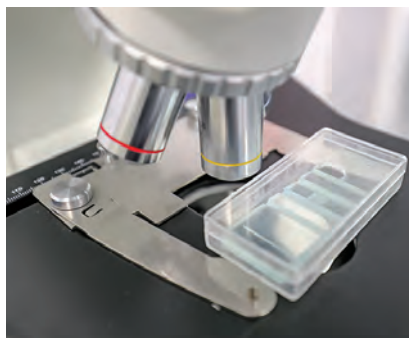




In the *Heroes of Belarus* project, we recall the feat of hero pilots — Major Andrei Nichiporchik and Lieutenant Nikita Kukonenko

4



Finding genetically compatible stem cell donors for Belarusians may require travelling the whole world

8

INTERNATIONAL

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Spouses Darya and Aleksei Zhuk from the town of Gorki, Mogilev Region, found their vocation in parenthood. In the photo: Aleksei and Darya Zhuk with their children — Zakhar, Semyon, David, Ruvim, Lida. In March, Darya Zhuk was awarded the Order of Mother.

Family is foundation of nation's development

The national campaign *My Family is My Country* dedicated to the celebration of International Family Day is held in Belarus in May. Information and educational events, charity events, conferences, contests, forums and festivals, cultural, sports and other activities are taking place throughout the country.

A person's life starts with the family that ensures the formation of civic identity and personality. Therefore, the family is the foundation for the development of the nation, the most important environment for preservation and transmission of traditions, spiritual and moral values from generation to generation.

A strong family is the backbone of state building. The protection of motherhood and childhood is the priority direction of the Belarusian national family policy. According to the recent population census, there have been 2,612,413 families in Belarus. The number of families with many children is constantly increasing. Currently, there are almost 124,000 large families in the country, bringing up 405,000 children.



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Friendship, partnership, unanimity

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, has paid a state visit to Azerbaijan

The programme of the stay was very eventful. The President of Belarus and the President of Azerbaijan began communication with a one-on-one meeting. The two leaders had a thorough conversation in a narrow format in the framework of which they discussed a lot of questions on the bilateral agenda as well as regional and international issues. Baku and Minsk confirmed the strategic nature of relations between the two countries. After that, the heads of states were joined by delegations, and the negotiations were held in an expanded format.

“We have no closed topics, everything is open. We communicate like brothers, and understand the world in the same way, realising where it is moving,” the Belarusian leader pointed out.

Aleksandr Lukashenko offered Azerbaijan assistance in the post-war reconstruction of territories. The Head of State stressed that revival and development of territories is the most important and challenging task once the hostilities are over. “The difficult time has come when it is necessary to revive these lands and return people, although some of them might have already been born in the city,” the Head of State remarked. The President noted that this work would require a lot of time and effort. According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, Belarus is ready to provide support in this direction.

“We value the trusting, creative partnership between our countries, which is based on mutual respect, friendship and co-operation,” Ilham Aliyev stressed. “Our relations are time-tested. I think that no one doubts that Belarus and Azerbaijan are two reliable friends.”

Speaking about the prospects for further collaboration between Belarus and Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev underlined that he saw great potential for boosting co-operation, including for increasing trade turnover, as well as for continuing and expanding industrial co-operation. The Azerbaijani leader noted that Azerbaijan would be glad if Belarusian companies and enterprises participated in the post-war reconstruction of territories. According to Ilham Aliyev, this topic had also been discussed by delegation members of both countries. “Our co-operation is quite multifaceted, it has a good history and good prospects,” summed up Ilham Aliyev.



Following the results of the official negotiations between the presidents, a package of international documents was signed.

During the conversation with media representatives, Aleksandr Lukashenko assured that Belarus could lend a shoulder to Azerbaijan in a way that no one else in the world would do.

“Azerbaijan has achieved a lot in recent years, especially in terms of solving its main problem — the return of lands that had been turning into a desert for a long time,” Aleksandr Lukashenko noted. “It is a hard history. Anyway, the territories have been regained, and they need to be revived. This will probably be a much longer and no less difficult task that Azerbaijan will have to tackle.”

The Head of State recalled that Belarus and Azerbaijan were implementing a roadmap for the development of bilateral co-operation. In view of a meeting of the intergovernmental commission to be held in Minsk soon and taking into account the new agreements, the parties decided to update this document.

“We have agreed on the joint production of complex mineral fertilisers. Why delay? We need to produce complex mixed fertilisers and start from the domestic market so that Azerbaijan does not need to look for any fertilisers anywhere, but manufactures them here.

We have the technology, we are ready to do this and provide the entire region, which is colossal. Iran, Pakistan, India consume a huge amount of mineral fertilisers. We will offer complex mineral fertilisers. We need to advance in this direction by November. We have set such a goal,” Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed.

“We have discussed all the questions, there were no closed topics. This refers not only to joint production of MTZ [Minsk Tractor Works’ brand] equipment, but also to joint production of MAZ [Minsk Automobile Plant’s brand] machinery, firefighting equipment, as well as the production of elevators. Old elevators that are still present in Soviet houses need to be replaced. We have preserved this production and are ready to produce this equipment here, together with our Azerbaijani friends.”

Azerbaijan is also interested in the production of railway rolling stock — both platform cars and tank cars. Belarus is ready to share its expertise in this area as well. An equally important area is co-operation in agriculture. This includes supplies of elite cattle from Belarus, the construction of agro-towns and infrastructure, the creation of dairy complexes, and the development of farms. This is especially relevant for territories that need to be revived, as the Head of State pointed out.

The traditional area of co-operation between Belarus and Azerbaijan is the supply of timber. Now the Belarusian side is ready to take a step further and build wooden houses on the revived lands of Azerbaijan.

“As for pharmaceuticals, we are ready to start supplying the medicines you need virtually tomorrow as well as create joint production facilities for medicines and veterinary drugs that we know how to manufacture in Belarus,” Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed.

According to the Head of State, Belarus and Azerbaijan can still accomplish a lot in the humanitarian sphere, including in the field of sports in terms of preparation for major events, healthcare and education. “We are ready to revive local and set up vocational education facilities on a new basis. We have such experience. Nowadays, blue-collar workers are in great demand. Ilham Heydarovich has asked us to undertake this work. We will carry out this work together with your specialists,” the Belarusian leader underlined.

It is expected that the heads of states will analyse the roadmap implementation in November. The 2024 UN Climate Change Conference will be held in Baku at that time and the President of Belarus is planning to take part in it.

The Belarus–Azerbaijan trade turnover exceeded \$400 million in 2023. The parties believe that their countries are capable of reaching \$1 billion in the future. “This is going to be a very big step. Maybe we will accomplish this in two stages. At first, we will achieve a \$500 million mark in trade turnover within 1-1.5 years, and in some time we will reach \$1 billion. We will do everything for this. Thus, in case we buy from unfriendly countries some goods that are produced in Azerbaijan, we should stop doing that and start buying such goods in Azerbaijan, regardless of anything — now is the right moment. Azerbaijan will do the same to meet us halfway,” Aleksandr Lukashenko clarified.

During the talks, the presidents discussed in detail the situation in their regions and informed each other about the events taking place. “I have informed my counterpart about what is happening in our region in connection with the conflict in Ukraine. In the most detailed way. Our assessments and points of view are either close or coincide. You know our position. The situation is not easy for us in this regard, but we will do everything to make peace there. We will move in this direction. Azerbaijan’s experience of post-war recovery, peaceful development is very important for our region,” the Belarusian leader stressed. The Head of State noted that the situation in the Caucasus region was not calm, either.

“Thank God that a very powerful and normal leader represented by Azerbaijan has appeared here. You are able to control the Caucasus region. You are already responsible not only for Azerbaijan but for the situation in the Caucasus as a whole. We, the peoples who do not live in the Caucasus, have great hopes for that. Therefore, this is an additional burden on you, although you have enough problems of your own. Nevertheless, there is no other way — time has chosen you, as we say, and you are responsible for the Caucasus region as a strong leader,” Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised.



On the streets of Baku

The President of Belarus invited his Azerbaijani counterpart to pay an official visit to Belarus at any convenient time to continue the bilateral dialogue.

After the official talks and a visit to the Caspian Agro international agricultural exhibition, Aleksandr Lukashenko laid a wreath at the tomb of National Leader Heydar Aliyev at the Alley of Honours in Baku. The Head of State laid flowers at the grave of Zarifa Aliyeva, the spouse of the former President of Azerbaijan and the mother of the current leader of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. The Belarusian leader also laid a wreath at the Eternal Flame monument at the Alley of Martyrs ('fallen heroes').

