



At least 150,000 hectares: scientists map Belarus' primeval forests



How is the production of Belarusian musical instruments doing now



INTERNATIONAL

The Minsk Times

Socio-political Weekly

PUBLISHED SINCE FEBRUARY 2003 ● NO. 33 (847) ● THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2020 ● WWW.SB.BY



Third-grade pupils of Minsk's newly launched school No. 52 with the primary school teacher, Tatiana Osos

Hello school

The three summer months have slipped away and the 1st of September — Knowledge Day — has come. The opening bells rang for pupils and joyful meetings for first-grade boys and girls were solemnly and cheerfully held around Belarus — indicating that a new school year has begun. The 1st of September is the beginning of a new stage of life. It's now when the path to boundless knowledge and incredible discoveries starts. This year, about 1.5 million children, including 114,000 first-grade pupils, started classes in more than 3,000 schools and gymnasiums countrywide.



9 771991 297007 2 0033

Industry is basis for the economy



The Head of State noted that this year has brought many challenges. Many markets closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, while the flow of goods and capital practically stopped — especially regarding items produced in Belarus. A difficult political situation in the country has now added to the issues.

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, attempts to stir up tensions come from both inside and outside, “This pressure impacts the domestic economic situation. I would like to reiterate that no one will give us any gratuitous assistance. We have to rely on our strengths and capabilities.”

Exports are the key

Aleksandr Lukashenko tackled the export related issues, saying, “Sales of products are our key task. A foreign currency flow, the Rouble exchange rate and other issues depend on these. We cannot sit and wait for people to come and line up to buy these products. We need to be more active. We are delivering measures aimed at the support of exports. Is there anything more we could do to help?”

According to the President, almost all the country’s industries showed growth in January-July, and stocks of finished products are gradually decreasing. These are positive

signs, he said. At the same time, Aleksandr Lukashenko asked about the companies’ forecasts for the end of 2020. “Next year is the start of a new five-year plan. No matter what it takes, we need to work hard and show growth at the finish line,” he noted.

Speaking about exports, Industry Minister Piotr Parkhomchik told reporters about how the largest industrial giants are working today. In particular, the Minsk Tractor Works demonstrates good results in shipments to foreign markets. The company has achieved special success in Africa, where about 1,000 different tractors will be delivered by late 2020. The Belarusian Automobile Plant is currently completing a major contract with India where 77 heavy dump trucks with a capacity of 136 tonnes will be delivered; 56 vehicles have already been shipped. BelAZ has won this order from American Caterpillar. In addition, a large contract is being prepared for 200 MAZ buses: these are to go to Kiev this autumn. As for cargo transport, the company has ambitious plans to sell its machinery to Africa.

Diplomatic onslaught

The most acute topics of modern days were also in focus. The President stressed that

a diplomatic onslaught has been launched against Belarus at the highest level.

“We are witnessing a certain stage of a hybrid war on Belarus. What else can it be called? Mass media and the information landscape have been involved in this fight, a war of conflicting sides. A diplomatic onslaught on us has started at the highest level,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

He noted that Belarus’ ‘not well-established neighbours’ do not only openly declare their position on the repeat election in the country, but also begin to interfere in its domestic affairs and to pressurise the state. The Head of State added that the country now has to spend huge amounts of money to stabilise the situation on its western borders where some military units have been dispatched.

“You see these statements saying that if Belarus falls apart, the Grodno Region will become part of Poland. They are already saying it openly, they are dreaming about it. They will not succeed, for sure,” Aleksandr Lukashenko stated.

A dialogue must be constructive

The President noted that he is ready for dialogue, including on the revision of the Constitution. He will engage in this dialogue,

The President held a meeting with members of the Government and heads of the country’s industrial giants. The stable operation of these plants is a cornerstone of the Belarusian economy. Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed, “Everyone understands perfectly well that efficient operation of manufacturing companies is crucial for the national budget and the ability of the state to finance social programmes.”

primarily, with labour collectives and student groups. “If people want dialogue, let it be. Student groups are those with whom I am ready to have a conversation. The same of labour collectives (I have said this before). Please, choose your representatives and we will maintain a dialogue. Everyone wants a new political system. I do not mind, let us start from the Constitution; put forward your proposals and we will

country, villagers, doctors and teachers — rather than dissolute youngsters ‘who are rambling about the streets and shouting that they want a dialogue’. “In fact, they do not want any such thing. None of the officials will negotiate with the street. This is my clear view and statement on the matter and on those with whom we can discuss. If the opposition has some sensible people who



At the Stadler Minsk workshop

write a new Constitution, the fundamental law of any country. Everything should be based on it,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

The President stressed that dialogue is possible with representatives of all labour collectives and student groups who are the future elite of our

see their country free and independent, go ahead, speak your mind, but not on the street. There will be no dialogue in Belarus under such pressure,” said Aleksandr Lukashenko.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by



Culture of the peaceful atom



The International Atomic Energy Agency has officially granted the status of ‘newcomer country’ to Belarus since it is currently establishing the culture of a nuclear industry for the first time in its history. With this in view, the sphere is under the special attention of numerous foreign missions. However, Russian colleagues remain the main mentors of our specialists; the former act as experts in conducting supervisory activities. According to Gosatomnadzor (Nuclear and Radiation Safety Department of the Belarusian Emergencies Ministry) top managers, there are no emergency situations that can affect the provision of nuclear safety.

By Kristina Glushko

The first power unit of the Belarusian nuclear power plant has been loaded with nuclear fuel and physical start-up operations are currently underway. According to Vigen Marukhyan — who heads Gosatomnadzor’s Nuclear Safety Regulation Department, 163 cassettes were loaded into the reactor unit. “However, at the same time, there are still certain procedures in terms of compaction, they do not occur in

an hour or a day. Meanwhile, the second phase of physical start-up is planned as soon as the operating organisation (the Belarusian nuclear power plant) sends us notification that it is ready to start hydraulic tests,” he explains.

According to the official, there are several phases of physical start-up: the first is the loading of nuclear fuel, the second — ‘cold’ tests (hydraulic tests are conducted under the temperature of the reactor plant of up to 130 degrees above Celsius), and the

third — ‘hot’ tests with the temperature rising up to 180 degrees.

“Security is a priority for us, so special emphasis is placed on it,” Mr. Marukhyan adds. “I can assert that, as European and Chinese experts note, our project is the most advanced and new; in terms of security, it is the most intense in comparison with other similar projects that exist today. We even have a policy on managing the aging of the nuclear power plant: it is clear that scientific and technical progress cannot be stopped and new

solutions are constantly appearing in the world, so we must meet any requirements. The process of enhancing safety is permanent and continuous. For example, our project already includes requirements that will prevent what happened at the Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant. The level of security is constantly increasing.”

According to the expert, world practice allocates about 10 years for the construction and commissioning of one power unit, and Belarus is still ahead of

schedule. The power start-up of the first power unit to be included in the country’s power system is planned in Q4 2020, while the commissioning of the second power unit is planned for 2022.

As the Energy Ministry has announced, commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power plant will provide about a third of the country’s domestic electricity needs, replace 4.5bn cubic metres of natural gas per year and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 7m tonnes annually.

Regional development is a priority

Fresh decisions

The major destination of the President's trip was Savushkin-Orsha JSC — a modernised milk-processing facility established in October 2018. In December 2018, it merged with Orshansky Gorlachik and



the total sum of investments since then has exceeded \$41m.

The company specialises in the production of fresh cheeses and, in autumn, new mozzarella production lines will be installed — to be launched on January 2021.

The President noted that the company now operates with a higher profitability than some state-owned dairy plants. However, he stressed that there should be no difference between state-owned enterprises and private ones. All must work effectively, Aleksandr Lukashenko believes.

