekistan.

— Could you give examples of Belarusian products that have gained a foothold in the Uzbek market?

— BELAZ mining equipment has performed well at Uzbekistan’s mining enterprises. Belarusian meat, dairy and other food products — such as beef, cheeses, milk powder, butter, sugar, confectionery — are in demand in the Uzbek market.

In 2020, Belarus led in exports of beef to Uzbekistan: about \$42m of meat was sold there.

Belarus is also traditionally

present in Uzbekistan’s tractor equipment market.

— What new projects does Belarusian business plan to implement in Uzbekistan?

— Belarus plans to supply ready-made wooden houses to be placed in Uzbekistan’s tourist areas. There are prospects for increasing supplies of Belarusian furniture, wallpaper and other woodworking products to Uzbekistan.

A number of Belarusian pharmaceutical companies have established joint ventures with Uzbek partners in 2020, which will focus on the production of popular antibiotics, antiseptic and disinfectants, and medical equipment.

Plasma against virus

Unique medicine based on anti-COVID plasma has been developed by our experts. Preclinical trials have been launched.

The effectiveness of treatment with anti-COVID plasma in our country has increased to 70 percent and, to date, about 3,000 patients with severe coronavirus have received this blood component. Since the beginning of the pandemic, about 4,000 people have become plasma donors, after recovering from COVID. A 600-litre supply of anti-COVID-19 plasma has been established. However, our specialists have advanced even further, becoming among the first in the world to develop an anti-COVID immunoglobulin based on this plasma. This universal medicine has a low number of side effects and contraindications. The drug is currently undergoing preclinical trials. Fiodor Karpenko, the Director of the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre for Transfusiology and Medical Biotechnologies, tells us more about this and other innovations based on the use of anti-COVID-19 plasma.



By Olga Kosyakova

A universal method

It will soon be a full year since your Centre has been involved in the collection of plasma from donors who previously had COVID-19. How has this method proven itself in the treatment of coronavirus?

We've passed the long stretch. Sufficient experience has been accumulated regarding the requirements for donors, plasma quality and the procedure for its use. Anti-COVID plasma is included in the protocols of medical care and can be used as a routine remedy. It's available to any citizen of Belarus when prescribed. The method is used for treatment of patients with severe coronavirus infections in hospital. We now aim to introduce additional parameters of plasma quality. There are contraindications for the use of plasma of patients who have been ill. For example, it can't be transfused to patients with chronic heart failure or certain degrees of blood clotting. Therefore, our specialists have developed a drug based on the plasma of patients with coronavirus. This anti-COVID immunoglobulin is a versatile tool with a minimum number of side effects and contraindications. Immunoglobulins have been used in medicine for a long time, in particular to fight tick-borne encephalitis or staphylococcus. However, they were used infrequently in the case of bacterial or viral infections since effective antibiotics and other drugs are available. So far, there is no specific drug for COVID-19. The use of natural antibodies that have a virus-neutralising effect, obtained from blood plasma, is considered a fairly promising area.

What is the difference between anti-COVID plasma and anti-COVID immunoglobulin?

We obtain pure immunoglobulin by removing unnecessary albumin proteins, blood clotting factors and various electrolytes. This is a universal drug that can be used regardless of the patient's blood

type, a medicine with a low number of side effects and contraindications. The pilot drug is actually ready and we'll soon start preclinical studies. It is assumed that, in the future, it will be intravenously infused once a day.

As we know, anti-COVID immunoglobulin is an innovative drug that is also being developed by a Japanese

company. We need to move forward. Production of anti-COVID immunoglobulin also looks promising in terms of exports.

Better quality

What does the observation of anti-COVID plasma donors show? How is the number of antibodies changing over time?

COVID is a complex infection. There are different degrees of severity of the disease. Anti-COVID plasma donors require careful attention to their health. We mustn't harm them. They are examined thoroughly: a biochemical blood test, an electrocardiogram



Universal medicine against COVID-19

company. Russia is also working in this field. How did it happen that our country is among the innovators?

We have specialists and equipment. We've kept the Centre of Biotechnology and the 5th-6th technological structures. We produce drugs from blood plasma, for which the patient doesn't pay. We've also built a state system. The understanding of what is necessary and promising has come to us only in recent years. These things are quite unique but not all countries can afford them. In Russia, such production is partially preserved. In the Ukraine, last year, a private drug was launched. In Poland, even just the albumin isn't produced. The situation is the same in many other European countries.

It is good that, within the framework of the state system, we have an opportunity to combine everything: donors, plasma, pharmaceuticals and modern biotechnol-

and a coagulogram amongst other tests are performed. We evaluate the functioning of the liver and kidneys. On average, after COVID, patients donate plasma 3-5 times. The decrease in the antibody titre occurs naturally. Up to 6-8 months, immunoglobulins G have been kept. We have donors who suffered from COVID-19 last May, but they still have enough antibodies to be plasma donors. Some people have less antibody retention.

Despite the success in using anti-COVID plasma, some doctors reject this method...

Last year, we had over 3,000 consultations for anti-COVID plasma. The best option for its use is the period when the

disease progresses from moderate to severe. Then it has a good preventive and therapeutic effect. If systemic multiple organ failure has started, the use of plasma is already ineffective, although it has happened in some cases that it was possible to help at this stage.

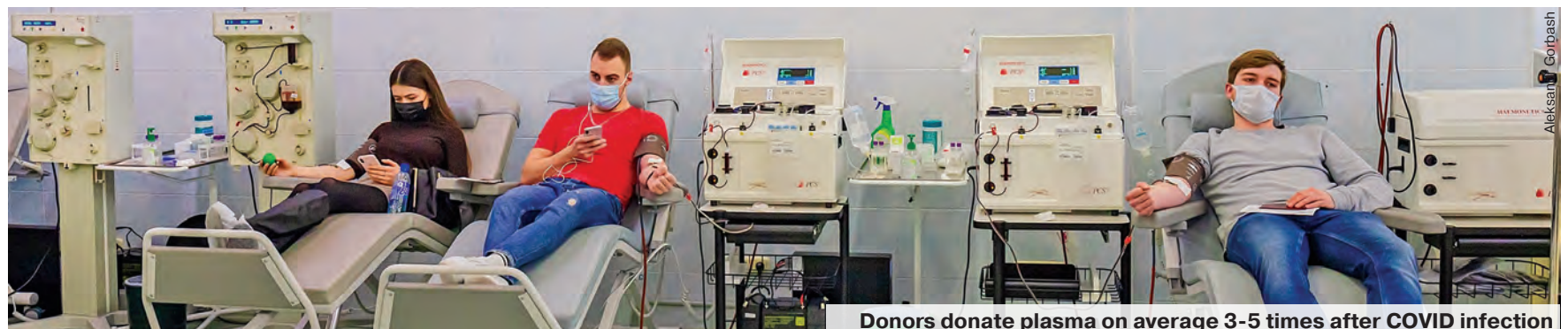
Plasma is a blood component. To make a transfusion, it's necessary to conduct a compatibility test and then perform a transfusion. There is a certain amount of inconvenience, some doctors probably don't use plasma for this reason. However, the websites of health departments worldwide are posting articles confirming its effectiveness. The proof class for this method is B-C. In Russia and China, it is used on severe patients and the plasma helps. In Belarus, the efficacy of anti-COVID plasma is around 60-70 percent. Doctors have learned how to use it, developed indications and contraindications. One recipient requires 2 to 10 doses of plasma at 24-hour intervals. To date, such assistance has already been provided to approximately 3,000 patients. Another question is whether it's possible to use anti-COVID plasma. Its quality also matters.