Within the framework of the state visit, Aleksandr Lukashenko, together with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, visited the country's territories under restoration.

The Belarusian leader arrived in the city of Fuzuli. Ilham Aliyev welcomed Aleksandr Lukashenko at the airport at the aircraft stairway. The President of Azerbaijan briefed his Belarusian counterpart on the ongoing work on the restoration and development of those territories, and the construction of new infrastructure facilities. Aleksandr Lukashenko got familiar with the new airport, and the

presidents headed to the city accompanied by an impressive motorcade.

During the trip, Aleksandr Lukashenko and Ilham Aliyev took a look at the city's territory, destroyed facilities and promising areas for development. The presidents travelled along the route in the same car driven by the President of Azerbaijan himself.

Aleksandr Lukashenko was demonstrated the expositions reflecting the dynamics of the restoration of destroyed facilities, after which both leaders headed to the city of Shusha [in Nagorno-Karabakh region]. The heads of states visited the residential area of the city, familiarising themselves with housing conditions, as well as memorable places and a museum exposition dedicated to the life and political activities of Heydar Aliyev. Aleksandr Lukashenko and Ilham Aliyev also inspected tractor equipment granted to the city by the President of Belarus. "If you like them, we will give more," the Head of State noted.

The city holds a lot of reminders of the tragic past — some buildings are not subject to restoration, memorials and temples have been destroyed. "Talking ruins..." Aleksandr Lukashenko noted. "It is necessary to restore buildings, where possible."

Following the results of the official talks between the presidents of Belarus and Azerbaijan, nine documents have been signed

Among them are international treaties and memoranda. In particular, there has been signed a protocol on mutual application of electronic systems for certification of origin of goods aimed at simplifying international trade, as well as protocols that update the previously concluded co-operation agreements in the field of veterinary medicine, and quarantine and plant protection.

The parties have also signed an action plan for the development of co-operation in the field of tourism for 2024-2025, a memorandum of understanding and co-operation in the field of competition policy, public procurement, consumer protection and advertising.

Another memorandum of understanding has been signed between the National Agency for Investment and Privatisation of Belarus' Ministry of Economy and the Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses of Azerbaijan. This document creates a legal basis for the exchange of experience and improvement of business

climate in order to enhance the investment attractiveness of both countries.

In addition, the parties have signed memoranda on the establishment of twin-city relations between Minsk and Baku, Gomel and Ganja, Grodno and Gabala. Collaboration in the new format will make it possible to leverage the regional potential in order to ramp up multifaceted interaction.

The parties will pay special attention to the implementation of joint projects in the field of economics, urban planning, local government, transport and road infrastructure, housing, science, education, culture, preservation of historical and cultural heritage, the environment, urban planning, healthcare, sports and tourism. It is envisaged to establish closer co-operation and develop direct contacts between industrial enterprises and companies, educational and scientific institutions, youth associations and creative unions, healthcare, culture, sports and tourism institutions.



During the Caspian Agro and InterFood international exhibitions in Baku



During a visit to Azerbaijani territories under restoration



Machinery granted to the city of Shusha by the President of Belarus

Aleksandr Lukashenko demands from KGB to resolutely suppress activities of foreign intelligence services in Belarus

When making personnel decisions in the structure of state security agencies on May 20th, the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, demanded from the State Security Committee (KGB) to resolutely suppress the activities of foreign intelligence services in the country

In particular, the President stressed, "I think that today's appointments (at least, I demand this from the chair) will contribute to strengthening our special service: the State Security Committee. You are aware of everything that is happening around us. You know this as well as I do. Our neighbours — Poles, Lithuanians and Latvians — respond in the opposite way to the neighbourly policy that we have proposed to them, taking into account the visa-free regime. We also see an attempt, in addition to the information war, to impose a war of sabotage groups on us. We have also been noting this recently and are fighting against it. We see that they are preparing various kinds of armed detachments and almost regiments — as they call them — in order to carry out an invasion into Belarus' territory. A lot has been

already said about this. I'm not even talking about sanctions — this is actually an economic diversion and a war against Belarus."

Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that our enemies act in violation of all international treaties and agreements, "They have obligations to us as a landlocked country. They have no right to block us. Nevertheless, you know what's going on. Therefore, we — or rather you, our state — need to reveal all sorts of negative trends in relation to our state in time. It is necessary to suppress very decisively the activities of foreign special services on the territory of Belarus."

The Head of State drew special attention to another serious area of activity, "A very important task that I would like to ask you about — this is the main reason for inviting you here in connection with your

appointment — deals with the issues of preventing corruption and protection racketeering in our country by the bodies under your control. You are in charge of counterintelligence support for both control bodies and law enforcement agencies. You must take appropriate measures and inform me if suddenly someone has a desire to expand their, so to speak, corrupt activities on the territory of Belarus."

Aleksandr Lukashenko accentuated a fundamental point, noting that such activities in our country are absolutely unacceptable, "We shouldn't have such hidden protection racketeering, as is customary in other countries. We often see films on this topic on television. We shouldn't have that. If it exists, it will hit our people very seriously. There shouldn't be such wild things

in Belarus as 'I will help you, you will give me something for this'."

Aleksandr Lukashenko noted that he had repeatedly paid special attention of the KGB leadership at this point, "I have told the chair about this several times, focusing him on the fact that when we are engaged in intelligence and counterintelligence, we shouldn't forget that we have our own internal problems that we must counteract. I pin big hopes on our security officers that at least I will be informed on certain issues in time. Where necessary, you will take appropriate measures yourself. Therefore, when appointing you to the position today, I would like to ask you and require you to work in this direction."

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by



On May 19th, Belarus remembers the unparalleled feat of hero pilots — Major Andrei Nichiporchik and Lieutenant Nikita Kukonenko, who barely had time to realise that by their deed they proved the real meaning of being faithful to the military oath, the people and the profession

The Minsk Times new project is dedicated to people awarded the highest Hero of Belarus title

Striving for the sky



Andrei Nichiporchik (17.10.1987 – 19.05.2021) — a first class military pilot. He was born in Postavy, Vitebsk Region, graduated from the Military Academy of the Republic of Belarus. Since 2016, he worked as an instructor.

Nikita Kukonenko (18.09.1998 – 19.05.2021) — a military pilot. He was born in Polotsk, Vitebsk Region, graduated from the Military Academy of the Republic of Belarus. Since 2020, he served at the Lida Assault Aviation Base.

AWARD

By Presidential Decree No. 457 dated November 24th, 2021, pilots Andrei Nichiporchik and Nikita Kukonenko were posthumously awarded the Hero of Belarus title for the unprecedented courage and heroism in the performance of military duty.



Heroic feat

A Yak-130 military aircraft of the Lida Assault Aviation Base crashed on May 19th, 2021 in the city of Baranovichi, Brest Region. The crew consisting of the flight commander of the combat training squadron, Major Andrei Nichiporchik, and the pilot of the combat training squadron, Lieutenant Nikita Kukonenko, were performing a planned training flight when they noticed a technical malfunction. The aircraft went into an uncontrollable chaotic movement and its trajectory began to deviate to the left, towards the city. The crew did not leave the plane and kept fighting, managing to switch to the backup control system. This enabled them to change the flight direction but not the altitude, which continued to fall rapidly.



MEMORY

- ▶ In honour of Nikita Kukonenko and Andrei Nichiporchik, a memorial sign has been installed in Baranovichi in the shape of two wrought cranes flying into the sky against the silhouette of the Yak-130 aircraft.
- ▶ Streets in the new districts of Lida and Baranovichi got the names in honour of the fallen pilots.
- ▶ Secondary school No. 6 in Lida is named after Nikita Kukonenko, and secondary school No. 9 is named after Andrei Nichiporchik.
- ▶ Pioneer squads in Baranovichi, Lida and Tarnovo bear the names of the heroic pilots.
- ▶ Capsules with soil from the place of death of Heroes of Belarus pilots Andrei Nichiporchik and Nikita Kukonenko are stored in the National Memorial Complex 'Temple-Monument in Honour of All Saints and in Memory of Victims Who Served to Save Our Fatherland' in Minsk.
- ▶ Memorial plaques in honour of Heroes of Belarus Andrei Nichiporchik and Nikita Kukonenko were unveiled in Lida, Baranovichi and Polotsk.
- ▶ A feature film dedicated to the feat of the Heroes of Belarus, military pilots Major Andrei Nichiporchik and Lieutenant Nikita Kukonenko, will be shot in Belarus. The film's working title is *One Sky for Two*. The filming is scheduled for 2025.
- ▶ Andrei Nichiporchik and Nikita Kukonenko have been permanently enrolled in the personnel lists of the 116th Guards Assault Unit.