Orsha example

The President stressed that a lot has been done for Orsha's development noting, "Its development model was expected to become an example for other similar cities (Borisov, Molodechno, Baranovichi and others). We are following the path we started in Orsha."

As for the city itself, it has really flourished: new businesses have been opened, a modern hospital has been built, and a kindergarten launched. It's also

necessary to build a polyclinic in the Zadneprovye-3 residential district where 8,000 live. A company employee asked the President to control the process and Aleksandr Lukashenko replied, "If it is planned, then we will do it!" As scheduled, the polyclinic should be completed by 2023.

Vaccine against COVID

In his talk to those gathered together, Aleksandr Lukashenko also touched on the topic of coronavirus. The President warned: we need to be careful since COVID has not gone and the second wave is already being seen in Europe.

Hopes are pinned on a vaccine, which Belarus will get first — as agreed by Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin. The Russian President suggested this solution. "I believe him for a reason: he tested this vaccine on his family. That's why we agreed that they would join us. They've passed through the stages very seriously and many well-known oligarchs have already been vaccinated," Aleksandr Lukashenko explained.

There was no need to worry, the President believes. He is convinced that the vaccine produced in Russia is of a good quality. He also added, "Of course, we will not only try the Russian vaccine. We'll also try others'. However, we cannot but admit: Russians, Chinese and Americans are leading the way in the creation and production of vaccines."

Response to sanctions

Journalists also had an opportunity to talk to the President. They were interested in how he personally reacts to the threats made by western states to impose sanctions against Be-

The Orsha District can be viewed as an example for other Belarusian areas: the preferences it offers enable public and private companies to develop. In addition, the Vitebsk Region has created an effective system in the field of agricultural production. The President came to evaluate the agro-industrial complex of the region, visiting a new dairy plant: Savushkin-Orsha. It recently launched supplies of its products. Aleksandr Lukashenko learnt about the full cheese production cycle and talked to personnel, stating that — when solving any issues of enterprises — he is primarily concerned with employees and their salaries. "I care about people. We should not leave people aside," he stressed.

larus and him personally. The Belarusian President's position is tough. "We are going to show them what sanctions are," he commented. "They (Poles and Lithuanians) transited our territory to trade with China and Russia. Now they will fly either through the Baltic Sea or the Black Sea to trade with Russia and so on. In terms of the embargoed products (food products embargoed by Russia) I suggest they forget about them. They have an exaggerated sense of self-worth and have forgotten what Belarus is. They think they can threaten us with tanks, missiles... We will see who will be left scared."

The Head of State added that he had instructed the Government to work out measures to redirect all trade flows from Lithuanian ports to others. "We will see how they will manage after that. The transit of our cargo flows generates 30 percent of the Lithuanian budget. What else do they

need? They think too much of themselves. We will show them their place," he said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko called upon people to calm down and think what consequences the problems in Belarus may bring to Europe. "You understand. You've heard the statement of our neighbour and my good friend [Russian President Vladimir Putin]. His words do not mean that Russians want to protect Belarus. We can do it ourselves. The Russian President and I understand what could happen," the Head of State added.

According to him, in this case Belarus could turn into a theatre of hostilities 'where they will work out their issues'. "Belarus is a springboard, as usual, to Russia. Just not in the way Hitler sent his Army Group Centre to Moscow. Technology is different. They need to remove this power and install another, which will appeal to a foreign state to send in troops and provide support. Is this legal? It is!

That is why they are having several of the so-called candidates over there: these are speaking on the Internet about how we will live," the President said.

As regards the military threat, Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that it does exist. The President spoke of 18 American F-16 aircraft stationed near Berlin. They have been redeployed from Berlin, closer to Belarus. "I do not know what they carry, maybe nuclear weapons. I am proceeding from the worst-case scenario. I had to respond. Moreover, why did they deploy NATO detachments close to our borders? These training exercises are near our border. What should I have done? I also deployed units near our borders, placing half of the army in operational readiness. That's not cheap," he explained.

As regards the agreements with Vladimir Putin, Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed, "While protecting Belarus, the President of Russia is primarily protecting Russia."



Lukashenko and Putin agreed to meet in person

A telephone conversation between President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko and President of Russia Vladimir Putin took place on August 30th. The heads of state discussed the most pressing issues, including bilateral co-operation, as well as the situation in Belarus. Separately, Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin also discussed the situation around our country. The presidents agreed to meet in person in the near future, during Aleksandr Lukashenko's visit to Moscow.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

A new Gosstandart testing laboratory to start operating in the country by the end of the year

By Vladislav Sychevich

Supplies of materials for equipment for the new electromagnetic compatibility testing laboratory for vehicles and industrial equipment have

recently begun to be delivered. The building has already been erected at the Belarusian State Institute of Standardisation and Certification of Gosstandart (State Committee for Standardisation). The project



is being implemented as part of a state investment programme. The assembly and installation of materials for the equipment began in late August, while the delivery of modern measuring equipment is planned in the near future. The laboratory is to open by the end of 2020.

The size of the laboratory is impressive at 23x15 metres. This makes it possible to, for example, have space for an 18-metre electric bus. Modern high-precision equipment will be installed to conduct tests in accordance with current trends in technical regulation in the field of electromagnetic compatibility. Currently, there is no such a platform in the country.

The radio-anechoic chamber is designed for testing the electromagnetic compatibility of vehicles and industrial equipment. Simply put, the levels of radiated radio interference and resistance to radio interference will be determined. Such tests are necessary to confirm that these products meet the mandatory requirements of the Eurasian Economic Union for safety, as well as European directives and standards when exported.

As noted in the press service of Gosstandart, the new laboratory will be in demand by the domestic industry for the production of various technological equipment and automotive equipment, and especially electric vehicles.

This is one of the priority and export-oriented areas of economic development both when confirming compliance with the requirements of the markets of the EAEU and the European Union, and when developing and mastering new models of competitive products.

Experts assert that conducting tests directly in the country will significantly save funds and logistics-related time costs for enterprises that are currently conducting quite expensive tests abroad. On the other hand, the state-of-the-art testing facility being created, which is unique not only for the country, but also for the CIS, and highly qualified personnel will help develop exports of services for these tests.



Park in an innovative period

The China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park is one of the most ambitious projects of modern-day Belarus. A decade ago, when it was only an idea, there was nothing but forest here. Meanwhile, the first factories are already up and running, while the Park is testing unmanned vehicles and 5G. Investors benefit from the most favourable business terms the region has known.

The Head of the Administration of the China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park, Aleksandr Yaroshenko, recalls when it all began. The idea to set up a platform to facilitate investment between Belarus and China was put forward in 2010. The ground breaking ceremony took place in 2014; a year later, the first resident companies got their registration certificates. The official birthday of the Great Stone is May 12th, 2015, when the Park welcomed the leaders of Belarus and China.

The first building was erected by China Merchants Group, a shareholder of the Industrial Park.

The facility was named after the village of Great Stone where it was built. The first stage of the project provided for building on an area of 850 hectares. This part of the project was completed one year ahead of schedule. "Over four years, we built all the infrastructure facilities, about \$260m was invested. Roads, communications — everything was planned as for a big city. Thus, we created prerequisites for the arrival of investors," Mr. Yaroshenko said.

According to the official, the efforts resulted in the registration of 63 resident companies from 15 countries. "The European Union, the USA, Russia, Switzerland, Israel, the United Arab Emirates... The geography is extensive, which suggests that the project has grown international and that it welcomes investors from any country. 22 out of 63 resident companies have already built factories here and begun to manufacture products, provide services and conduct R&D projects. The Park has become recognisable. It has become an exemplary project of the *Belt and Road* initiative," he noted.