How is the issue of plasma quality solved in your institution?

Among the CIS countries, we'll be the first to receive American testing systems that will enable us to evaluate the virus neutralising activity. We'll be able to predict the effectiveness of plasma from a specific donor and ensure a high titre and antibody quality more effectively.

Where is anti-COVID plasma collected in our country now?

It's collected in all regional centres of transfusiology, at city clinics in Lida, Bobruisk and Borisov. The technology for plasma preparation is routine. It ensures automatic plasmapheresis; and later, the inactivation of plasma pathogens is conducted in case there is no time for quarantine and the blood component needs to be transfused immediately. Donor-blood is tested for all infections.



Donors donate plasma on average 3-5 times after COVID infection



Belarusian Railways and Russian Railways have signed an agreement on co-operation in rail traffic, the interchanging of cars, containers and cargos and use of railway infrastructure between interchange stations

The document was signed by the Head of Belarusian Railways, Vladimir Morozov, and the Director General, Chairman of the Board of Russian Railways, Oleg Belozero, during an online meeting. Both sides also took stock of railway related liaisons in 2020 and discussed joint activities for 2021.

As the Belarusian Railways' press service announced, the agreement has been signed to keep up to date with the international legislation in rail transportation, to ensure its enforcement in rail transportation between interchange stations of Belarusian Railways and Russian Railways, and to promote

Our common way

further digitisation of the shipping process.

Container transportation on the China-Europe-China route has been developing rapidly in line with the multilateral agreement between seven participants and the UTLC project (the joint project of railway operators of Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan aimed at organisation of container transportation in the EAEU). The countries launched new routes for container trains across the Belarusian-Polish border checkpoints and Russia's Kaliningrad Region, and through the seaports of the latter.

Oleg Belozero emphasised that Belarusian Railways is a reliable partner in the development of transportation on the China-Europe-China route. Last year, over 550,000 containers (TEU) were transported across Belarus, which was up by 60 percent compared to 2019.

On his part, Vladimir Morozov noted that 2020 was diffi-

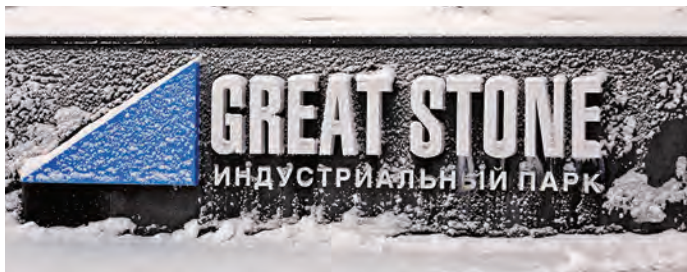
cult for freight businesses. Despite this, in 2021, Belarusian Railways will keep its transit transportation tariffs at the same level as 2020. He also stressed that it's important to intensify efforts to expand the network of routes for container trains, transfer to fully digital legally valid document management, and set up an exemplary 'digital transport corridor'.

Speaking about the international passenger traffic, Vladimir Morozov said that Belarusian Railways is ready to resume passenger traffic between Belarus and Russia.

It later became known that, on February 8th, Belarus and Russia resumed railway communication between their countries.



Technologies to help medicine



The issue was in focus during the company's top managers' visit to the Park. Both parties discussed the business environment in the Great Stone, benefits and advantages to its resident companies, and its development plans. Possi-

ble avenues of co-operation were also on the agenda of the negotiations. The company expressed its intent to establish a pharmaceutical factory in the Park to produce a wide range of medicines, including those for COVID-19.

American Ivy Global plans to launch a pharmaceutical plant in Chinese-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial Park

The representatives of Ivy Global also visited manufacturing sites at the Park that are ready for the fastest possible launch of the new project.

Earlier, the Industrial Park and Mariel Special Development Zone (the Republic of Cuba) signed a memorandum of understanding. The document aims to develop co-operation in attracting investment, strengthen relations between the busi-

ness communities of Belarus and Cuba, and provide mutual information support.

Mariel Special Development Zone is located 45km away from Havana and has 55 resident companies from 11 countries. Its priority areas are electronics, logistics, pharmaceuticals, the energy industry, and the financial and banking sectors.

In turn, the Chinese-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial

Park is home to 68 resident companies from 14 countries. Its priority development areas include mechanical engineering, electronics and telecommunications, biotechnologies, pharmaceuticals, new materials, logistics, digital commerce as well as large data storage and processing.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Aleksandr Lukashenko named most popular foreign president in Ukraine



This is evidenced by the data from the latest survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology. According to the survey, 36 percent of respondents said they trust Aleksandr Lukashenko while, for example, only 26.7 percent and 26.2 percent of those surveyed trust the presidents of the United States and France, Joseph Biden and Emmanuel Macron. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 79.8 percent, do not trust Russian President Vladimir Putin, but 14.4 percent responded that they trust him.

Interestingly, according to the trust rating, based on the survey data, Aleksandr Lukashenko has overtaken many Ukrainian politicians, including the current president of Ukraine. If the presidential elections in Ukraine were held in the near future, only 21.2 percent of citizens would vote for Volodymyr Zelensky.

BelNPP supplied the first billion kWh of the country's energy system

Power unit No. 1 at the Belarusian nuclear power plant has generated the first billion kWh of electricity since its inclusion in the united power system of the country. Currently, the first block continues the stage



of pilot operation, with systems and equipment being tested at the rated power level.

With the commissioning of two power units of the BelNPP into commercial operation, electricity generation will amount to about 18bn kWh per year. The station will provide about 40 percent of domestic electricity needs, enabling the replacement of about 4.5bn cubic metres of natural gas annually.

The Belarusian NPP with two VVER-1200 reactors, with a total capacity of 2,400MW, is being built according to the Russian AES-2006 project near Ostrovets, Grodno Region. The second power unit is to be commissioned in 2022.

Belarusian dental school ahead of foreign countries in innovative projects

At a press conference dedicated to International Dentist's Day, specialists noted that in the field of cellular technologies, Belarusian dentists are ahead of their colleagues from abroad.