At an altitude of about 50 metres, with incredible efforts, the crew sent the plane to the only point that was outside the residential buildings — an empty plot of land between apartment blocks and private houses. It took a little over a minute from the moment of the emergency to the aircraft crash.

Hundreds of Belarusians could have died on that day, but the brave pilots made an unequivocal decision — to take the plane away. Later, when decrypting the black box, a recording of the talk between Andrei Nichiporchik and Nikita Kukonenko was found. The last words were the flight supervisor's command, "Jump!" and the pilots' answer, "No! The city is below us!"

Viktor Khrenin, Defence Minister of the Republic of Belarus,

"What happened is irreversible, but the memory of the pilots and their heroic deed will forever remain in our hearts. The guys did not abandon the virtually uncontrollable aircraft and steered it away from residential buildings at the cost of their own lives. This made it possible to avoid the irreparable disaster. This deed shows that strong-minded and courageous people serve in our Armed Forces."

Galina Nichiporchik, Andrei Nichiporchik's mother,
"We did not raise him as a hero. We just taught him to live properly, like a conscientious human being. We taught him to be honest, fair, respect the elderly and love the Motherland, as we were taught in the Soviet years."

Sniper pilot Vladimir Nichiporchik, Andrei Nichiporchik's father,
"Young people should know why people act like that in critical situations. My son made the right choice, although very difficult for us."

Colonel Aleksandr Krivets, Commander of the 116th Guards Assault Aviation Base,
"I trained both of them, we performed flights. I flew with Nikita when he was still a cadet. In life, Andrei and Nikita were positive, smiling people and real masters of their craft. Andrei was a high-level professional as an instructor. Nikita also proved himself to be a good officer and pilot in a short period of service. Only people who loved life could sacrifice their lives to save other people. Our entire team accepted the award of the Hero of Belarus title to Andrei and Nikita with great pride for the guys and pain in our souls due to the 'posthumously' prefix."

Here it is that tiny green square among the dense residential development — the place where the Yak-130 pitched down with precision



Based on materials of sb.by, belta.by and Heroes of Belarus by Nikolai Machekin

The unemployment rate in Belarus, calculated according to the methodology of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), is steadily decreasing. For comparison, in 2016 this figure stood at 5.8 percent whereas in the first quarter of 2024 it fell to 3.3 percent. What ensured the positive dynamics?



Working for benefit of the country

Ensuring a high level of employment is a distinctive feature of Belarus

By Kristina Khilko

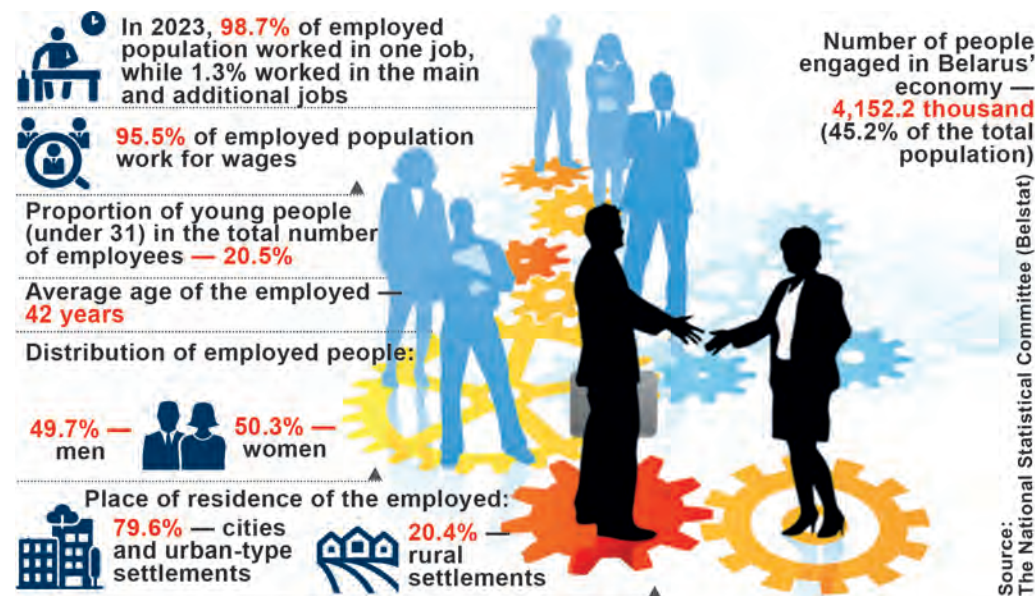
From IT to humanities

The echoes of lockdowns are still heard in the EU countries, and the consequences of inflationary shocks due to the disruption of supply chains make themselves felt. All this has taken its toll on the EU labour market. According to the ILO forecasts, the unemployment rate will continue to rise in Europe with a possibility of increased market imbalance, including staff shortage, a slowdown in labour productivity growth and a decrease in real income of the population against the inflation backdrop.

Belarus currently boasts a low unemployment rate. This figure is significantly higher in the European Union: Spain — 11.7 percent, Greece — 9.2 percent, Sweden — 8.2 percent. Political scientist Vadim Elfimov has noted that the unemployment rate in the West persists at an average of 10-11 percent, “It is generally three to four times higher than in Belarus. In our country, unemployment has been at the level of 3 percent for many years. We live in a socially oriented state, yet at the same time we do not abandon the market features of the economy. Turbulence happens, but thanks to the competent policy pursued in the country, it is under control.”

The expert is sure that if Western strategists had not imposed sectoral sanctions against Belarusian enterprises, our country’s unemployment rate would have been even lower,

“Belarusian industrial products are in demand around the world. However, Western markets are closed to us, which creates certain difficulties. Still, even against the background of the existing challenges, the unemployment in Belarus will tend to zero.”



Now Belarus is developing the Eurasian economic space and actively building the Union State. These steps will open up new markets. Raw materials are supplied to our country without any hindrances. The investment flow is fairly large, which contributes to the constant modernisation of domestic enterprises and ensures demand for their products.”

It seems that IT specialties will soon cease to be the most desirable. Today, global IT giants are massively cutting staff. According to the political scientist, one of the factors facilitating this situation is the accelerated transition to automation and increased use of artificial intelligence in solving typical and routine tasks. Some operations that previously required human participation can now be performed by a neural network — this allows reducing personnel costs and enhancing work efficiency.

“The world is returning to fundamental knowledge. A smart economy requires a specialist of the future to combine manual and mental labour. The humanitarian

sphere will develop, too. American society is technically armed. Yet, what has it come to? Their humanitarian sphere lags behind, social support is underdeveloped. We are witnessing a crisis there — riots, unrest, etc. The reason is that intellectual and spiritual development lag behind technical development. In order for us not to repeat that bitter experience, a lot of attention should be paid to the development of the humanitarian sphere,” Vadim Elfimov emphasised.

Job fairs and subsidies

According to Zhanna Chernyavskaya, deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, the Belarusian government helps to ensure the maximum possible employment of the population.

“The Constitution of our country guarantees the right to work to its citizens. Everyone can choose an activity that suits their abilities, education, and professional training. The state, in turn, provides support by ensuring the maximum possible employment of the population.”

Special attention is paid to taking care of the most vulnerable categories of citizens. Thus, reservation in employment is provided for orphans, young people under the age of 21 (first-time job seekers), the disabled and some other categories. After all, a difficult life situation, lack of experience, or loss of qualifications narrow the possibilities when searching for a suitable job vacancy,” the deputy clarified.

The parliamentarian also listed other measures aimed at involving citizens in the economy. A state employment service has been established in Belarus, which keeps records of job vacancies, registers the unemployed, organises paid community service, and provides free training and retraining opportunities to those who wish. Job fairs have proved to be effective since they directly connect applicants with employers — both in real-life communication and online.