The Park is unique since it has its own special economic zone. Many benefits are provided only in this area. Investors are attracted by tax and customs preferences and relaxed requirements during the construction and production phase.

The World's Free and Economic Zones Federation (FEMOZA) recognised Great Stone as the world's fastest growing special economic zone in 2019. *Asiamoney* magazine named the Park the best project of the *Belt and Road* initiative in Central and Eastern Europe. In turn, *The Financial Times* included it in two categories of its FDI Free Zones of the Year 2019 rankings.

From the very beginning, Great Stone focused on high technology and innovation. "The priority for us was to identify the industries that will shape the



BELTA

Great Stone is not merely an industrial park but a city of the future

future of our economy. The projects that have already been implemented confirm that the chosen lines of business, namely electronics, new materials, engineering, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, hold great promise," Mr. Yaroshenko noted.

The first to launch production here was Chengdu Xinzhu Silk Road Development. It makes supercapacitors for electric buses. MAZ-Weichai manufactures Euro-5 and Euro-6 engines for MAZ. The plant to manufacture transmissions is on track to be completed this year. This product has not been manufactured in Belarus before. Zoomlion Corporation is also completing the project to build a construction equipment plant. US resident IPG Photonics Corporation produces laser equipment.

The country's largest trade and exhibition centre spanning 22,000 square metres is already up and running here and the Park is finishing the construction of an innovative R&D commercialisation centre. It is being built using China's technical and financial assistance. The building in the form of an infinity sign will become a springboard for start-ups.

Mr. Yaroshenko admits that the pandemic has affected work, although new resident companies were still being registered during this time. Four out of



Aleksandr Kulevsky

seven new companies are related to the healthcare sector. For example, a resident company from the Czech Republic will produce innovative prosthetic implants, which are in demand on the market. Another 17 promising projects are in the pipeline.

The first unmanned vehicle has been tested on the site with the prototype being produced in China. The Great Stone is eager to produce unmanned and electric transport. A free charging station for electric cars has already been installed.

According to Mr. Yaroshenko, the Park has created a barrier-free administrative environment. The 'One Station' service has been developed here, and all administrative procedures can be carried out on site. "Things that work only

here include the 'One Station' service, the right of ownership of land, a non-regression clause [for 10 years]," he said.

The China-Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park is located in the direct vicinity of Minsk and the Moscow-Berlin transport corridor. It borders on Minsk National Airport and is the largest project of the *Belt and Road* initiative in Belarus. China, proposer of the *Silk Road* idea, is not the only party interested in logistic capabilities. Europe's largest river port, the Port of Duisburg, became a shareholder of SZAO Industrial Park Development Company in 2018.

This port, China Merchants Group, Belarusian Railways and the Swiss

company Hupac Intermodal SA are creating a consortium to build an international multimodal terminal. It will handle cargo transported between China and Europe. The construction of the freight terminal will begin in 2020. It will be one of the key projects of the Park. The Belarusian side has already started building a railway line to connect the terminal with

the country's railway network.

Mr. Yaroshenko notes, "The Head of State has decided in favour of building a fast railway line between Minsk and the national airport across the Park. It will give our investors new opportunities in terms of workforce, since people will commute to their new jobs primarily from Minsk." A fast tram service may become available in the future, too.

Admittedly, not all the Park employees need to commute from other cities. Some of them already live in the Park's first residential building with panoramic windows. The house offers 156 finished apartments with furniture and household appliances. There is a shop, a first-aid post and a post office on the first floor of the building.

Nearly \$584m has already been invested in the development of manufacturing enterprises and the infrastructure of the Park. It may become home to more than 130,000 people in the future. Instead of a mere industrial park it will be a city of the future, the administration believes. The first residential complex of the smart, environmentally friendly, and comfortable city is planned to be built by 2025.

Based on materials of belta.by

Major support

The largest technical support centre of the Belarusian heavy truck manufacturer BelAZ (the sixth in Russia) has been opened in the Belovo District, Kemerovo Region



The Kuzbass Industry Minister — Leonid Starosvet, the Belarusian Industry Minister — Piotr Parkhomchik, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Russia — Vladimir Semashko — took part in the opening ceremony.

Piotr Parkhomchik said, “The centre has united all the competences in the area of technical support, maintenance and repairs of BelAZ mining vehicles, which will be realised in line with documents and blueprints developed by the Belarusian company. It will guarantee exceedingly high quality of all kinds of repairs.”

BelAZ’s official representative in the region — BelAZ-24 company — started building the centre in 2018. As the company’s press service has announced, in terms of its size and equipment, the centre is the largest in BelAZ’s aftersales service chain. Apart from that, the project was part of the federal programme on developing single-industry cities in Russia.

The centre occupies about 15,000 square metres and comprises three buildings dedicated to administration, logistics and production used for repairing components and aggregates of quarry dump trucks. The infrastructure is thought out to the smallest detail: for example, the

entrance for transport will be along a new technological road, so that the load on public roads will not increase.

The centre is unique since it boasts a full set of cutting-edge specialised equipment for repairing and maintenance of Belarusian haul trucks with a capacity of 30-450 tonnes, for repairing hydraulic systems and electric drives.

The administrative wing comprises offices for engineers and technicians and a chemical lab as well as auxiliary infrastructure. It also houses classrooms where specialists will be trained, career enhancement courses offered and where students of local educational institu-

tions will be offered practical classes.

Experts believe the centre will be able to reach its designed output capacity in 2022.

Its convenient location near the Kemerovo Region’s key motorway that connects the two largest cities in the region — Kemerovo and Novokuznetsk — makes it accessible for customers that use BelAZ mining vehicles.

“The construction and commissioning of the technical support centre is an important stage in the history of the long-term partnership between Kuzbass and the Belarusian Automobile Works,” emphasised the company.



A clear business plan

Gomelglass mastering markets of Hungary and Romania

General Director Piotr Maksimchikov stressed that Gomelglass is export oriented, selling abroad over 80 percent of its produce. “The major consumers are the neighbouring countries: Ukraine, Poland, Russia and the Baltic States. We are also mastering new areas: i.e. Hungary and Romania. The company’s foreign trade balance is positive: our exports are several times higher than imports,” he said.

“The situation observed globally in connection with the pandemic has unfortunately affected us but the timely measures taken and the state assistance to support businesses have enabled us to get out of this situation with dignity. We have not only returned some of our customers, but even increased sales,” the official added. During the pandemic, the facilities and the staff have been retained and a stock of products has been prepared. “When our neighbouring countries lifted restrictions on quarantine measures, we immediately offered our products,” said Mr. Maksimchikov.

The company is fully booked today. “The most important task now is to improve the quality and maximise production volumes,” he added.



A workshop for polished glass at Gomelglass

Thanks to the modernisation carried out in recent years, innovative products have been launched. “The coated glass line is modern and the development of production of new types of products was completed last year. We are talking about multifunctional glass and sunscreens. In addition, since 2016, we have been producing energy-saving glass here and have reached maximum

performance. All the glass produced is sold out. The lines operate around the clock,” Gennady Astapovich — who heads the special glass section of the industrial processing shop — added.

According to the General Director, industrial processing products — energy-saving, multifunctional, sunscreen, laminated and tempered glass — account for 25 percent of the total produc-

tion volume; five years ago, the figure was 5 percent. “The company intends to increase and broaden the processing of glass. For this purpose, business plans are currently being worked on, and sources of funding sought. I think, in the future, it will have a positive impact on production,” said Mr. Maksimchikov.