"We have been working on this topic with the National Academy of Sciences for eight years," said the Rector of the Belarusian State Medical University, Sergei Rubnikovich.



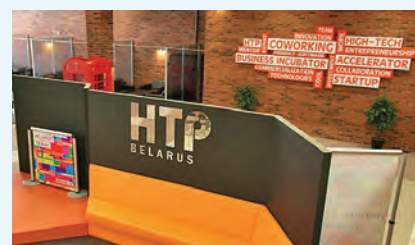
"We've created original methods of treatment, developed biological grafts, transplants of autologous mesenchymal stem cells for the treatment of periodontal diseases, gum recession and chronic periodontitis. These enable us to carry out organ-preserving operations in severe cases. We use genomic technologies to help patients with pre-tumor and neoplastic diseases of the oral mucosa."

In 2020, exports of HTP exceeded \$2.5bn

It provided over 20 percent of total exports of services in Belarus, as stated by Belarus' Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko at the *Digital Almaty 2021* Forum.

Belarus has long been home to the largest IT cluster in Eastern Europe: the Hi-Tech Park. The country has created a sufficient infrastructure reserve for digital transformation. The Republic occupies a leading position in Europe in terms of building fibre optic equipment.

"The result of this work is 32nd place in the rating of the International Telecommunication Union for the development of information and communication



technologies: the best indicator among the CIS states," said Mr. Golovchenko. "For Belarus, the priority of digital transformation has been determined both on the internal and external contours of state policy."

Exhibits return home



A storage for Torah scrolls in an 18th century synagogue. From Uzlyany synagogue.

By Natalia Tychko

Returning the lost

Until now, the events of the Great Patriotic War responded with grief for the dead and pain for the destroyed cities and villages. The terrible war affected virtually all spheres of life and, for example, destroyed and looted museums lost many of their exhibits.

For 70 years, the National Historical Museum has been piecing together its former collection, with most Belarusian relics discovered in Germany. “After the war, the items gradually returned to the country and a large batch arrived in 1947, in two train carriages,” recalls museum researcher Daria Selitskaya. “Until the Historical Museum was restored, the artefacts were returned to the Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War. Over the following decades, some of them were gradually relocated to the Historical Museum. For example, in 2019, we received 22 of them. Vladimir Levin, a researcher from Israel, helped us with the attribution [clarification of the author, place and time of creation of the work]. He deciphered

Over 100 artefacts lost in war time are now back in the National Historical Museum



Inventory numbers and museum stamps help identify the relics



A shoe for the Khalitsa ceremony when shoes are taken off the brother of the dead husband by a childless widow

all the texts and, thanks to this, we managed to learn the exact dates of some items. This was a great help, considering that not many people nowadays speak Hebrew.”

The collection includes around 100 exhibits, including pieces of decorative and applied art, household items and visual sources. Some of them have not been shown to the public for over 70 years. About 50 artefacts from the museum’s pre-war collection are now available to visitors.

A true detective story has unfolded in Belarus’ National Historical Museum. The exhibits lost during WWII are gradually being returned to their homeland. The museum’s inventory numbers and stamps help to identify the relics. Now there are over a hundred of these artefacts; all belonging to Jewish culture. It’s the first time the collection has been prepared as part of a single show: *The Second Birth. Reconstruction of the Jewish Collection of the Belarusian State Museum in the 1920s-1930s.*

Yury Mozolovsky



Tas, a pointer and a shoe

“We have a good collection of tas, Torah breast plates; these are being exhibited for the first time since the 1930s. We have 18 of them and all are completely different, including those made of high-quality silver. All the plates date from the late 18th — early 20th centuries. This is actually a very valuable and unique collection,” Ms. Selitskaya comments on the nuances of the show which also features aron kakhodesh, a sacred cabinet from the synagogue where the Torah scrolls were kept. “This object is only a 140x110cm fragment.”

Among the historical treasures is a silver pointer for reading the Torah. The scroll mustn’t be touched. A long hand-shaped tip with an outstretched index finger helped keep track of the letters. The exhibit dates back to 1817.

As is traditional, the exhibits were restored before the show. Some even required particularly meticulous work: i.e. a shoe for the khalitsa ceremony when shoes are taken off the brother of her dead husband by the childless widow. In this way the woman relieves him of the obligation to marry her and gets the opportunity to marry someone else. “The shoe is made of leather. Such an item doesn’t store well since the material dries up. It took five months for our restorer to bring back to a wonderful state. Of course, this was quite a long process, but it was worth it,” added Ms. Selitskaya.

TALKS TO CONTINUE

The museum boasts many artefacts from the pre-war collection, and many more. In 1920, the collection of items of Jewish culture of the Belarusian State Museum numbered about 2,000 items. A few years ago, the staff of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem discovered a Belarusian State Museum’s stamp on a Kabbalistic amulet. After careful study, it appeared that, in Jerusalem, there are ten items from the Belarusian pre-war collection. After the borders open, the museum staff will continue negotiations on the return of the items to the country.

From Minsk to Dubai and back

Belavia airline launches a regular direct flight on the route Minsk-Dubai-Minsk from February 19th

By Igor Platonov

Belavia will operate flights from the Belarusian capital to Dubai International Airport twice a week: on Thursdays and Fridays. Return flights from Dubai to Minsk National Airport will be made on Wednesdays and Fridays. A one-way ticket will cost upwards of 216 Euros (off-peak), including taxes and fees, and a round-trip ticket will cost upwards of 375 Euros (off-peak). Tickets are already available for sale.

The route will be served by Belavia’s new Embraer 195-E2. This aircraft is perfect for long-haul flights and can seat 125 passengers: 9 in business class and 116 in economy. Belavia added the new jet to its fleet last December, becoming the seventh airline to fly Embraer’s second-generation aircraft. Two more of these jets will be delivered in March and April.

“Opening up a new destination after a difficult year such as 2020 is an important

step for the airline. This is a breath of fresh air and gives us hope for the resumption of regular air services on all routes on the company’s route map in the near future. The possibility of launching regular flights to Dubai has been on the agenda for a long time, but this has only become possible now, thanks to the work of our team and our efforts to upgrade the fleet. We hope that Belarusian travel agencies will opt for our convenient direct flights. We also

expect these direct flights to promote inbound tourism and increase the number of tourists from the UAE,” Belavia’s Deputy Director General for Marketing and Foreign Economic Affairs, Igor Cherginets, said.

During the flight check-in and upon arrival in Dubai, passengers will be required to present a negative COVID-19 PCR test in English and Arabic, performed no later than 72 hours before the flight. Upon

arrival, passengers are also required to show medical insurance for the whole period of stay in the UAE, covering all the costs of COVID-19 treatment, and fill in a questionnaire about their health.

As from January 16th, Belarusian citizens are allowed to enter, leave, and transit through the UAE territory as well as stay in the UAE without a visa (for up to 90 days). The same terms apply to UAE citizens in the territory of Belarus.