“During meetings, unemployed people are explained in detail how they can turn a hobby into a business with the help of

TO THE POINT

First Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection Natalya Pavlyuchenko summed up the results of the 2nd National Youth Job Fair, which was held in Belarus at the end of April, “It is the second year that we have arranged it. About 2,800 employers offered more than 34,000 job vacancies in various fields of activity — services, trade, catering, industry, healthcare, construction.” Job fairs give young people an idea of how to earn money and what contribution everyone makes to the development of the country. “A total of 46,000 young people became participants in such a large-scale event. One in four of this number tentatively agreed on subsequent employment. Last year, over 28,000 young people took part in the job fair,” Natalya Pavlyuchenko specified.

state subsidies — that is to start entrepreneurial or craft activities. The amount of money provided for business development does not need to be returned, subject to fulfilment of conditions under the contract,” Zhanna Chernyavskaya pointed out.

In 2023, about 600 people received state subsidies to launch entrepreneurial and craft activities, and to provide services in agro-ecotourism.

According to the deputy, it is very important in this regard that the person is ready to take what they are given and leverage this opportunity, because high results are achieved through hard work and conscientious attitude to business, “It is necessary to appreciate everything that has been accumulated and established in our country over the years of independence. Look, large corporations in Germany are now massively cutting personnel, motivating their decision by high energy prices, a weakening economy, and inflation. Thus, Bosch has disclosed its plans to lay off 1,500 ‘extra’ employees this year. The transfer of production to other countries also contributes to unemployment growth. At the same time, against the backdrop of the ongoing crisis in the labour market, Germany is testing a four-day working week. In contrast, Belarus demonstrates care towards the employee not through words but through deeds.”

Wall of dependence

The Polish authorities are not independent in their decisions, which causes increasing discontent among the local population

By taking a Western position in promoting sanctions policy and pumping Ukraine with weapons, official Warsaw is leading to a serious aggravation of the internal situation. The protests of farmers, the closure of border checkpoints, mass demonstrations, and now the growing number of people fleeing the country, where the case of Polish judge Tomasz Szmydt who has asked for political asylum in Belarus has become the highest-profile one, are all links in a chain. What is our western neighbour going to?

By Piotr Petrovsky, political expert

Continued tantrum

Polish propaganda has for many years created an illusion that migration can take place only in one direction — to the countries of the collective West — due to the allegedly better living conditions there. The precedent with Polish judge Tomasz Szmydt has called into question the crudely made clichés that have been hammered into the heads of ordinary people for decades. This has clearly been not the first time that Poles have moved to Belarus for political reasons to seek permanent residence. However, their status as ordinary citizens gave Polish propaganda every opportunity to either ignore such cases or declare them marginal.

The situation with Judge Tomasz Szmydt, in contrast, has illustrated a completely different level of migration to Belarus. He is not an average citizen but a judge at the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Warsaw, whose level corresponds to the city judge of Minsk Region. Szmydt also headed the legal department at the Polish National Judicial Council. Moreover, the local authorities have already admitted that Szmydt, due to his position, had access to secret classified information concerning NATO, the EU, the European Space Agency and even Polish intelligence agencies, in particular the Internal Security Agency.

The high status of the judge is confirmed by the massive media campaign immediately launched against him. Various versions are being thrown into the media — from the dissident's allegedly large debts to issues with his mental health. Senior officials have joined in the denigration. Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski has already predicted that the 'troublemaker' will follow the fate of Emil Czecko, a Polish soldier who defected to the Belarusian side over the disagreement with his government's policies in the border refugee crisis that involved abuse and murder of migrants and refugees. Sikorski was joined by Defence Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz. According to him, if the fugitive 'chooses Belarus', it may well mean that 'he has been acting in Poland for years in someone's interests'.

Unlike Polish propaganda broadcasters, Judge Szmydt has explained the reasons for his departure to Belarus very explicitly. "I had to leave Poland primarily because of the political situation, the pressure that was exerted on me. In two or three months, I might have not been able to leave."

It is clear that Polish officials cannot recognise the motive of the fait accompli for political reasons.

Spy mania on the march

Polish intelligence services were immediately brought in the case of the voivodeship administrative judge. Poland's Internal Security Agency instantaneously began checking the volume of classified information that Judge Tomasz Szmydt had access to. It also became known that in the summer he was supposed to join the panel composition that deals with issues of refusal to grant access to classified information. Szmydt was expected to make a report on five cases brought against the head of the Internal Security Agency. This means that the trust in the judge on the part of the government system was high. Not only did he have access to classified information, but he also determined the level of access to it for certain officials.

The fear, confusion and shock of the Polish elites result in paranoid moods. Thus, Prime Minister Donald Tusk even called an unscheduled meeting of the Secret Services Council to discuss the issue of 'alleged Russian and Belarusian influence in the Polish power apparatus'.

Against the backdrop of the increased politically motivated flow of migrants from Poland to Belarus, the fence along the Belarus-Poland border built by Warsaw requires a look from a completely different perspective. Isn't its real goal, contrary to Polish propaganda, to counter migration — just not to Po-

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, "Warsaw is steadily increasing the number of the Armed Forces. By 2035, it is planned to increase them to 300,000 people while currently they have a little over 190,000. I cannot help but comment on that. Poor Poland actually lacks labour force and has more than enough civil problems to solve. What kind of battles are they dreaming of? Who will provide for them?"
During the meeting of the 7th Belarusian People's Congress, on April 25th, 2024



Farmers' protests, closure of border crossings, Mass demonstrations, People fleeing the country.

land but, vice versa, from Poland? Such a statement may be based on the logic of events itself. In contrast to Belarus that has introduced a visa-free regime, the Polish side has closed almost all checkpoints on the border with Belarus, having made the border crossing conditions unbearable at the only remaining checkpoint, artificially reduced the number of cars allowed through with only one purpose — to discourage its citizens from visiting Belarus.

Vector of relations

Warsaw's current policy is not in line with national interests. Thus, the direct losses of entrepreneurs of Podlaskie Voivodeship alone due to the closure of all border crossings with Belarus amounted to €124.5 million in 2023. However, the local authorities are ready to compensate only z15 million, equivalent to €1 million. This is a calculation of just direct losses, excluding indirect ones.

A natural question arises — what interests is official Warsaw guided by, making decisions that lead to losses for domestic producers? From the standpoint of rational logic and interests of the state, open borders and good neighbourliness could stimulate not only cross-border trade, tourism, but also transit. Most importantly, Poland would have saved the money that has gone to militarise the border zone today.

However, the western neighbour has chosen the path of escalation, which leads their own citizens and the region as a whole to a loss. Polish leadership taking decisions to its own detriment makes everyone question the real sovereignty and independence of the country. Tomasz Szmydt, being aware of the nitty-gritty of Polish politics from the inside, has lifted the veil in this regard.

"If we talk about Poland's politics, it is not completely independent. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany have a great influence."

These revelations give an insight into the essence of Polish problems. Local elites are guided not by national, but by the Euro-Atlantic interests of Washington and Brussels. Therefore, Poland acts not as a sovereign and independent state but as an instrument of American and European Union policy towards Belarus and Russia. Consequently, all the downsides of such actions fall on the shoulders of Polish taxpayers while American and European Union corporations reap the cream. The paradox consists in the fact that a shift in Warsaw's policy towards Belarus and Russia may occur only when Poland gets its sovereignty back. The real independence of this country can come only after Warsaw has abandoned a single-vector, exclusively Western-oriented policy, and has moved to a multi-vector one — let us say, by the examples of Hungary or Türkiye. However, in order to do this, Warsaw needs to have the political will which it currently lacks. The symbol of restoration of its independence is already available. Just as the destruction of the Berlin Wall became a sign of German unification, so the demolition of the Polish fence on our borders will mean the restoration of Poland's sovereignty and its return to a policy of good neighbourliness.

Judge Szmydt, "I am apprehensive about the actions of Polish, American, British and Ukrainian intelligence services"

The major weapon of Westerners against their peoples has been found — the peoples of Europe are intimidated, threatened, blackmailed, or imprisoned. Sometimes political undesirables just disappear or get in accidents. A Polish dissident, a judge from Warsaw, Tomasz Szmydt, has given an insight into the methods of Western democracy.

By Lyudmila Gladkaya

— You have asked the President of Belarus for political asylum. The Head of State has told reporters that he will definitely consider it. How do you feel about this?

— I would like to thank the President. When I heard his words, I felt better, there is hope now. I believe that the Head of State will allow me to stay here, in your country. I would like to work towards normalising relations between our countries. After all, there were no problems between Belarusian and Polish peoples for many years. The border territories used to co-operate, there was an economic exchange... Now, however, the Polish government wants to destroy all of this.

— At your request, Aleksandr Lukashenko has instructed to provide your protection in order to prevent any attempt at your physical neutralisation. Who are you afraid of? Do you feel safe now that you are already being guarded?