Based on materials of belta.by

NEWS IN BRIEF

Belarus, Moldova discussing possibility of scrapping roaming charges

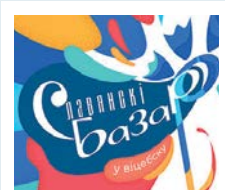
The Ambassador of Belarus to Moldova, Anatoly Kalinin and Moldova’s Economy and Infrastructure Minister, Sergiu Railan, discussed the possibility of reducing or scrapping roaming charges between the countries during a meeting in Chisinau. They discussed preparations for a session of the intergovernmental commission on trade and economic co-operation — scheduled to take place in Minsk in October. Joint projects in the manufacturing sector and transport were also in focus. The officials noted that it is important to consider Belarus’ proposals on the joint construction of roads in Moldova.



New format of Slavianski Bazaar likely to be preserved

Conceptual approaches to holding the 30th edition of the Slavianski Bazaar Festival of Arts were discussed at a session of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee. It’s proposed to hold it over four days as this year; as a result, the festival programme will be richer and all possible resources will be involved. It’s been decided to use indoor venues for the festival as well as to develop the open-air format that appeals to the youth.

The festival’s advertising campaign in Belarus and abroad is planned and a promotional tour ahead of the anniversary edition of the festival is to be held around the world.



Belarusian Encyclopaedia Publishing House releases a book about the history of Minsk

The book by historian and professional guide, Ivan Satsukevich, *Minsk: From Ruins to Prosperity* tells us about the directions of urban development in sovereign Belarus. Thanks to exclusive post-war photos and videos from the Belarusian State Archives of Films, Photographs and Sound Recordings, Minsk’s transformation after the war is described. In addition, with the help of QR codes and a smartphone, readers will be able to see video footage of the post-war capital. Each photo is supported by the author’s fascinating comments.



Nature and us

At least 150,000 hectares: scientists map Belarus' primeval forests

When speaking of 'primeval forest', some might think of the Amazon, its impenetrable jungles, tall trees and creepers... However, scientists have their own criteria by which a particular forest can be called 'primitive'. Belarus also has forests such as these and our MT reporter has talked to scientists to learn how many of them there are in the country and how the map that is being compiled will help the environment.



Scientists believe that there are very few primeval forests left in Polesie: no more than 4 percent of the total area

By Inna Gorbatenko

Green memories

Scientists of the V.F. Kuprevich Experimental Botany Institute at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus liaise with the Frankfurt Zoological Society and the APB-BirdLife Belarus public organisation in investigating primeval forests. As the head of the laboratory of productivity and sustainability of vegetation communities, Maksim Yarmokhin, says, 'abandoned' forests are being searched for in Polesie right now.

"A primeval forest is one which has not been changed by human activity. Its main feature is the presence of old trees — both alive and dead. The age of the trees varies from 1-2 to 200-300 years old and even more. Moreover, the trees grow in several layers and there are no traces of felling," he explains.

According to the criterion, primeval forests include massifs where at least 10 percent of trees are older than 120 years and all vegetation is natural.

In Belarus, there is a system of specially protected natural territories where certain sections of ecosystems — such as forests and swamps — are being preserved in their original form. One of the criteria is the presence of rare species of animals and plants, as well as unique vegetation groups.

"Previously, we had no common approaches to classifying the territory as specially protected. In one area, a pine forest older than 80 years is

protected and, in another, it's trees older than 120. Therefore, a need to unify these norms has become obvious. It will put things right, defining what is considered rare in Belarus," Mr. Yarmokhin notes.

Where no man has ever set foot

Within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, some countries are trying to preserve forest sec-

tions that have either never been affected by economic activity or where human activity is almost invisible. These are the most valuable since they are the standard of what a forest should look like without intervention. In addition, they are places with a concentration of endangered plants and animals. Our country has joined the general trend to carefully study potential 'primeval' candidates.

"The forests of the Amazon and taiga in Komi and Karelia are a striking example of primeval territories. Do we have such forests?" asks Maksim, adding, "Pine and spruce, for example, can grow up to 400 years, oak — even longer. The age of felling is 80 years, so it is not easy to find relict trees. There are three likely primeval forests in the country: pine forests in upper and transitional swamps, black alder forests in lowland and

transitional swamps and those on floodplains. We focused our main search on wetlands. In many forest-swamp ecosystems, trees are low — 5-7 metres — but their age is 200-250 years. From an economic point of view, they are not interesting, so they have been preserved. Most of them are located in the Vitebsk Region and Polesie. According to our preliminary data, the area of primeval forests in the Belarusian part of Polesie may range from 10 to 100,000 hectares."

Similar work has been completed in the EU and as it's been discovered that, to visit the depths of the primeval forest, it is not necessary to go to Siberia. The last green islands of almost untouched forests are preserved in Finland, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. Based on the monitoring of the state of ancient forests conducted by an international group, the world's first map of the primeval forests of Europe was created. The authors of the study estimated that, in 32 European countries, 262 sites with primeval forests with a total area of at least 1.5m hectares have been preserved. More than half of these relict massifs are under the threat of extinction.

What the map shows

In comparison with the EU countries, Belarus is not in the last place in terms of areas where primeval forests have been preserved — despite the fact that relict forests suffered from massive drainage in the mid-20th century.

"The most valuable ecosystem of primeval forests is the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve. It was founded almost 100 years ago, and, for almost all this time, there was no economic activity on its territory," says Mr. Yarmokhin. "One of the most interesting woodlands is located on the Stary Zhaden National Reserve: it's a swamp located between the Prip'yatsky National Park and the Olmansky Bog Biosphere Reserve. Vir-

gin ecosystems have been preserved on the hard-to-reach 'islands', among the swamps; here, the age of trees exceeds 300 years. Of the floodplain forests, the most well-preserved are those located in the Prip'yatsky National Park."

To calculate the area of primeval forests, scientists use plantation plans which reflect the age and species of trees for each site. Researchers exclude sections located along roads, canals, and residential localities. The remaining areas are compared with historical maps, then researchers are sent on expeditions and the age of trees are determined on the spot — using a special age drill which helps calculate the number of annual rings for a particular tree. After analysing the data, the borders of the primeval forests are mapped.

According to scientists, there are very few primeval forests left in Polesie: no more than 4 percent of the total area. In this regard, for example, on the territory of 8 forestry enterprises and the Prip'yatsky National Park, these can cover about 380 square kilometres but exact figures will be known next year.

"The main goal of the project is to create a basis for optimising the system of specially protected natural territories," Mr. Yarmokhin explains. "We want to prepare a detailed map of primeval forests — to be used when planning economic activities, so as not to affect these ecosystems. Such forests are a major accumulator of carbon dioxide and are also more often inhabited by endangered species of plants and animals."

In total, Belarus is expected to distinguish at least 150,000 hectares of such forests: not only in specially protected natural areas but also outside them where additional protection measures will need to be introduced. During the first two field seasons, about 50,000 hectares have already been put under protection. This year, scientists are working mainly in the southern regions of the country.



The tree is about 200 years old

Fortress of faith

The icon carries miraculous power in the ancient Synkovichi church

For six centuries, the Synkovichi Church of St. Michael the Archangel has been considered one of the most mysterious churches in Belarus, being filled with legends. It's located in a remote corner of the Zelva District, ten kilometres from Slonim. Thousands of pilgrims and tourists from different countries have found their way here.

By Yelena Semenova

It's hard to believe that, even 30 years ago, this pearl of architecture, a source of faith, was used as a collective farm grain warehouse. In 1991, the shrine was returned to the Orthodox church. The revival of the temple, which is recognised as an architectural monument of the late 15th-early 16th centuries, was crowned with the copy of the ancient icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa). The news that the Synkovichi image of the Mother of God was miraculous began to be passed from mouth to mouth.

Both pilgrim and tourist routes have already reached the village of Synkovichi, at the entrance to which an unusual ancient church rises majestically in the field. Some are attracted by the unusual architecture of a defensive place of worship, others by the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa). Whichever way people get here, they return surprised and spiritually enriched. The place where people have prayed for centuries is very special.