Wonderful ideas

At a global level: scientists demonstrate their best innovations

An unmanned aircraft-target with a turbojet engine and a personal bactericidal LED air recirculator were among the two hundred best new developments presented at the National Academy of Sciences as part of the *Day of Belarusian Science 2021* exhibition

By Vera Arteaga

All facets of the future

Many of the innovations presented at the Academy of Sciences were shown for the first time. Among them were the 'Academic Electro' electric pickup, an unmanned aircraft-target with a turbojet engine by the Research and Production Centre of the NAS' Multifunctional Unmanned Complexes.

The Deputy Director for Scientific Work and deputy chief designer, Aleksandr Shchavlev, commented, "Our development aims to simulate air targets such as jet combat aircraft and cruise missiles. This is necessary for the education and training of the Air

delivery services. Air taxis for the transportation of passengers are also planned for the future. The third prospect envisages the replacement of traditional aviation with unmanned aerial vehicles."

Science guides practice

At the exhibition, it was possible to see firsthand that science gives great impetus to practice and innovation. For example, the Belarusian Steel Works, one of the few enterprises in the country with scientific organisation status, runs its own research centre and has technical management; their main function is to work on new innovations. Furthermore, as the company's Marketing Department Head, Oksana Dyubki-

money, we have mastered a new product which makes it possible to cut the necessary pieces of re-bar and, accordingly, reduce the waste volume," she explained.

The plant is especially proud of its production for the automobile industry's needs. Some enterprises represented at the exhibition, including Gomselmash, MAZ, BELAZ, use the Belarusian Steel Works' produce.

Ms. Dyubkina added that, recently, a long-range rolling shop was launched and the creation of new types of rolled products enabled the company to enter and gain a foothold on the global market. "We are co-operating with 118 countries. The plant was originally built with an eye to exportation. The launch of our new workshop made it possible to solve the process of import substitution and the issue of wire rod supplies. For example, the business of the holding, Rechitsa Hardware Plant, works with our wire rods; and accord-



Aleksey Stolyarov

them is a robotic dump truck with a lifting capacity of 36 tonnes and a 78250 remote-controlled loader.

"At present, BelAZ-made robotic dump trucks are operational in Siberia (Khakassia). Another robotic system is now being tested: at the Sitnitsky field in the Brest Region, by Granit enterprises. In addition, we are presenting a gas-fuelled dump truck with a lifting capacity of 45 tonnes. This vehicle now operates in Russia. The company also produces a diesel tram: a dump truck that moves along tram lines. Thanks to this, the diesel engine isn't needed and the vehicle moves

From space to ecology

The exhibition also featured many developments in various different directions, including space and ecology. It was not only the NAS' organisations which presented their innovations. There were also exhibits from the State Committee for Science and Technology and several departments and ministries: of education, industry, healthcare, communications and informatisation, and emergency situations. For example, the Forest Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus presented a biological method for protecting coniferous stands using a pheromone trap to attract and infect stem insect pests with



Aleksey Stolyarov



Force and Air Defence units."

The small white aircraft makes it possible to simulate means of air attack at a speed of up to 400 km/h. This is the first model of an unmanned aircraft with a jet engine designed by the establishment. Such developments are very popular worldwide and are used for new weapons.

Speaking about where these drones will be available, Mr. Shchavlev stated with confidence that there are great possibilities for their use, "The most obvious use is precision farming, which is clear to everyone. It also includes cartography, preparation of initial data and later the distribution of pesticides from the air. Another direction is the commercialisation of drones. In the next 10-15 years, we'll see drones being used in

na, asserted, the research centre is looking for new raw materials that will also improve technological processes at the business and reduce the final cost of their products.

"The plant, a monopolist in the field of metallurgy, operates in four areas, and construction is key. Some of the products presented at the exhibition are reinforcing materials which, due to unique and improved chemical composition, have increased the adhesion of concrete. The production of bay fittings is another serious step forward since modern construction is moving away from standard boxes to specially constructed houses. This means that different dimensions are required for iron reinforcement. To reduce the cost and save

ingly, we provide ourselves with raw materials, regardless of the fluctuations of the foreign market. We are saving and expanding jobs. After all, the enterprise is the heart of the city and one in every four residents of Zhlobin work here."

Symbolically, BelAZ and its unique mining equipment neighbour, the Belarusian Steel Works' stand at the exhibition. As German Gusakov, an engineer at the BelAZ Scientific and Technical Centre, admitted, those models were the prototypes of real vehicles which are now used successfully. Among



using electricity along the same principles as a tram.

Accordingly, the business-consumers of our equipment save a significant amount of money. Today, we are also demonstrating a promising 7558 series dump truck with an electromechanical transmission and a load capacity of 90 tonnes. Equipment with such a load capacity is one of the most popular choices around the world. We are proud to have made a vehicle like this for the first time. Based on the 90-tonne truck, we are also working on the development of a gas vehicle and an electric dump truck with rechargeable batteries. We hope to take part in a large-scale exhibition of mining equipment in Las Vegas this year to present our new products," Mr. Gusakov added.

an entomopathogenic drug. The field of application for this development is forestry and gardening.

Several developments were born as a result of joint work. For example, the NAS Centre for LED and Optoelectronic Technologies joined the NAS Institute of Physiology to develop a personal bactericidal LED air recirculator aimed to decontaminate the air inhaled by a person in real time with an efficiency of up to 99.9 percent. In turn, the Lykov Institute of Heat and Mass Transfer of the National Academy of Sciences and the Belarusian State University presented a multispectral thermograph for measuring high temperatures under conditions of uncertainty of radiation coefficients. It is designed to control the temperature fields of the surfaces of heated metals ranging from 1,200 to 2,500K.

INSIDE

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7



Living on the fringe



One in five people in the European Union, or more than 92.4 million of the bloc's population experienced poverty, said a United Nations report

This amounts to 21.1 percent of the population experiencing poverty. The observation has been made by Olivier De Schutter, a UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, who interviewed dozens of EU officials to make his assessment.

De Schutter warned that the EU institutions — which include the Commission, the European Central Bank and the Council of Ministers — must use the current

COVID crisis to 'reinvent themselves' to fight poverty. He also criticised EU policy-makers for being focussed on austerity and balanced budgets rather than lifting tens of millions of Europeans out of poverty.

Currently, 'EU member states are asked to be competitive and lean: they are pardoned for not being social enough', said the report. EU member states all too often 'compete with each other in very unhelpful ways', stifling social progress.

"They race to the bottom by lowering taxes, wages, and worker protections because they think that's how they can

attract investors and improve... competitiveness," said De Schutter.

He also slammed the EU's much vaunted *Green Deal*, a vast programme that is meant to ensure the EU becomes carbon neutral by 2050.