— If the President has said that I am safe, that is the way it is. As it turned out I can harm many people in the Polish government and not only. I am apprehensive about the actions of Polish, American, British and Ukrainian intelligence services. There is great danger coming from them. But I am just saying common truth that our peoples — Polish, Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian — can live in peace and harmony. It had been like that for many years. However, it turns out that these simple, obvious words have caused a real threat to the person who is talking about it. Then, when I started receiving information from friends that the special services were preparing and fabricating documents against me in order to shut me in prison, it was already the last moment, the last chance to leave Poland before they included me in the travel ban list.

— Why do the Polish authorities regard you as a threat? Why are they afraid of you?

— This is a very interesting question. I ask myself this question, too. Who could I be an obstacle to? I have been meditating on that, thinking about it... The first to speak about this was Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, who has a very interesting biography. I do not want to accuse anyone, especially without firm proof. Yet, if you just look at Sikorski's biography from the outside, it seems to me that the special services should go after him, as well.

— Aleksandr Lukashenko has called you a courageous man when talking to journalists. You knew what was waiting for you, and you decided to go ahead anyway. How do you see your future, including career-wise?

— I would really like to thank the President for his words. I have always known that he is a wonderful politician. It turns out that President Lukashenko is also a very good person. Of course, I would like to engage in politics, geopolitics, and talk about how mechanisms work, including in the West, and the work of media. I would like to talk about a totalitarian system where democracy is sheer appearance, just a beautiful wrapper. I think it will be very interesting. This is actually a dictatorship under the guise of democracy.

— What about Belarus in this regard? They say we have a dictatorship, a harsh regime of Lukashenko...

— In my opinion, Belarus is a democratic country. A simple example — I asked BelTA journalists if I could speak with them. 'You are welcome', they said, no problem. 'If you wish, we can provide a studio. Perhaps some journalists from other agencies will come.' To be honest, I did not expect other journalists to also join. It was quite stressful for me.

— In Poland, you have been called a spy, a traitor, and the Polish court has lifted your immunity and allowed to arrest you and prosecute. I still cannot understand what you violated. You crossed the border on legitimate grounds. There are no facts or evidence that Belarus or Russia recruited you. No evidence has been provided that you were spying against your country...

— This is how Polish democracy works. Why do you need any evidence? Why would you need any information at all? Here is one example — Polish politician Slawomir Nowak spent about six months in prison without charges, without any evidence. Six months! And this is for one of Poland's most important politicians. After the evidence had been fabricated, with the involvement of Polish and Ukrainian intelligence services, Nowak was also charged with working in the interests of another country. Later, the witnesses in the case either retracted their testimony or admitted that they had been forced to slander.

— You know, this sounds like some kind of spy mania in Europe. Why do they see spies everywhere?

— First of all, this activity is aimed at people who have their own opinions. A court case may be prepared against them, an accident may be initiated, they may be just eliminated...

— This is probably done against people who not only have their opinion but whose opinion is important to society and the people.

— Yes, it is specifically aimed at preventing from expressing your opinion or sharing it with the public. After all, Poles have a good attitude to Belarusians, and they want to live in peace and harmony.

— That is, in Warsaw's opinion, you are a criminal whereas the Belarusian fugitives, advocates of the white-red-white (BChB) flag [traditional for the Belarusian opposition and associated with Nazi's accomplices during the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War] who defected to Poland having become defendants in criminal cases of a bloody 2020 coup d'état attempt, terrorism,

and extremism — where solid and fact-based evidence was presented to journalists and society for the charges — are portrayed as white and fuzzy 'regime victims'. Why doesn't Poland condemn them?

— First of all, this is disrespect for the legal system of Belarus. The second point is support for extremist actions. People receive financial support, support from special services, security, apartments, and houses for that. They get an opportunity to demonstrate their views on the streets of Warsaw and in Poland as a whole in order to deal a direct blow to Belarus. Why? Perhaps this is because a Maidan [type of protests associated with the mass anti-government uprising in the centre of Kiev, Ukraine, orchestrated and financed by the US and European powers that resulted in coup d'état] staged with the active participation of American and Polish special services failed in Belarus. They did not succeed in reaching their goal despite the imposed sanctions, either. We see that Belarus is developing, co-operating with China and other countries. Therefore, they are trying out other methods.

— The President of Belarus has called you a Polish patriot. In your native country, however, which you served honestly for so many years in a high position, you have been appointed a scoundrel and a traitor. What do you have to say to the Polish authorities?

— A Polish patriot can be a friend for Belarusians. The government of Warsaw sees a discrepancy in that, though. I would tell them the following — dear gentlemen from Warsaw, dear gentlemen in power, from the government of Warsaw, start to finally implement what is for the benefit of the Polish people and not what is for the benefit of Washington or London.

— Aleksandr Lukashenko has mentioned that he talked with Vladimir Putin about your situation. In other words, we see that this story has gone beyond the Belarus-Poland relations and acquired a global scale. The Belarusian side is talking openly, while Poland is probably transmitting data, consulting with the United States, Britain, Germany how to proceed with you. Doesn't that scare you?

— The fact that President Lukashenko has talked with Putin inspires me with hope. They are great politicians. As for Western politicians, they are obviously not up to the mark and do not have such class. There are no good politicians there. I do not want to go into details talking about Western politicians; otherwise I would have to use an ugly word.

— You know, people have picked the right word in relation to current European politicians — time-servers, temporary figures. Apparently, they expect to be in politics for a short period of time and therefore they are trying to secure personal benefits now, as I think. Thus, today they do not care at all about what happens to their countries afterwards.

— They provide for their own interests, for sure, including for the time when their political careers are over. A good example is the visit of Andrzej Duda and Donald Tusk to Washington. President Duda is in favour of dragging Poland into the war, because he will surely receive certain bonuses from the U.S. side for this. The joint visit of the president and the prime minister does not comply with political protocols. However, according to the Polish Constitution, in order to send Polish troops abroad, the

Szmydt, "It is necessary to speak, thanks to Belarusian journalists. This is also a kind of security guarantee for me. After all, it is not so easy to eliminate a person who is in the public eye."

Szmydt, "If someone in Poland even thinks that it might be worth resuming the dialogue with Belarus — perhaps start presenting such ideas in some unofficial media — this person will be immediately eliminated."

corresponding decision is to be made by the president at the request of the prime minister. Therefore, Biden needed them both to come together. If there is no statement by the prime minister, the president will have nothing to consider in relation to the deployment of Polish troops abroad. This is how it happens. These politicians are pursuing solely their own ambitions and not something that would benefit Poland. They are not bothered about the future of the country in the least.

— Speaking with reporters about you, the President of Belarus has noted that your colleagues treat you well. How do Poles, people who currently hold high positions in Poland, feel about Belarus? Perhaps they are the future political elite who will make important decisions for Poland independently of the USA and Britain?

— If we talk about my friends, their attitude towards Belarus, Belarusians, and Russia is not negative. Reasonable people understand that our countries need to co-operate, and that Russia, in fact, was forced to launch a special operation. Yet, if we talk about politicians, I do not know to what extent they realise these things. I have a feeling that these people are being stimulated from the inside, and they do not see what is going on. They act in the interests of others — the USA, Great Britain — either through compromising material or through money. It may well be that some of these people are not quite intelligent. Perhaps they are just unreasonable and fail to understand what results such a policy can cause. Well, we also have another situation. If someone in Poland even thinks that it might be worth resuming the dialogue with Belarus — perhaps start presenting such ideas in some unofficial media — this person will be immediately eliminated. This is absolute nonsense. Even Americans and Russians maintain unofficial communication channels. Poland does not.

— Is there any hope that Polish politicians will someday regain their prudence and will stop dragging their people into war, stop putting up various barriers, and will do everything for peace and normal relations with Belarus?

— For that, Poland should have a democratic system, but it does not work in Poland. I think the approaching economic crisis, for example, can become such shock therapy — and this applies not only to Poland but to the entire European Union. Maybe only then, it will cause some changes and push to the resumption of normal relations with Belarus and Russia.

— By the way, do you think you could declare your candidacy for the post of head of Poland?

— So far, yes, but it is not unlikely that I may be stripped of my citizenship after some time. If they come up with another criminal case against me based on fabricated documents, it will be impossible for me to run for the presidency from a legal point of view. I did not even expect that my arrival in Belarus, my statements at the press conference would spark such panic in Warsaw.