It's not known for certain when the unique church was built. According to the most common version, its construction is associated with the name of the Grand Duke of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vytautas. In 1382, he was captured by Duke Jagailo and imprisoned in Krevo Castle. He managed to escape imprisonment and found refuge in his estate, not far from Slonim, as the chronicle says, 'in a dilapidated castle or fortress'. Hiding here from his enemies, the nobleman found support from local residents.



Synkovichi Church of St. Michael the Archangel

After coming to power, Vytautas did not forget about the village where he'd found salvation and ordered the construction of a unique fortress church on the ruins, in which residents could pray and also hide from enemies.

It's known from the church chronicle that 25 years later, in 1407, together with his wife and neighbours, the Grand Duke arrived at the consecration of the revived temple-fortress.

Six centuries have passed and different winds have tested the shrine for strength. In Soviet times, they covered over its unique paintings. But even after the resumption of liturgical life in Synkovichi, the desolate building barely resembled a church for many years. The beginning of the church revival is associated with the works of Archpriest Arseny Ananko, who was appointed rector in 2004.

People called the Synkovichi Church of St. Michael the Archangel the most mysterious temple in Belarus. Until now, historians have argued about its age and origin. The help that believers receive here through prayers, however, is well-known. Each such case is recorded in the church chronicle, and there are hundreds of them already.

A collapsed roof, no floor, oil paint on the walls and not a single icon — this is how the temple appeared before Father Arseny took over.

"Did you think then that it would be possible to restore it?" I ask Father Arseny.

"I believed that this ancient temple should have a different fate," says the rector.

The fate of the St. Michael's Church in Synkovichi did indeed change, though not overnight. The small parish was unable to lift it from the ruins, and the priest 'rang all the bells', calling for help from both the patrons and the state. They heard him.

Thanks to the support from the state, the roof was replaced, the walls were restored and asphalt was laid to the church from the highway. With donations from people, the site was put in order, fences restored and a parking lot built near the church, with additional church buildings built and the Holy Spring being ennobled.

It's noteworthy that the bells on the ancient temple rang in 2005 for the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a miraculous way.

The rector recalls how it happened, "Two families came to the church one day. I told them about my dream of bells. To my surprise, the guests said they wanted to donate them to the church, and after a few months, the bell tower was restored."

The major shrine of the church — the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa) — also appeared in an unusual way. Father Arseny says that, over time, the circle of parishioners began to widen, and visiting people appeared at the service in the ancient church. Many shared their pain: some were struggling against cancer, others were suffering from infertility. There were no icons painted at that time in the church, so a paper image of the Most Holy Theotokos had been placed there.

The original Miraculous Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa) is kept in the Great Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos. There are many copies of the ancient image in the

world, which are also considered miraculous. The Mother of God also heard the sincere prayers of the modest Synkovichi image. People who have faced a miracle in life, as a token of gratitude to the Queen of Heaven, donated funds for which the Synkovichi icon of the Most Holy Theotokos was subsequently painted. Over time, rumours spread about this copy as a miraculous image in its own right.

Two years later, another 'Panagia Pantanassa' icon — painted on Mount Athos and donated by one of the patrons — was delivered to the ancient church. Before getting to the Synkovichi church, the image was carried through all the monasteries of the Holy Mountain, attached to all the shrines on the way and prayers were offered.

The rumour that the icons in the ancient temple had acquired miraculous power spread from mouth to mouth. One grateful parishioner left their gold jewellery in the church as a token of thanks to the Most Holy Theotokos for healing, and soon the image was decorated with them.

No one could have thought that this tradition, coming from the soul of a grateful person, would become a temptation for others. Two years ago, on Easter week, the church was robbed. The thieves got in at night, cut off the window bars, turned off the burglar alarms, broke the glass on the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Theotokos, and took away all the jewellery donated by people. The icon itself was not touched and, over time, the parishioners made a golden robe for the Most Holy Theotokos.

"A person is given in line with his faith, the Queen of Heaven helps us through the icon. It is joyful that the Mother of God chose our church to perform her miracles," says the rector.

Father Arseny says that the testimonies of the miracles of the Synkovichi icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa) formed the basis of a whole book, which will soon be published.



The miraculous icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia Pantanassa) — painted in the 17th century — is kept in the cathedral church in the Great Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos in Greece.

In the 20th century, the famous Athonite Elder, Joseph the Hesychast, blessed his disciples with the image of Pantanassa. He also brought the ancient legend about this icon to our contemporaries. Once a strange person approached the image and began to mutter something indistinct. At that moment, the face of the Mother of God shone with a wondrous light, and an invisible force threw the young man to the floor. In fear, he ran out of the temple and with tears confessed to the elders that he was leading a sinful life, practicing witchcraft and magic. Having repented of his deeds, the young man remained on Athos. This was the first manifestation of the miraculous power of the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Soon they began to notice that the icon has a beneficial effect on patients with various tumours, including malignant ones. From the image, they began to make precise 'copies' for other monasteries. Gradually, the icon became known throughout the world as a healer of cancer. The day of celebration of the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos is August 31st.



Return to the sea

The MSC Grandiosa is one of the first cruise ships to be returning to the sea since the industry's global shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic

The MSC Grandiosa, the first big cruise ship to resume operations since the suspension of worldwide cruising due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has completed its first 7-day cruise. The cruise industry is closely watching the Grandiosa as it plots a course for recovery in the battered industry.

Reportedly, the MSC Grandiosa voyage went successfully without any virus outbreaks onboard. It's a major achievement. Smaller cruise lines across Europe have restarted operations, with varying results, mostly poor.

MSC Cruises hasn't confirmed exact numbers, but the Grandiosa was operating at about 60 percent of its 6,300 passenger capacity. Fewer passengers on board meant no crowds and an easier time observing strict social distancing rules.

The ship completed the round trip sailing from the Italian port city of Genoa which featured stops in Civitavecchia (Rome), Naples, Palermo and Valletta (Malta) before returning to Genoa.

Health protocols were necessarily strict even before the Grandiosa set-

sail. The line is only taking residents of Schengen countries on these first sailings back; a few people from high-risk countries outside the Schengen were turned away at boarding.

Prior to embarkation three health protocols were enforced: a temperature check, a health questionnaire and a COVID-19 swab test. Depending on the screening results and according to the guest's medical or travel history, a secondary health screening or testing was also required.

Free from wild polio

Africa declared free from wild polio by the independent body, the Africa Regional Certification Commission

Polio usually affects children under five, sometimes leading to irreversible paralysis. Death can occur when breathing muscles are affected.

Twenty-five years ago, thousands of children in Africa were paralysed by the virus. The disease is now only found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is no cure but the polio vaccine protects children for life. Nigeria is the last African country to be declared free from wild polio, having accounted for more than half of all global cases less than a decade ago.

The vaccination campaign in Nigeria involved a huge effort to reach remote and dangerous places under threat from militant violence and some health workers were killed in the process.

Polio is a virus which spreads from person to person, usually through contaminated water. It can lead to paralysis by attacking the nervous system.



Digital technologies in the field of finance should serve ordinary citizens, such as these statisticians from Turkmenistan

Digital economy in the limelight

A UN taskforce set up to look into the risks and benefits of the digital economy has concluded that it could have a transformational impact on sustainable development, and empower citizens, both as taxpayers and investors

The report *People's Money: Harnessing Digitalisation to Finance a Sustainable Future* was released by the UN Secretary-General's Task Force on Digital Financing.

The Task Force, led by UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Achim Steiner, and made up of senior figures from the tech sector, financial institutions, governments, and UN bodies, was set up by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in 2018, to improve understanding of the benefits and risks of the fast-moving financial technology (fintech) and digital finance sectors.