"The fight against poverty is the missing piece of this *Green Deal*" even though it was presented as a key component, he said. "But as long as this good intention is not translated into concrete actions, millions will continue to struggle for a decent standard of living in a society that leaves them behind."

A special day

Pope Francis announced the establishment of a World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly as a reminder of the important role they play as a link between generations

During his Angelus address, the Pope said the day will be celebrated every year on the fourth Sunday of July to coincide with the feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne, Jesus' grandparents. The first celebration of this day will be July 25th.

"It is important for grandparents to meet their grandchildren and for grandchildren to meet their grandparents because — as the prophet Joel says — grandparents, before their grandchildren, will dream and have great desires, and young people — taking strength from their grandparents — will go forward and prophesy," he said.

Highlighting the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the Pope said the recognition of Christ as the Messiah by the elderly Simeon and Anna is a reminder that 'the Holy Spirit still stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly today'.



"Their voice is precious because it sings the praises of God and safeguards the roots of peoples," he said. "They remind us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between generations, passing on the experience of life and faith to the young."

Protests continue

Demonstrations against lockdown measures continued in cities across Europe

Hundreds of protesters in Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands were detained by police after the economic and social toll of living with coronavirus restrictions prompted thousands of people to defy bans on public gatherings.

Although all rallies in the Austrian capital were cancelled, about 5,000 people gathered in Vienna's Maria Theresien Square for an unregistered corona 'walk'. As the mood became increasingly heated, police had to block routes, and several people were arrested.

In Brussels, police arrested scores of protesters at two banned demonstrations. Belgium has registered one of the highest death rates during the pandemic. However, restrictions closing bars

and restaurants since October along with a night-time curfew have brought infection and hospital cases down and many feel it's time to lift restrictions.

Belgium's neighbour, the Netherlands, was rocked by anti-curfew riots. In Amsterdam, a heavy police presence thwarted a mainly peaceful but unauthorised demonstration at Museum Square.

The closure of schools in Slovenian Zasavje and Obalno-kraška after only they had only opened for a week following a ten-week closure brought out protesters.

In Spain, a demonstration was held in the Balearic Islands, the participants of which opposed the extension of the ban on the operation of restaurants and bars.



Italy reopens, with no tourists

Italy relaxed coronavirus restrictions in most of its regions, allowing greater freedom to travel and the daytime reopening of bars, restaurants and museums

The Government announced an easing of restrictions. In Rome, which is in the 'yellow' region of Lazio, the Colosseum and other tourist landmarks such as the Pantheon and the Borghese Gallery reopened their doors.

The Vatican also eased coronavirus restrictions, allowing visitors back into the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel after being closed for 88 days — the longest closure since World War II. Museum Director Barbara Jatta said staff took advantage of the weeklong closure to rearrange some exhibit halls and do

maintenance work that would otherwise be difficult to complete with the nearly 7m visitors who normally flock to see Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and Raphael masterpieces each year.

"I think it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see it so empty," marvelled Julia Lammer, a visitor from Austria who said she had been in Rome for several weeks before being able to snap up a ticket online to see the Sistine Chapel.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies





Ivan Shamyakin

Atlas and his fans

Recently, the 100th anniversary of Ivan Shamyakin's birth was celebrated. His daughter Tatiana shares memories of the People's Writer of Belarus.

Ivan Shamyakin never believed in mysticism: he was a Komsomol and a party member. However, the belief in his own good fortune always lived inside him. He realised his talent in writing early. The writer survived the war, fought from Murmansk to Berlin (and was not even wounded!). He had a wonderful family, awards, titles and, most importantly, he left us a vast creative legacy: ordinary stories about ordinary people, which have become iconic for several generations of readers. The beating of his characters' hearts always surprisingly coincided with the rhythm of time: Shamyakin's literary talent very accurately reflected all the epoch's cataclysms.

The Doctor of Philology, Professor of the Department of Theoretical and Slavic Literary Studies at the Belarusian State University, Tatiana Shamyakina, tells us more about her childhood in the famous writer's family, her father's office and (unexpectedly!) of Yakub Kolas' *New Land* novel.

By Yuliana Leonovich

The family name

In my school years, I was convinced that our family was related to Dmitry Shemyaka, the Prince of Moscow and Galicia, a rival of Vasily II who established himself on the throne of Moscow in the 15th century. They were both grandsons of Dmitry Donskoy and had equal rights to the throne. In the end, Shemyaka was poisoned and, to discredit him, the *Shemyaka Court* novel was written. I looked for information about Shemyaka in books, while my father laughed at me. Sometime later, he admitted that one of his ancestors went to Russia to work in the 19th century, returning to his native village with the nickname 'Shemyaki': the word comes from 'sheyu myat' [to squash the neck]. I think our ancestors had remarkable physical strength and won in fistfights. The nickname was preserved and was gradually transformed into a family name. Initially, it was written Shemyakin but, in the late 1940s, when my father was publishing books, he changed one letter in the documents from 'i' into 'a'. He said that sounded more Belarusian.

The first love

Events happen to everyone which have such a strong influence on them that they often determine a person's character and even their fate. In science, this phenomenon is known as impression. There may be several impressions throughout your life.

For example, my father called the reading of Yakub Kolas' *New Land* in his forest house fateful. On becoming a writer, he got to know Kolas and often visited him. My father always viewed Kolas as his mentor in life and work. I remember him reading me *New Land* in the evening; I was then six. I wrote my thesis on this work and even now I'm engaged in Yakub Kolas' creativity.

Another fateful event in Shamyakin's life occurred when he was twelve. His family then lived in the forest, near the village of Teryukha, Gomel Region. Ivan studied at the Teryukha school where he met his future wife; but of course, he didn't know that at the time. A few years later, they

recognised each other in a movie theatre in Gomel. They fell in love and my father described that deep feeling in his *Unique Spring* novel, the first book of the *Disturbing Happiness* pentalogy (an autobiographical and widely appreciated work). In May 1940, my parents got married and lived together for 58 years.



Ivan Shamyakin, his daughter Tanya and wife Maria

The family

Our mother was the guardian angel of the family and the home. My father dedicated his *Glory to Mary* novel to her. We witnessed his full devotion in the first days of my mother's illness. Thanks to his care, she lived six months longer than the doctors had predicted...

My father was very proud of his children and grandchildren. My older sister Lina was an expert in French and German, while my brother Sasha helped in the designing of the Minsk metro. The youngest sister, Olesya, is a Candidate of Philological Sciences. She keeps our father's archive and helped prepare an academic collection of Ivan Shamyakin's works in 23 volumes. I was my father's favourite from early childhood: he often took me to Moscow, to museums and theatres. This played a role in my fate: for many years, I've been lecturing on the history of the world and Russian history at the university.