— And the case was opened really quickly. Hardly had you switched on the microphone when they declared you a spy. It is a very popular criminal charge in the EU.

— Yes, it is.
— Tell me one thing. There was information that the Polish leadership was going to go to the border to find out how you crossed it. Is that true?

— Yes, I have read about that, too. It is true. Prime Minister Donald Tusk wrote about it on his official resource. However, I would not refuse, with the permission of President Lukashenko, to invite Donald Tusk to Belarus so that we could talk here. Why is he only going to the border? After all, Belarus is an open, friendly country.

— We also have a visa-free policy, remember.
— Yes, Tusk will not even need to apply for a visa.
— There is no reason for Tusk to be afraid of coming here. Journalists will be working, and everything will be transparent, perhaps even on air.

— Sure, we can talk openly here.
— The representatives of Poland who work in our country have not expressed a wish to meet with you so far, have they?

— No, they have not yet, without a clear reason.
— You are actively meeting with journalists now. We asked you for an interview literally in the morning, you agreed, and now we are already talking in the afternoon. You are pretty open and approachable. You are not hiding. Why?

— It is important to talk openly about some things, about how democracy does not function in the West, about the failure of democracy in Poland. It is necessary to speak, thanks to your journalists. This is also a kind of security guarantee for me. After all, it is not so easy to eliminate a person who is in the public eye.

Szmydt, "I think the approaching economic crisis can become shock therapy that may cause some changes and push to the resumption of normal relations with Belarus and Russia — and this applies not only to Poland but to the entire European Union."

Everyone has their own allele

Finding genetically compatible stem cell donors for Belarusians may require travelling the whole world

Hematopoietic stem cells save lives of people with oncohematological diseases. According to international statistics, stem cell transplantation helps the patient achieve sustained remission in almost 80 percent of cases. This is the reason why the International Bone Marrow Transplant Registry (IBMTR) and the International Stem Cell Registry (ISCR) were created, with approximately 80 million people from Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and America registered as donors.

Belarus has a similar national registry with about 100,000 donors. This is a big number, yet it all depends on the human phenotype, the analogue of which sometimes has to be looked for in different parts of the world.



By Yelena Basikirskaya

Unique code

The National Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant Registry is maintained at the Republican Centre for Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplantation. This bank helps to find donors not only for Belarusians but also for foreigners. As a rule, those who wish to share their cells are between 18 and 50 years old and in good health. The selection for transplantation is based on the compatibility of phenotypes — this is where the main bottleneck lies. Belarus is located in the centre of Europe, therefore our phenotypes are mixed. According to Yelena Glaz, a transfusiologist at the Republican Centre for Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplantation,

“Belarusians have Russian, Polish, German, Ukrainian, Japanese, Chinese and even African blood in their family history. The allele — in other words, the code — is determined thanks to HLA typing, which is carried out in three laboratories in our country. The combination of alleles makes the human phenotype.”

Each country has its own unique phenotypes. Thus, the A*01:02 allele is a common phenomenon in Belarus, while A*36:01 is rare. What is unusual for our country will be the norm in another area. Alleles have millions, if not billions, of variations. Phenotypes may not match even in children from the same family, because they received different combinations of genes from their parents.”

Time is ticking

About 300 new patients in our country need stem cell transplantation every year. In some diseases, it is possible to use the patient's own cells, which makes the situation easier. Stem cells are then extracted and frozen using cryopreservation while

the patient undergoes chemotherapy. About half of those in need of a transplant are children, but if the child's phenotype coincides with that of the adult, the age difference does not matter. Belarusian doctors can apply to a medical centre for stem cells in any country and even on any continent.

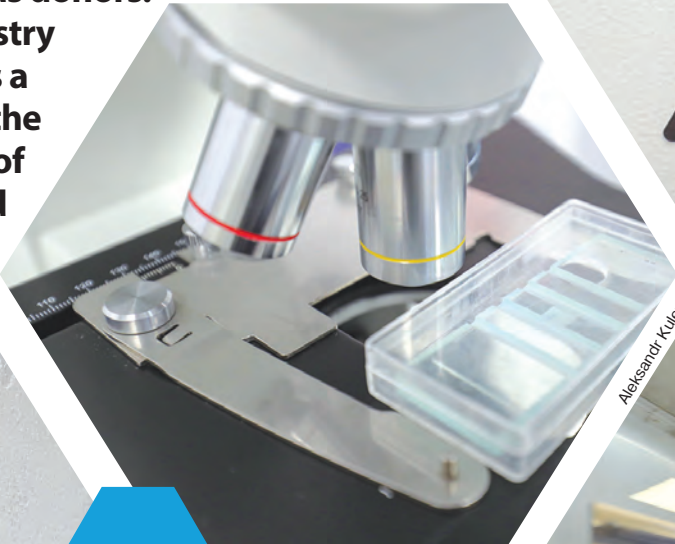
How does it work? Belarusian specialists directly contact the centre to which the donor belongs. Foreign colleagues examine the donor and send the test results to Minsk. If everything is in order, the donor is prepared for the sampling procedure. Meanwhile, the Belarusian side is devising the logistics. The point is that stem cells are only viable for 72 hours at a certain temperature. Therefore, they must be delivered to Belarus and transplanted within this time.

The delivery can be arranged by plane or across the land border. Yelena Glaz shared the details,

“We notify the customs and border control in advance as to when and who will transport stem cells, and attach a package of documents. If the logistics route is complex, we ask the courier company which has the right to transport biomaterial to deliver it, for example, from London to Vilnius, from where we collect it and bring to Minsk on our own.”

For each patient — €18,000

The courier is met in Vilnius by Yelena Glaz. The fastest way to get to Minsk is by bus — it takes six hours to reach the capital of Belarus. In contrast, when going by car, there is a risk of standing in the line at the border for a much longer



Aleksandr Kulevsky



time. Immediately upon arrival, stem cells are taken to the operating room, where the patient is already

prepared and waiting for the transplant. The delivery time has increased after the closure of the air boundaries, while not all ground checkpoints have the right to process documents for stem cells. However, despite this hindrance, the team of Belarusian specialists manages to complete delivery and transplantation within an average of 48 hours, out of 72 hours of cell viability.

Sometimes it happens that the first sampling from the donor is not enough, in which case a second one must be carried out. This complicates rapid transportation, but still does not make it impossible. Belarusian doctors have even developed a 60-hour route from the US medical centre to the Belarusian one.

“I transfer the donor material in a special thermal container with refrigerating elements,” explained the transfusi-

ologist. “When filled, it weighs about 7 kilogrammes. Stem cells are placed in numbered sealed bags. All personal information is encoded so that only designated people could relate the donor to the patient. Our courier who has a Schengen visa travels abroad several times a month. There is no time to see the world, though. After all, the viability of cells is limited.” Meanwhile, Yelena Glaz travels a lot in her free time and has visited almost every European country.

The donor material for one patient, including delivery from Europe, costs our country an average of €18,000. The Belarusian citizen does not need to pay anything for the stem cell therapy. The main task for the patient is to recover.

“The major task for doctors is to choose an appropriate donor despite the unique phenotype,” concluded Yelena Glaz. “Thus, we have recently received a request from a patient from Sudan, where there is no stem cell transplant registry at all. We often provide stem cell therapy to patients from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and other countries where stem cell transplantation is not as developed as in Belarus. We try to help everyone.”

IN SEARCH OF CELLS

Some people's phenotypes can be so unique and rare that it is hard to find donors for them.

In order to perform a stem cell transplant, the donor's phenotype must correspond to that of the recipient. Phenotypes can be common and rare, when there is less than one percent of a certain set of alleles in the country. It depends on the genetics inherited from parents. Thus, the probability of finding a donor for a person who has an African in their family history is fairly low in Belarus. In this case, welcome to the international registry.

555 minutes in the sky

“Touching clouds is possible!” Belarusians have set off on an aerial adventure in a hot air balloon wicker basket and set a record

The crew came out with a flying gait in early March and disappeared into the veil of mist behind the hot air balloon, for as many as 9 hours 15 minutes. Instructor pilot, lecturer at the Academy of Civil Aviation Dmitry Bondarenkov and pilot Aleksandr Povshko lifted one of Belarus’ largest aircraft over Minsk Region and became the first national record holders for the flight duration on a hot air balloon. What you need to be prepared for in order to spend so much time in a small basket, how long it took the guys to make a plan and implement a grandiose idea, and what difficulties they encountered in the air — below are the captivating details of the offbeat flight.