"Digital technologies, which are revolutionising financial markets, can be a game-changer in meeting our shared objectives", said Mr. Guterres in response to the launch of the report. "The Task Force on Digital Financing of the Sustainable

Development Goals provides leadership to harness the digital revolution."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the popularity of digital tools has grown rapidly, and demonstrates the potential of digital finance to provide relief for millions around the world, support businesses and protect jobs and livelihoods.

The report identifies five ways for harnessing digitalisation, which cover much of global finance. Firstly, the huge amounts of money flowing around the world needs to be invested in a way that supports the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Public finances need to be more effective and accountable. Savings need to be invested for long-term development projects, using digital tools. And there needs to be more financing for small and medium-sized businesses, which are crucial for generating employment and income.

1,000-year-old gold coins

Israeli youths have unearthed hundreds of gold coins stashed away in a clay vessel for more than a thousand years

The treasure was discovered by teenagers volunteering at an excavation in central Israel where a new neighbourhood is planned to be built.

"The person who buried this treasure 1,100 years ago must have expected to retrieve it and even secured the vessel with a nail so that it would not move. We can only guess what prevented him from returning to collect this treasure," said excavation director Liat Nadav-Ziv.

The area it was found in housed workshops at the time the treasure was hidden and the identity of the owner is still a mystery.

"It was amazing," said Oz Cohen, one of the volunteers who found the treasure. "I dug in the ground and when I excavated the soil, saw what looked like very thin leaves. When I looked

again I saw these were gold coins. It was really exciting to find such a special and ancient treasure."

Dating back to the ninth century Abbasid Caliphate period, the 425 24-carat pure gold coins would have been a significant amount of money at the time, said Robert Kool, a coin expert at the Antiquities Authority.

"For example, with such a sum, a person could buy a luxurious house in one of the best neighbourhoods in Fustat, the enormous wealthy capital of Egypt in those days," Mr. Kool said.

The discovery was among the largest caches of ancient coins found in Israel. In 2015, amateur divers found about 2,000 gold coins off the coast of the ancient port city of Caesarea dating to the Fatimid period in the 10th and 11th centuries.

"Hopefully the study of the hoard will tell us more about a period of which we still know very little," Mr. Kool said.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Movement is key to life

Physical inactivity is an issue among some young people. How can they protect themselves against the disease of the century?

By Lyudmila Konopelko

A sedentary lifestyle, restriction of motor activity and weakening of muscle activity are natural for hypodynamic syndrome which doctors are calling the disease of the century and the reverse of progress. The modern world has developed many diverse devices that enable people to limit their physical activity as much as possible. At the same time, it has brought with it some serious health problems.

Inactivity is increasing and becoming a social phenomenon. We are less likely to walk up the stairs since there's a lift, we prefer to drive to the nearest store by car, while many professions have become 'sedentary' with short breaks for smoking (which, admittedly, only makes the situation worse). About 40 percent of Belarusians follow a sedentary lifestyle, hypodynamia is seen among 10-20 percent of preschool children. Its figures rise to 50 percent when it turns to schoolchildren and students, while the rest accounts for 30 percent.

"The development of hypodynamia is now increasing as a consequence of forced self-isolation because of coronavirus, as well as a rapid growth in the popularity of remote working, where a professional can perform their professional duties while sitting at home at a computer, accounting or auditing documents," says Leonid Meleshko, a specialist overseeing health protection issues at Minsk's City Clinical Psychiatric Dispensary. "In all civilised countries, doctors are sounding the alarm, looking at

how the number of overweight people who already have problems with the cardiovascular system at a young age is increasing. Although we may think we are constantly moving (for example, we walk, run for the bus, crouch down in the store trying to see a price tag, turn our heads) but these movements are narrow and monotonous, only involving

The specialist admits that the healthy lifestyle which gained its popularity in the early 2000s has borne fruit. At present, an increasing number of people are aware that a certain amount of physical activity is necessary to maintain one's health. Numerous articles in the media related to the benefits of physical activity have millions of supporters.

At the same time, many, including students and pensioners, are not able to visit gyms and swimming pools: some do not have enough time and some lack money. However, it's possible to significantly improve one's health with minimal cost; everyone has the opportunity: it's simply a matter of willpower, comfortable walking or running

shoes, a pair of dumbbells and a gym mat.

"Scientists have concluded that even 30 minutes of daily physical activity can significantly reduce the risk of obesity and other related diseases in people who lead a sedentary lifestyle," adds Mr. Meleshko. "There are many options for how to organise this half an hour of time usefully. One can make it a rule not to use the lift or only walk up the stairs during the day or wake up early and start the day with physical exercises. It's great to take a quick walk before going to bed. Walking is generally considered extremely useful at any time of the day, so don't be lazy in the evenings. Try to walk at least a couple of stops after work. Fans of music can not only raise their mood, but also significantly improve their health by simply dancing for 20-30 minutes a day. Try to train your body to daily physical activity and, in two months, you will notice changes for the better. The nervous system will respond (you will become much calmer, insomnia will disappear, and the mornings will no longer be torture), the muscles will tighten up and skin colour will improve. Don't forget about nutrition: 3,000 calories a day for a mobile person will not do any harm but is unnecessary for another person who follows a sedentary lifestyle. When excess calories enter the body, they are consumed for the formation of fat which increases its synthesis in the liver. In short, don't eat too much and move more!"



specific muscle groups. It appears that, from the age of 25, many people need massage of their cervical-collar zone due to progressive osteochondrosis and headaches, and the services of a chiropractor — in addition to other health problems. Actually, prolonged inactivity contributes to the occurrence of atherosclerosis, hypertension, myocardial infarction and osteoporosis."

The increase in inactivity is seen as a reason for obesity. The fact that urban residents are more likely to be overweight than rural residents and that 'intellectual' workers are more likely than those who regularly experience physical activity is also related to low mobility.

Dancing with history

Kotchino quadrille as the brand of Mosty District

By Lyudmila Minkevich

This dynamic and playful dance has been performed in the Mosty District for decades. For some time, it was forgotten but, in 1960, at the christening of the daughter of a resident of the village of Kotchino, guests remembered the old dance. The tradition began to recover and, as early as 1969, according to livingheritage.by, the quadrille was presented at a folklore review and, in 1971, experts came to Kotchino, wrote a description of the dance and placed it in the *Belarusian Dances* book.

When the village club in Kotchino was closed, the 'quadrille relay' was taken

over by the neighbouring village of Velikie Ozerki where a dancing club opened, attracting local schoolchildren. At present, residents of different professions and ages perform the unique dance in the village — indicating the continuity of folk dance traditions.

There are twelve elements in the Kotchino quadrille. Each has its own name — 'a snake', 'a stream', etc.



Pavel Kuzmin

The dance unfolds according to the script. Each pair, each participant in turn repeats the movement on the principle of 'all for all'. Interestingly, the musical periods and repetitions of dance figures do not correspond to each other: the end of the choreographic part does not coincide with the musical one. The dance is performed with enthusiasm, but at a moderate pace.

The quadrille must be danced in folk costumes. The women's costume consists of a shirt, fitted corset, and skirt with apron. Men are dressed in shirts, trousers and have richly decorated belts.

Melody in major

Almost 700 pianos and 60 button accordions, key accordions and harmonicas per year: how is the production of Belarusian musical instruments doing now



By Ilya Krasovsky

Things are sailing smooth

Older people remember well the Borisov Factory of Musical Instruments, which produced up to 2,000 pianos a month. They were bought from all over the Soviet Union and beyond. In 2006, production ended. However, on the instruction of the President, it was revived. The Piano Factory was established in Minsk, where they once again produce instruments under the familiar brand of 'Belarus'.