Friends

In Moscow, my father often visited famous people and, since the war, he was a friend to the Director of the Institute of Latin America, Viktor Volsky. He knew the classics from Soviet literature, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, well and was on friendly terms with Mikhail Alekseev, Aleksandr Prokofiev, Anatoly Sofronov, as well as several Ukrainian writ-

ers, in particular, Stepan Oleynik, a satirical poet upon whose story Leonid Gaidai made his *Dog Barbos and the Unusual Cross* movie. Of the Russian directors, he was friends with Samson Samsonov, the director of the film based on my father's story, *The Merchant and the Poet*, with Natalia Andreichenko as the title role.

Relationships

There was no Shamyakin writing tradition in our family. There were no taboos for children and especially, grandchildren, even when he was working. He didn't hold anyone back or order them to calm down. He was moved by children. He treated all living things the same way. For example, my father forbade the cutting down of old fruit trees, although they had long since died and shaded the garden at our summer cottage.

Furthermore, my father, who repeatedly declared his atheism, always acted according to his morals in real life. This was especially evident in those months when my mother was terminally ill. He, with weak legs after being operated on several times, went to see her in the hospital every day. He supported her in



Ivan Shamyakin at the poetry festival

His character

Of course, my father changed over the course of his life. In his youth, Shamyakin was joyful, fond of humour and made endless jokes with his friend Andrei Makayonok. However, in reality he was quite shy, the effect of a barrage of insults and rudeness. In his old age, my father was touchingly humble: he became more patient with people, forgiving everything and everyone. He was far from being self-conceited or arrogant. My father helped everyone, and often those who, perhaps, should not have been helped... For example, at the end of his life, he was very happy that, during the years of his heading the Union of Writers, he helped about two hundred writers and their children receive their own flats. However, it was not easy to visit all those offices with so many requests...



Actor Nikolai Yeremenko Sr., Ivan Shamyakin and playwright Andrei Makayenok. 1981

every possible way to the end, demonstrating the depth of feeling that characterises the best of his characters. In general, the attitude of my father to my mother was always very touching, tender and romantic. When I recall my parents' family life, I can say for sure that their relationship, out of probably a million marriages, was very happy and exceptionally serene.



Tatiana Shamyakina

The house

My father felt happy first and foremost in his wife's homeland: in the village of Teryukha where he built a house for us using money received as part of the Stalin Prize. Here is where all his novels were written. We went there every summer, even after the Chernobyl disaster. Throughout his life, my father raised us to respect the villagers and ordinary workers. The memories of his childhood and creative time in Teryukha were kept by him as some of his most fond recollections.

I also consider the 15 years we lived in the so-called 'house of writers' at 36 Karl Marks Street as the happiest time. This district was somehow similar to my father's office which was also very cosy. My father organised all the rooms in the houses where we lived for himself. He was also remarkably neat, meticulous even, and always cleaned his office himself.

There was a special spirit in our writers' house. For example, when we came home from school and there was no-one at home, we could easily go to dinner with our neighbours. The adults were happy to tell us stories, read books and take us on outings. They also took care of us as well: for example, when my brother Sasha kept pigeons in the attic, they escaped, he got out to chase them, right there on the roof. In turn he was chased by Yanka Bryl who, instead of our father who was always busy with his work, sent careless

Sasha off the roof before he injured himself... My father's relationships with our neighbours were exceptionally friendly. He didn't like disagreeing at all. The neighbours were also great: among them were Yan Skrgan, Yanka Bryl, Ivan Melezh, Ivan Naumenko and Piotr Glebka.

Photos courtesy of Tatiana Shamyakina

Miracles in stained glass

By Anna Naumova

From lawyers to artists

Cute saucers with angels, and plates like white canvases, on which lush daisies and timid cornflowers delight the eye ... Furthermore, there are works based on Marc Chagall's paintings; can we go anywhere without his lovers *Over the City*?! Anya and Olya manage to fit this and much more onto their small ceramic plates. With great success! They have been doing stained glass painting for ten years now. Anna tells us, "Now we are competent using French and Italian paint, as well as various brushes and contours... However, we started out with pure enthusiasm and imagination, and achieved everything with our own brains, because back then, there were no masterclasses live or on the Internet. Even today, the artists who constantly work with this technique can be counted on one hand, especially in Vitebsk."

It's interesting that in the university diplomas of the twins there is a completely 'earthly' specialty: law. The Vitebsk women graduated from the prestigious schools but didn't work in the profession. Instead, they plunged headlong into the creative world, acting in a couple of Russian sitcoms. Two lovely young women at once were very appealing, so at the casting, Anya and Olya were of course noticed. The fact that the girls had a modelling school behind them was also an advantage. Filming a series is from bygone days. They said, "Yes, it was an interesting, unusual experience, but acting is now in the past. Now we express ourselves not in words and playing for the audience, but in colours. Where do we get our inspiration? It's in every moment: a blossoming flower, sunny weather, the architecture of Vitebsk. In the city of Chagall and Malevich, art is probably in the air. How could we not get inspired?"

Both sisters have had special creative talent from their childhood. At school, they went to art classes, and having entered the university, they didn't aban-

TO THE POINT

Painting on glass can be an unusual, refined element in an interior. Olga and Anna would like to return to such large-scale projects. There are plenty of examples from their practice. The artists once painted ceramic tiles of golden onyx and the design order turned out to be a successful experiment.



Anton Stepanishchev

Handmade souvenirs from Olga and Anna Ivanova, from Vitebsk, conquer domestic and foreign connoisseurs

Recently, an exhibition-fair was held in the Vitebsk Regional Museum of Local Lore, with local artists, designers and artisans presenting their creativity, including the twin sisters Anna and Olga Ivanova. Lawyers by profession, but creative people, they surprise with miracles depicted in stained glass windows.

don their hobby. They didn't miss their extracurricular classes from the art and graphics faculty where they became acquainted with the intricacies of painting and graphics. They thought seriously about drawing straight after graduation. The girls remember their first job with a smile. A relative had been looking for a stained glass artist for a long time, dreaming about an unusual painted alcove in the kitchen. Finally, she despaired and asked the twins, "You like to create things, why don't you try?" With



a large flower arrangement half a metre by half a metre, the sisters began to immerse themselves in the subject. Olga picks up the conversation, "It turned out to be quite easy and quick, and there was plenty of special paint left. Having become interested in a new direction in creativity, we created two dozen more paintings on glass within a month."

Later on, the sisters decided not to keep their knowledge to themselves, but to bring their subtle beauty to the people. The city above the Dvina River came

alive with the festive atmosphere of the *Slavianski Bazaar*. Olya and Anya were welcomed with open arms on Suvorov Street, which annually became the 'Vitebsk Arbat'. Their handmade items enjoyed wide popularity and they had their first serious success. The women admit, "We've officially become artisans and are enjoying the positive effects. Over time, we began to liaise with art galleries and formed our own client base. Now we can hardly believe that everything could have turned

out differently, we've become so attached to what we do, we get nothing but pleasure from it."