By Irina Lukashik

A fixed idea

Senitsa [agrotown in Minsk District], early morning. Imagine a sharp noise, a flame from a burner and only two degrees Celsius on a thermometer. Nevertheless, March 9th became the perfect day for the first record, according to Aleksandr Povshko, “We had been going to this for about four months, thinking over the route and waiting for the right weather. Winter would be ideal for us in terms of using the least amount of gas. So the weather conditions were not the most suitable — the average wind speed that day was about 15 kilometres per hour, which is three times more than what we needed. We did not back down, though!”

The record holders started at a speed of about 18-20 kilometres per hour, which is even faster than they had originally planned. When they reached a height of 450 metres, the wind was finally on their side — Aleksandr and Dmitry caught the necessary 3 kilometres per hour. While the experienced pilots were deftly coping with the controls and examining the surroundings of Minsk Region, cars passing below were stopping to capture the beauty in the sky. A team on the ground was closely watching the passengers of the wicker basket. The guys were in touch with Aleksandr and Dmitry for all 555 minutes by accompanying them throughout the entire route and transmitting the coordinates over the radio. They were also ready to assist in the event of an emergency landing. “No pilot is an island, as they say,” pilot Yekaterina Ivashina smiled.

“Each flight is always a team effort. This is especially true when setting a record, which largely depends on the concerted action of each team member. The balloon flies in a straight line, while roads follow their own trajectories. That is why in parallel with Aleksandr and Dmitry, we also calculated the route.”

10 mugs of tea and 700 litres of gas

The balloon envelope that the whole team deployed at the start was actually commensurate with more than 80 trucks expressed in cubic metres. The pilots took the most necessary things

with them to the basket designed for 12 people — first of all, 16 gas cylinders for 40 and 55 litres. “Not much gas is needed to launch the balloon, 20 litres is enough,” said Dmitry. “As soon as we started, the consumption was obviously higher since the basket was filled to the maximum. When the gas was used up in the process, the mass decreased. According to our calculations, one gas cylinder was expected to last for 30 minutes but in fact it lasted even longer.”

Aleksandr shared his impressions when answering the question if they had got frozen in nine hours, “This is what the guys on the ground asked us about every hour. Of course, we had been worried about that. But to be honest, I only recalled that we were in the open air after four hours of flight. I told Dima, ‘In principle, we could already take out thermo mugs with sandwiches...’ Only then did we get ourselves tea and coffee.

We also took thermoses with boiling water.”

In order not to freeze at bird’s-eye height, the pilots got dressed as for winter before departure — thermal underwear, ski trousers, jackets, hats, gloves. However, due to adrenaline, the guys almost did not notice cool weather and besides, time flew by quickly. “We did not sit still. The balloon has no electronics or autopilot, unlike airplanes. So we controlled the balloon in turn, heated the air in the envelope to maintain the balloon at a certain height, checked the coordinates, monitored the number of gas cylinders, analysed the landing point,” Dmitry clarified.

What about a keepsake photo? Tablets and phones were mostly used to open special applications needed for the flight, explained Aleksandr. But sure, they did not remain without photos and videos!

Focus on altitude

A huge hot air balloon easily lifts off the ground and soars into the sky — romance! This is the opinion of everyone who has not yet experienced the heavenly euphoria of flying in a balloon.

For experienced pilots, in contrast, this has become a common thing. According to Aleksandr, waiting out ‘non-flying times’ is a challenge of its own. Twelve years ago, he could not even imagine that aeronautics would captivate him so much. The pilot admitted that he was not one of those who dreamed of the sky since childhood, and got a profession of power engineer.

“My story with the heavenly sphere started by chance. My friends once offered me to participate in launching a hot air balloon, that is to lay the envelope out on the ground, inflate it, and put it up. You know, I really liked all the inner workings. So I completed theory and practice at the Belarusian State Aviation Academy, and flew my first 16 hours. There were a lot of emotions! I realised them only the next day, though. Then I understood that it is possible to touch clouds.”

Over the years of their aerial experience, Aleksandr and Dmitry have made ascents not only over Belarus. Dmitry has been studying nature and cities from up high for more than 20 years, he flew about 1,300 hours and even conquered the Alps. Aleksandr has about 600 hours of flying time under his belt and the highest ascent of 2,400 metres. The pilots’ careers do not stop there as the crew strives to soar to new heights.

“The day when the Guinness Book of Records record holder, chief expert of the national register of Belarus’ Book of Records Kirill Shimko awarded us with a certificate on record registration in Belarus’ Book of Records after the flight left the most unforgettable impression,” Aleksandr noted. “I am glad we caught our wind! Everything turned out even better than we had planned. Now we are confidently going after new records. We are now thinking about taking the highest altitude in a hot air balloon. This requires a lot of preparation and medical examinations ahead, but it is worth it.”



RECORD

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9

Secrets of cities' coats of arms

Seemingly innocent animals placed on coats of arms actually hide the centuries-old secrets of Belarusian cities. In order to unravel unconventional mysteries, it is necessary to set out on a journey across the country.

By Sofia Arsenyeva

Distinguish between grey and red

If you ask the residents of Mstislavl [city in the east of Belarus] what animal is portrayed on their city's coat of arms, some will say it is a wolf while others will argue it is a fox. One thing can be said for sure — the animal is of a rich red colour. Why? The point is that red has always been associated with beauty. Mstislavl is considered one of the ancient Belarusian cities, which was founded by Vladimir Monomakh's grandson Rostislav Mstislavich. Tourists will definitely love it here — spectacular knight festivals are held on picturesque Zamkovaya mountain in the summer, and



local museums feature unique artifacts from a thousand years ago. The ancient streets of the city are studded with temples, churches, monuments to famous countrymen. One of them, Pyotr Mstislavets, is the closest associate of the first printer, Ivan Fyodorov. Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, also happened to visit this place. The empress stayed in Mstislavl overnight on her way to Taurida [the old name of the peninsula of Crimea]. It is believed that it was at her behest that a fox appeared on the coat of arms of the city, which has by now transformed into a wolf.



A sculptural composition of buffoons and a bear — the Smorgon landmark

Dance with a bear

Smorgon [city in Belarus' Grodno Region] was famous throughout Europe in the 17th-19th centuries for its 'Bear Academy'. Local gypsies trained wild animals so skilfully that the latter could dance with a lady, and even drink champagne Brüderschaft. Smart bears from dense Belarusian forests were awaited at fairs in Paris and Rome as the dearest guests. That is why the clubfoot bear with a tambourine has long been an unspoken symbol of the town. Nowadays, bears do not roam freely the streets of Smorgon. One has settled on the city's coat of arms, though. In addition, the memory of the unique academy was immortalised in a sculptural composition — a shaggy big bear dancing to the accompaniment of two buffoons. This is a favourite place for tourists to take selfies.



'Boatman' — a monument to the first settler hunter and his tame lynx in Gomel

Sail across the river with a lynx

According to a legend, a wild cat from Belarusian Polesie [a unique area of swamps, peat bogs and marshy lakes in Gomel Region] once accompanied a traveller on a boat, who actually gave the name to the city of Gomel. He was sailing across the foggy Sozh river, followed by other travellers. When his boat struck aground, he began to shout, "Go! Mel ['shallow water' from Russian]!"

The lynx is the symbol of the city. It shows off not only on the coat of arms, but also on sign plates and souvenirs. It was embodied in genre sculptures on the streets. Meanwhile, this beautiful predator with tassels on its ears lives in Belarusian forests. It does not look for meetings with people, but is captured by camera traps all the time.



Spot an invisible lion

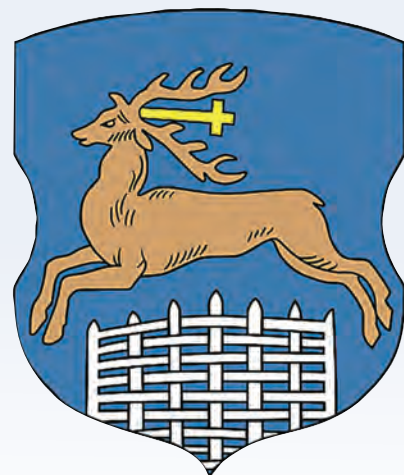
It is a curious paradox that the king of the hot jungle appeared on the coat of arms of a Belarusian northern city. According to the observations of weather forecasters, the absolute minimum temperature — minus 41.5 degrees Celsius — was recorded in Gorodok District in 1940. Every winter, this place is the first in the country to meet the cold Arctic air. On the plus side, locals have the opportunity to occasionally admire the northern lights. What does the lion have to do with this? The majestic animal appeared on the coat of arms back in the 16th century since it was believed that the inhabitants of this region were brave, strong and fearless. Well, just like lions in nature!