The backbone of the enterprise includes masters of Soviet manufacturing, many of whom are almost 70 years old.

"We employ 25 people," says Renata Martynovich, Director of the Piano Factory. "In our country there are still no manufacturers that teach piano making. Therefore, the master craftsmen themselves pass on their experience and skills. It takes at least two years to train a specialist."

The factory produces classic acoustic pianos. They are handmade, so each instrument has its own signature tone. The price is about \$3,700. Manufacture begins with gluing the body: a powerful press glues the frame of the future instrument from spruce and pine. At the Borisov factory, this stage previously took two days and now takes just 20 minutes. The effectiveness of the progress is evident: the case is assembled perfectly, fitted with millimetre precision. Otherwise, the instrument will not sound right. Then the masters get down to business, assembling the mechanics. For example, they insert weights into the keys — the weighing process. At the end of the entire assembly, the master leaves his last name on the leftmost key. The next step is to hammer the instrument on an automatic machine in an isolated room. 15 minutes of its 'playing' replaces six months of real operation: such is the resource test.

After assembling and playing, the instrument is tuned four times. It's impossible to immediately tune to the desired frequency of 442 hertz, as the strings will break. A powerful cast iron frame holds 222 strings tension — equal to the pressure of up to 16 tonnes. In a last step, the final intonation is ensured, so that the piano acquires a smooth and rich sound. In total, it takes two months to assemble each one.

"Last year, we produced 669 pianos, and 464 instruments in the first half of this year," continues Renata Martynovich.

Most of the work is handmade, done with love and attention to detail, like, for example, a door closer on the lid so that it does not hit your fingers. The general impression of the manufacturer is formed from such important little things. Final polishing and packaging and handsome instruments in black lacquer, and soon in white, are getting ready for their customers bearing the proud inscription: 'Belarus'.

Pianos are tuned four times. It's impossible to immediately tune to the desired frequency of 442 hertz, as the strings will break. A powerful cast iron frame holds 222 strings tension — equal to the pressure of up to 16 tonnes.



Production of phonic plates

Vladimir Shlapak



Reed instrument maker Tatiana Soroka

Collected by golden hands

During a meeting with creative youth two years ago, the President was also shown the capabilities of a unique electronic midi-button accordion, created by Zonta JSC in Molodechno. The button accordion is able to reproduce the sounds of a variety of musical instruments, performing the role of a kind of mini-orchestra.

Zonta company has been producing button accordions, key accordions and harmonicas since 2006. The enterprise employs 25 people, just like at the Piano Factory. They produce everything themselves: from a sheet of plywood to a finished tool. Even the smallest details

— levers, valves, buttons, pushers and springs — are produced at Zonta. However, the scale of production is much more modest: about 60 instruments per year.

In 2018, more than 600 button accordions alone were required to be updated judging by the requests received from music institutions across the country. The company received a stream of orders, and even had to expand.

"Demand now significantly exceeds supply, because creating a tool is a laborious manual process," says Vladimir Stasevich, head of production. "It takes three months to make one button accordion. Instruments are made individually to fit the musician. There are three types of button accordions in the size line: 'pioneer', 'medium' and 'grand'. They differ from each other only in a reduced range."

In Grodno, Zonta buys leather for belts and accessories. Brass, duralumin and aluminium are also Belarusian. The company purchases spruce for the resonant parts of the instruments from the northern regions of the country.

"We buy some parts and materials abroad," continues Mr. Stasevich. "For example, we buy 2.2mm leather for bass voices in Germany, natural mother-of-pearl for buttons and celluloid — in Italy, a lump bar for a combined chord — in the Czech Republic."

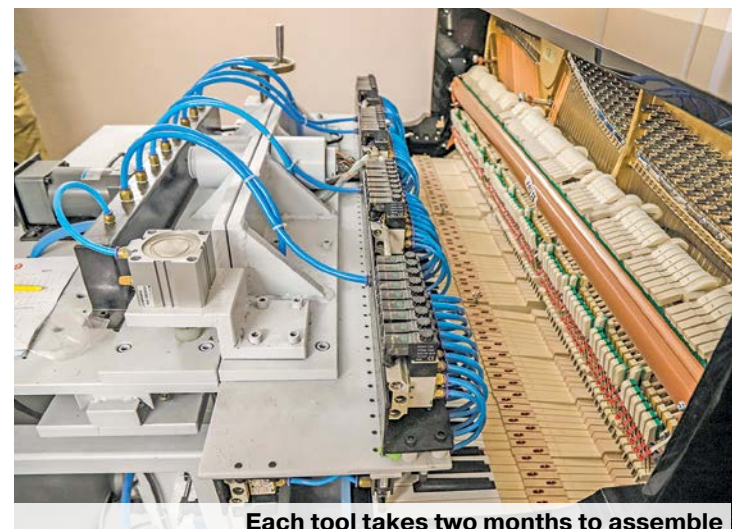
The button accordion contains 2,000 parts. There are about 800 voice tags alone. Therefore, the work of local craftsmen is akin to the craft of watchmakers with delicate assembly of the smallest mechanisms.

The first stage of production is preparation, which is carried out by turners and millers. Then comes the assembly of the right and left keyboard mechanism, and the chords are riveted. Then the masters paste over the resonator and mount the chord. The body of the instruments are not painted, but covered with celluloid. This material is soaked in acetone and is attached to the body with a special glue. Then the body is polished while additional decorations can be also added to suit the taste of the client. For example, *Khoroshki* Dance Company asked to put the name of their ensemble on the harmonica. The adjuster is a completely

unique worker — the only one for the whole factory. He grinds off the solder on the voices and does intonation. One bar sounds in unison with the tuner, while the second bar rises or falls, so overtones are born.

The factory also sews covers and straps for tools and installs midi-systems. With this system, Zonta has created a button accordion for concerts which combines eight instruments. There are also instruments with radio microphones that 'detect' within a radius of up to 80 metres.

Only about 5 percent of Zonta's clients are individuals. Prices for harmonicas start at \$1,000, for button accordions — from \$2,000, key accordions — from \$3,500. It's simply impossible to create a high-quality handmade item cheaper. Zonta has customers even from Italy — the home of the accordion. Foreign musicians enjoy the sound of our chord, with a unique Eastern European flavour.



Each tool takes two months to assemble

Great expectations

The official start of the Belarusian handball season turned out to be a feast for the eyes, with Minsk SKA and Brest Meshkov meeting in the decisive match of the Belarus Final Four Cup and giving their fans a high-class spectacle!



By Sergey Kanashits

What you have seen and experienced can be expressed in just one word: great! It's also possible to make the optimistic statement that Belarusian handball is slowly but surely climbing up the ladder, developing and improving. New names are being seen and interesting and original teams are born while promising and competent coaches appear. The Belarusian Handball Federation is consistently and progressively moving towards its goal: to return handball to its former glory in the country, and, it seems, is making considerable progress in this.

Pinsk hosted the Belarus Final Four Cup. The city is not known for handball, but is very sporty, boasting one of the country's best infrastructures, as is proven by the ice hockey players of Moscow Dinamo, who regularly hold off-season training camps here. Now the handball players have also appreciated the facilities on offer. One of the federation's advantages is its breadth of scope. Our handball, like the famous Gulchatay, finally began to show its face. This turned out to be quite cute and smart. Tournaments are organised and held not only in familiar cities and centres, where handball has long and firmly held roots, but also gradually captures new areas. The Cup in Pinsk fully confirmed the correctness of their chosen path: the tournament went off with a bang both in terms of organisation and the intensity of the games.