Against the backdrop of skyscrapers, in embroidered shirts

Paintings on glass using stained glass paints don't require firing, but they won't work without spark and imagination. The creative process can be quite long. Olga Ivanova shares her views with us, "You sit in the studio, cross your fingers in anticipation of Muse, and then you understand you have to start painting. In this case, one standard-size plate can take a week. And sometimes, after giving yourself a rest, you come back refreshed and several stained glass windows come out from under your fingers in just a couple of days. My strong point is floral motifs while Anya enjoys themed paintings with views of our native Vitebsk, e.g., with the Town Hall or the Resurrection Church. However, our tastes are very similar. In life and work we are in tandem, so we aren't afraid of criticism from each other. It's more about constructive advice on how to do well and even improve."

BY THE WAY

How profitable is the plate business? The craftswomen admit that due to the quarantine, tourist sales have noticeably dropped. Nevertheless, the two sisters remain optimistic. Their works are willingly accepted by galleries in Vitebsk and Minsk, and recently the artists managed to establish contact with the State Gift Fund. Simple, at first glance, their plates have perspective and potential. Such designer souvenirs are an excellent unusual gift for guests in Belarus. The highlight is the emphasis on modern motifs and the desire to show the country here and now through the prism of colours.

Curiously, it's not an easy task to distinguish the works of the craftswomen from the outside. But the girls themselves, even if they are engaged in identical styles, can easily do it.

"The fact is that we are mirror twins," Anya explains patiently. "Literally a reflection of each other: Olga is left-handed, and I'm right-handed, so our author's manner is similar, but there are nuances that are noticeable only to us."

However, buyers are unlikely to focus on this, as they are happy to take pictures with both artists at once during the *Slavianski Bazaar*. The girls themselves have long become accustomed to such a trick, as well as to the fact that sometimes they amaze others, without saying a word, by answering a question in unison. This happened when I asked them about their favourite works.

"It's the same," they unanimously responded. "Is it possible to single out one, if each for us, is the best. Let's just say that it's not easy to part with a souvenir that you have created. But then you smile, easily letting go of greedy thoughts, because your work will bring joy to someone."

Handmade souvenirs from Olga and Anna Ivanova conquer not only domestic but also foreign connoisseurs. Stained glass plates from Vitebsk managed to travel around the world: to neighbouring Russia and Germany, the Baltic States and the USA. One of the works most remembered by the authors just crossed the ocean and became a wedding present for Belarusians in America. At the request of the customer, the plate depicts the bride and groom in our national embroidered shirts against a backdrop of skyscrapers.

Flying high

A new name in Belarusian freestyle skiing

Recently, the most elite of freestyle skiers competed in Raubichi at the routine stage at the World Cup while a similar European start is scheduled and one of its favourites is considered to be the Belarusian, Makar Mitrofanov. Furthermore, he could make the podium a week earlier than expected.

By Dmitry Komashko

— For me, the performance at the World Cup in Raubichi was a surprise. Seriously, this is my best career result! Only my second time in the grand final, as well as the first this season, at the World Cup in January. We performed at Yaroslavl and at that time it was a complete shock! Perhaps that is why in the final I couldn't produce anything worthwhile. I was performing an easy jump, so the chances of getting to the medal podium were initially limited. However, I am getting used to it. After Yaroslavl, we jumped in Moscow, where I finished seventh. It was also a very good result: one step away from the grand final. In Raubichi, for the first time in the grand final, I performed a triple somersault which is difficult, but I managed to do it well, landing on my feet as planned. After that, to be honest, there were thoughts that it might be possible to jump into the top three. It would be really cool. But in the end I was pushed aside: the guys there are older and have much more experience.

— How did the team perceive your success? It turns out that a serious competitor has appeared for the leaders...

— They congratulated me and I felt they're happy for me. It turns out that I've become a kind of continuer of traditions. There are also other young athletes, Slava Timertsev and Igor Drebekov. We are the generation that came to follow the leaders or to help them out. But, as far as rivalry at the World Cup stages goes, then my youth doesn't both-

er me at all. On the contrary, it motivates me. I would like to become better and to prove that I am as good as the current favourites. I even have an idea to try to set some kind of record, e.g., to become the youngest freestyle skier among the winners of the World Cup.

— Who is the youngest winner of the World Cup now?

— Christopher Lillis from the USA, who won at 17. Furthermore, he did it here, in Raubichi. I'm also seventeen, so it will be difficult to outstrip him. But, firstly, it is still possible to become a medallist, and secondly, there is a world championship.

— What about the youngest winners of the Games?

— In my opinion, the greatest historical achievement there belongs to Dmitry Dashchinsky, who won his first medal, bronze in Nagano, at the age of 20. So, I still have a chance to get ahead of him, of course only if I get to the Olympics.

According to the results of the home stage of the World Cup, 17-year-old freestyler Makar Mitrofanov was the best of the men's national team of Belarus. He finished fourth, one step away from the first 'adult' medal of his career, thus creating a promising impression on the competition. While Makar himself is still surprised he managed to rise to such great heights this season, the coaches are convinced that very soon he will be able to really spread his wings.

— After such a spectacular season, there are chances to get to the Olympics. Are you ready for some extra attention?

— I don't think that my results at the World Cup stages can be proportionally transferred to the Olympics or even to the World Cup. Competitions there are of a slightly different level, and, frankly speaking, my repertoire is still new. I only recently started triple jumping on the slopes. At the same time, there are not as many places at the Games: only four from our country.

— Does competition affect relationships?

— Formally, yes, we are rivals who, nevertheless, live together. We are constantly talking to each other. This is an interesting situation. It seems like every man for himself but at the same time, we are a team, and all battles must be left on the springboard.

— The World Championship has already been postponed twice this season. As a result, it will be held in Kazakhstan, in the mountains, and at an unusual time. Should you be expecting unpredictable results?

— I performed in Kazakhstan last year, but the World Championship will be held in a different place, where the stages of the Mogul World Cup are usually held. Acrobatics have never been easy there, so everyone will have to adapt. After the World Championship there will also be a World Cup stage, but I don't even know if I'll get there yet. There are many guys in the team, but I have a tight schedule of performances. After the stage of the World Cup in Raubichi there will be more stages of the Euro-

pean Cup, and I'll also perform there. After all, these are exactly the type of competitions that were originally designed for young athletes, like me.

— You remembered Dmitry Dashchinsky: did he work with you in the youth team?

— Yes, but we aren't his first team. He's already managed to bring Pavel Dik and Dima Mazurkevich into the national team. Under his leadership, they won medals at the junior championships. Now Dashchinsky continues to work with them and with us in the main squad. He is always with us during the World Cup stages and his support is always felt. He is an inspiration for the entire younger generation of freestylers. I am sure that almost every one of us reviewed the videos of Dmitry and Aleksei Grishin and were inspired by their victories. Dashchinsky himself teaches us to properly tune in before the start. To some extent, my psychological stability is his doing. Furthermore, I would like to mention Mikhail Kurlovich, who now also works a lot with us, as well as my first personal trainer, Dmitry Glushakov. However, he doesn't go to training camps with the national team as he works at the Republican Centre of Olympic Training with the junior team, he helps me a lot.