As expected, the decisive battle saw old and principled rivals — Minsk SKA and Brest



SCOREBOARD
Handball. Belarus Cup. Semi-final.
SKA — Masheka — 36:29, Brest Meshkov — Gomel — 33:20.
Match for third place.
Gomel — Masheka — 32:31.
Final.
Brest Meshkov — SKA-Minsk — 26:25.
According to the results of the tournament, the best players of the teams were recognised: Pavel Duda from Masheka, Dmitry Smolikov from Gomel, Kirill Samoilo from SKA, and Jaka Malus from Brest Meshkov. The best scorer was Nikita Vailupov (Brest Meshkov), who scored 21 goals across two matches.

Meshkov. Each match between these two teams is a new story, almost epic. At the semi-final stage, the favourites easily defeated the Masheka and Gomel squads (but what a wonderful

feast these teams gave in a fight for third place!) and prepared for a full-time duel. Those keen on predictions juggled with various assumptions, but agreed on the main point: the

significantly rejuvenated SKA team, who had lost almost all of its leaders in the offseason, will find it very difficult to fight on equal terms with the Brest players. After all, Meshkov HC, unlike SKA, on the contrary, carried out high-quality transfer work in summer, having gathered under their roof one of the best (if not the best!) squad in history. The tasks for the team are appropriate: the Champions League is a priority while the Belarus Cup is a matter of course. Moreover, last time, this trophy was taken from the Brest team right from under its nose by the Minsk squad.

The final turned out to be wonderful! It's good to note that both teams made a great

impression. Yes, there were plenty mistakes, it is clear that the 'gears' of the in-club mechanisms have not yet got used to each other, but the potential is huge. Brest Meshkov has become more organic and solid in comparison with last year. Obviously, the Slovenian star ball handler, Stas Skube, was welcomed with open arms while Nikita Vailupov moved up to the level of a world-class handball player. Brest Meshkov as a whole has significantly improved in many aspects and we would like to believe that the team is capable of reaching a new level. Even with all things considered, Minsk SKA not only put up resistance to a much more experienced opponent, but fought until the last minute, losing in the end with a difference of only one goal! Already we can distinguish several players in the SKA and it will be very interesting to follow their progress.

Twenty-year-old Stanislav Yurcha acted brilliantly on the last defence line while Kirill Samoilo bombarded the gates of the rivals from the left wing (scoring 7 goals!). Moreover, 18-year-old line player Gleb Leukhin, appeared to be a mature master. 20-year-old Nikita Chizhik and 18-year-old Igor Belyavsky pleased the crowd with interesting and unconventional solutions, as well as intransigence and persistent character. Yesterday's boys gave the grandee of Belarusian and European handball a real fight and created lots of talk. The future of these guys and of whole of Belarusian handball, however, depends only on themselves, yet there is reason to believe that the future will be bright.

ARENA

● Victoria Azarenko wins the tournament in New York

Belarusian tennis player Victoria Azarenko (ranked 59th in the world) has won the major Western & Southern Open tournament in New York with a total prize fund of more than \$7.1m. This is her 21st title in tournaments under the aegis of the WTA.



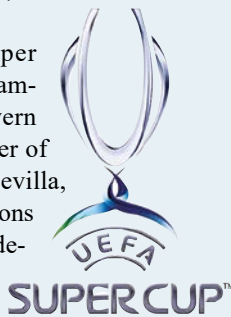
The former women's world number one was expected to play in the final against the world number ten, Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka, who was forced to withdraw due to injury. To achieve her victory, Victoria Azarenko defeated two French tennis players — Alize Cornet (60) — 6:4, 7:5 and Caroline Garcia (49) — 6:2, 7:6 (10:8),

Croatian Donna Vekic (24) — 6:2, 6:3, Ons Jabeur of Tunisia (39) — 7:6 (11:9), 6:2 and the British Johanna Konta (15) — 4:6, 6:4, 6:1.

● UEFA Super Cup match will be held with fans' presence

The stands of the Puskas Arena (which can seat 67,000) in Budapest, Hungary, on September 24th, will be occupied by no more than 30 percent. At the same time, the Executive Committee of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) confirms that all other matches of continental tournaments will be held with empty stands, until further notice.

In the match for the Super Cup 2020, the triumphant Champions League — German Bayern from Munich — and the winner of the Europa League, Spanish Sevilla, will play. In the recent Champions League final, Bayern players defeated Paris Saint-Germain of France — 1:0, while Sevilla



prevailed 3:2 over Inter Milan of Italy in the final match of the European League.

● International Judo Federation officially announces the dates of elite tournaments after the season resumes

The first of three such events will be the Grand Slam tournament in Budapest, scheduled for the end of October 2020. In December, the competition with a similar status will be held in Tokyo. The Doha Masters series is scheduled for early 2021. All these events will have the status of qualification for the Tokyo Olympics, which was postponed to 2021.

The competitions will be held in accordance with the medical protocol for countering the spread of coronavirus, approved by the Federation for the restart of the season. It is noted that there may be changes in the schedule of competitions adjusted for the epidemiological situation in the world.



Tatiana Stolyarova

Photo of the week



Minsk. A boy playing in the rain

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



On September 5th, 1920, Aleksandr Filonov was born — Hero of the Soviet Union (1945), who took part in battles in Belarus during the Great Patriotic War. The battalion led by Filonov distinguished itself on June 24th-26th, 1944, in battles near Chausy, where it captured 38 enemy ammunition depots, crossed the Dnieper River near the village of Buinichi, in the Mogilev Region and repulsed numerous enemy attacks on the captured bridgehead. After the war, he worked as a lawyer. He died in 1995.

September 5th is the International Day of Charity, celebrated at the initiative of the UN since 2013. Its aim is to draw public attention to the activities of charitable organisations and individuals in overcoming poverty and acute humanitarian crises, encouraging their work and mobilising people, public organisations and stakeholders around the world to participate in charitable activities.



On September 6th, 2000, the United Nations Headquarters in New York hosted the Millennium Summit of the heads of the UN member states — the largest meeting of national leaders in the history of mankind, at which goals for the next 15-20 years were determined. The President of the Republic of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, made a speech at the summit.



On September 6th, 2015, the restored palace of Drutsky-Lyubetsky became a gift to the town of Shchuchin for the Day of Belarusian Written Language. The palace was built at the end of the 19th century, designed by the Vilno architect, Tadeusz Rostworowski, near the estate of the 18th century Scipio del Campo. In its appearance, the palace in Shchuchin is similar to the Small Trianon Palace on the territory of Versailles — the residence of the French kings.



September 6th is the Day of Workers in the Oil, Gas and Fuel Industries in the Republic of Belarus. This is a professional holiday for representatives of various gas and oil specialties: geologists and drillers, developers and builders, transport workers and technologists; all those who have linked their lives to the oil and gas industry. The uninterrupted operation of all sectors of the national economy and the comfort of life of citizens depend on their activities.

September 6th is the Day of Belarusian Written Language in the Republic of Belarus. It's a national holiday and is celebrated annually on the first Sunday of September. The concept of the holiday envisages the demonstration of the inviolable unity of the Belarusian printed word with the history of the Belarusian people, its close connection with its Slavic origins, as well as understanding



the historical path of writing and printing in Belarus. The enlighteners of the Belarusian people — Francysk Skaryna, Kirill Turovsky, Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya, Simeon Polotsky — are figures on a European scale.



On September 7th, 1945, a parade of allied troops of the USSR, the USA, Great Britain and France took place in Berlin at the Brandenburg Gate. The parade was accepted by Marshal of the Soviet Union, Georgy Zhukov.

On September 8th, 1990, the Polotsk Museum of Belarusian Book Printing — a branch of the National Polotsk Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve — was opened, to mark the 500th anniversary since the birth of the first Belarusian printer, famous Polotsk resident, Francysk Skaryna. It's located in the building of the former brotherly school of the Polotsk Epiphany Monastery — an architectural monument from the 18th century.