— You're from Minsk, aren't you?

— Yes, my mother took me to skiing. I saw the performances of our team at the Sochi Olympics on TV and asked to try it. Before that I really wanted to play football, but somehow it didn't work out. As a result, at the age of 12, I started ski acrobatics.

— It's a bit late for this kind of sport...

— It's a bit late, but from 3 to 10 years old I did lots of artistic gymnastics, there were even some wins and medals at city competitions. Then I practiced athletics for two years. I ran. In general, I had a good foundation. I simply stopped enjoying gymnastics. Probably because I grew up, and some interests in my life changed. As a result, I've been doing freestyle for the last five years now.



Makar Mitrofanov

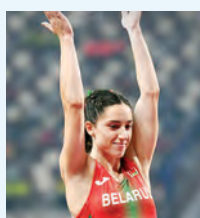


SPORT

ARENA

● Returning with awards

Belarusian athletes, Irina Zhuk, Vitaly Zhuk and Anastasia Mironchik-Ivanova, won three silver medals at tournaments in France, Estonia and Germany.



Irina Zhuk

Pole vaulter Irina Zhuk performed in Rouen, France, at the Perche Elite Tour Rouen 2021 event. The athlete, who recently set a national record (4m 66cm), this time achieved 4m 62cm at her first try. Only the British athlete Holly Bradshaw was able to beat the Belarusian.

Vitaly Zhuk claimed silver at the all-around tournament held as part of the

World Athletics Indoor Tour in Tallinn, Estonia. For the first time in his career, he scored 6,010 points, becoming the fifth all-around athlete in the history of Belarus, who outstripped the record holder's score of 6,000 points.

Long jumper Anastasia Mironchik-Ivanova went to Germany for the PSD Bank Indoor Meeting Dortmund. There, on her second attempt, she achieved 6m 56cm. The best result by a Belarusian this season guaranteed her a silver medal.



Vitaly Zhuk

● Successful start in new team

A representative of the new Belarusian cycling team BELAZ, Roman Tishkov, won the Grand Prix Gazipaşa in Turkey. He covered a distance of 157.6km in 3 hours 48 minutes and 58 seconds, beating the competitors on his final push. Second place went to Mamyр Stash of Russia followed by Alan Banaszek of Poland. Earlier, at the Alania Grand Prix, Belarusian racer Yevgeny Sobol won the first points of the new season, taking 10th place.

The BELAZ cycling club was established at the



Roman Tishkov

beginning of this year. One of its leaders is famous Belarusian cyclist Vasily Kiriyenko, who also leads the national team of Belarus.

● Injury thwarted plans

Belarusian tennis player Victoria Azarenko (ranked 13th in the world rankings) dropped out of the competition at the Champions Trophy tournament due to injury. The ex-number one seed was expected to face Anett Kontaveit of Estonia (23) in the quarterfinals but was unable to make the court due to a back injury.

In the first round of these competitions, Victoria Azarenko defeated a representative of Kazakhstan — Yulia Putintseva (28), 6:4, 1:6, 11:9.



Photo of the week

Sculptor Valentin Borzdy creates ice sculpture — 'The Traveller' — at the *World of Crystals Festival of Ice Sculptures* in the Central Botanical Garden

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



February 11th is International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in order to achieve full and equal access for women and girls to science, as well as to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

On February 12th, 1961, the first Soviet automatic interplanetary station, Venera-1, was launched into orbit by the Molniya carrier rocket in the USSR. It was the first spacecraft designed for planetary exploration. A parabolic antenna was used to transmit telemetry information for the first time.



On February 13th, 1956, the flag of the USSR was raised above the first Soviet Antarctic station-observatory Mirny on the sixth continent. At present, a synoptic group is working at the year-round Mirny station, with various scientific studies being carried out, mainly of a climatological and geophysical nature.



February 13th is World Radio Day, proclaimed at the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference (2011). On February 13th, 1946, UN Radio went on air for the first time, the station located at the United Nations headquarters. Radio is powerful and inexpensive, and even in the digital age, it continues to be a recognised means of communication for the largest audience in the world.



On February 14th, 2001, an official delegation from the English city of Nottingham, Minsk's twin-city, arrived in the Belarusian capital. The guests visited the Belarusian State University, the Belarusian State Polytechnic Academy, and healthcare and education institutions while also getting to know the memorable and historical places of Minsk.

On February 14th, Valentine's Day is celebrated in many countries of the world. A Christian martyr, Valentine, who suffered for his faith was canonised by the Catholic Church. In 496, Pope Gelasius I declared February 14th as Valentine's Day. In Western Europe, Valentine's Day has been widely celebrated



since the 13th century, and in the United States since 1777. On this day, it is customary to write love notes and send Valentine's cards.

On February 15th, 1706, during the Northern War, Peter the Great settled in Minsk, in the house of Sapega on Yurievskaya Street (in the area of the present Oktyabrskaya Square) and stayed here until March 13th, 1706. The house was destroyed during the bombing of Minsk by German planes in June 1941.

On February 15th, 1931, Georgy Poplavsky was born, a Belarusian graphic artist, Honoured Art Worker of Belarus (1978), People's Artist of Belarus (1997), academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (1995) and the Russian Academy of Arts (1991). He worked in various mediums in graphics novels, alongside easel painting. He is the author of the cycles *Memory*, *Arctic: White Continent*, *Braslav Area*, *The Land of the Lake*. He illustrated the books by Y. Kolas, Y. Kupala, A. Adamovich, V. Bykov, V. Korotkevich, *The Word about Igor's Regiment*. He was awarded the M. Grekov Gold Medal (1990). Furthermore, he was a laureate of the Lenin Komsomol Prize of Belarus (1970), the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International



Understanding (1973), and the State Prize of Belarus (2002). He died in 2017.



February 15th is International Soldier's Remembrance Day in the Republic of Belarus. On this day in 1989, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was completed. The war in Afghanistan lasted for a long time. 14,000 Soviet soldiers died in a foreign country and 6,000 died later from wounds and diseases. Today, in Minsk alone, more than 4,000 veterans of the war in Afghanistan live, as well as 97 families, the parents and widows of the dead soldiers. For them this is a Memorial Day.

On February 17th, 1986, the Luninets Regional Museum of Local Lore was opened. The exhibition is based on collections of archaeology, ethnography, history of technology, money, documents, photographs, printed publications, sphragistics, and phaleristics. The most interesting items from the museum's collection include the axes from the Stone Age and a mammoth tooth.