Race with a deer

The coat of arms of Grodno features not only a noble animal but also a cross between its antlers. Why? This is because it is not an ordinary deer, but the deer of Saint Hubert — a famous hunter of the 8th century. He became a priest and gave up hunting after a deer presumably helped him get out of the forest after a storm. St. Hubert is considered the patron saint of hunters, and there were a lot of them among the residents of Grodno.

In 1540, when the city was granted a coat of arms, it was surrounded by thick forests inhabited by a lot of ungulates. However, in the 20th century, hunters overdid it — the species disappeared from the territory of Belarus. Hubert would obviously not approve that! Now experts are engaged in restoring the population of this graceful animal.



They fought and got it

Ten Belarusian wrestlers have secured tickets to the Paris 2024 Olympics amid uncertainty over whether they will be allowed to compete at the Games

In terms of the total number of Olympic medals won during the sovereign times, the Belarusian national wrestling team is second only to representatives of diverse and multifaceted track and field athletics. The courtiers of the queen of sports managed to clinch 15 awards at seven Olympic Games, while turnover and suplex masters secured 14 awards. True, Belarusian wrestlers have not won a single gold medal so far; therefore, the vacancy of the main hero remains open. Taking into account the fact that Belarusian track and field athletes have no opportunity to demonstrate their skills and contend for medals at the Paris 2024 Olympics since World Athletics has taken one of the most irreconcilable positions among all international federations and refused flatly to allow Belarusian track and field athletes to participate in any world or European competitions, and the wrestlers are planning to head to the banks of the Seine river with a pretty impressive composition, the medal balance may swing in their direction in the very near future.

By Sergei Kanashits

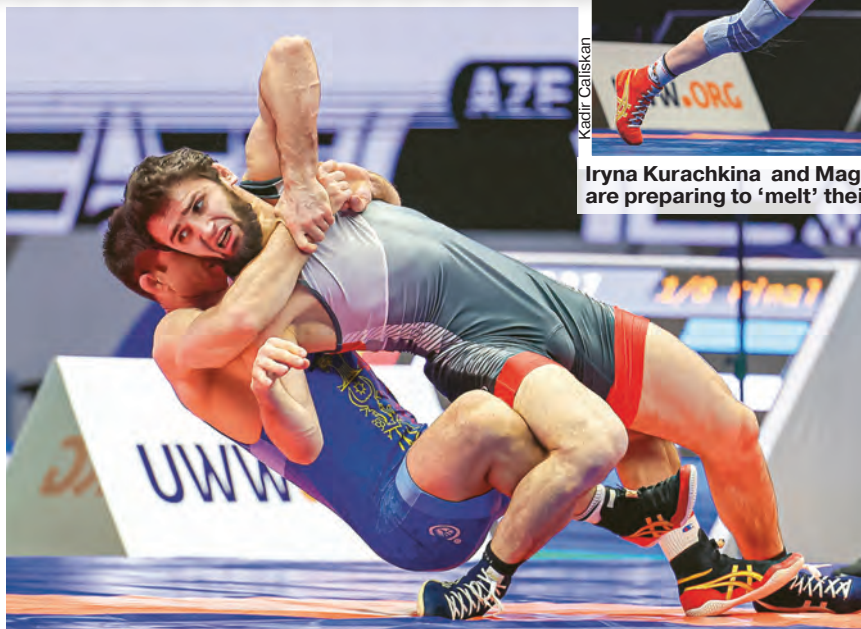
Hard-to-get tickets

The journey to Paris is going to be nothing less than offbeat, not only from the point of view of logistics but also in terms of other aspects. How, when and through which hubs Belarusian athletes will get to the Olympic capital will have to be decided as the action progresses. It is important to figure out the main thing — who will actually go to compete at the once major four-year starts, which have now turned from a bright sports festival into a buffoonish political farce? Winning an Olympic licence for Belarusians under the conditions where practically nothing is allowed, the national flag and anthem are banned, there is no opportunity to carefully plan a training and competitive process, nerves are stretched to the breaking point, and confusion reigns in the head is half the battle. There is still a bewildering International Olympic Committee (IOC), which will personally analyse the dossier of each Belarusian Olympic contender and deliver its verdict. That means that IOC officials can literally pull any Belarusian athlete off the tram to Paris even if they have secured a coveted ticket, without explaining the reason. So far the situation is like this.

In wrestling, Belarus has as many as 10 licences — four in freestyle, three in women's wrestling and in Greco-Roman style each. In weightlifting, our athletes have clinched four quotas; in canoeing and kayaking, and in swimming — three each; in rowing and trampolining — two each; in taekwondo, shooting and cycling — one each. As for wrestling, the secured number of quotas is not a record one, there used to be more. Thus, in the first ever 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Belarus was represented by the national wrestling team of 15 athletes. By the way, the richest medal harvest so far was collected there — four awards! In Sydney, 14 Belarusian wrestlers stepped on the carpet, in Athens — 10. It is in 2004 that women's wrestling was introduced to the Olympic programme, where the only Belarusian freestyle wrestler, Olga Khilko, took 6th place. Nine of our wrestlers fought for medals in Beijing, 11 — in London, eight — in Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo.

BELARUSIAN WRESTLERS IN OLYMPIC STANDINGS

Atlanta 1996 — 4 medals: Sergey Lishtvan, Aleksandr Pavlov (Greco-Roman), Aleksey Medvedev (freestyle) — silver; Valery Tsilent (Greco-Roman) — bronze.
 Sydney 2000 — 1 medal: Dmitry Debelka (Greco-Roman) — bronze.
 Athens 2004 — 1 medal: Viachaslau Makaranka (Greco-Roman) — bronze.
 Beijing 2008 — 2 medals: Murad Gaidarov (freestyle) — silver; Mikhail Semyonov (Greco-Roman) — bronze.
 London 2012 — 0 medals: five athletes competed for bronze but all of them lost to their rivals.
 Rio de Janeiro 2016 — 3 medals: Maryia Mamashuk (women's) — silver; Javid Hamzatau (Greco-Roman) — bronze; Ibragim Saidov (freestyle) — bronze.
Tokyo 2020 — 3 medals: Iryna Kurachkina (women's) — silver; Magomedkhabib Kadimagomedov (freestyle) — silver; Vanesa Kaladzinskaya (women's) — bronze.



Kadir Galiskan

Iryna Kurachkina and Magomedkhabib Kadimagomedov are preparing to 'melt' their Tokyo silver into Paris gold

Paris is not for tourists

The Olympic guiding principle stating that it is not about winning but about taking part is not relevant today. As Belarus' President stressed, "Those who have qualified and are going to the Olympics in a neutral status must show their mettle and outperform their opponents." According to the current time, one needs to bend every effort in order to snatch their piece of the cake. Therefore, everyone who goes to compete at the Paris Olympics should be deeply aware — their goal is not to take a tour of the Eiffel Tower but to win a medal. The Belarusian national wrestling team obviously has no tourists and everyone is capable of achieving a lot. A Tokyo silver medalist, freestyle

wrestler Magomedkhabib Kadimagomedov is going to Paris for revenge — he is only interested in the championship title. Aryan Tsiutryn, a brisk, small, but very angry wrestler from Yakutia who chose our country as his sporting homeland, dreams of a medal. Belarusian heavyweight wrestlers Aliaksandr Hushtyn and Dzianis Khramiankou will undoubtedly fight for Olympic medals with all their might. The same refers to our unparalleled medalists of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Iryna Kurachkina and Vanesa Kaladzinskaya — they are virtually capable of stopping a galloping horse and entering the burning hut. Veranika Ivanova is not so titled yet but she is definitely not the timid type, either.



Kiryl Maskevich is the happy owner of the Olympic licence



Onward and upward!

A very promising trio in terms of results is preparing to storm Paris in Greco-Roman wrestling. The most experienced is Kiryl Maskevich, 26 years old. He is the World Cup winner, the winner of the world and European championships, an incredibly technical and explosive wrestler. Pavel Glinchuk is 23, and he is still a junior by the wrestling standards. He is known as a fast, gifted and very persistent wrestler. By the way, Glinchuk performs in the super heavyweight category, although he clearly falls short of it in terms of kilogrammes. This may actually be a plus for him as he compensates for the lack of power with excellent manoeuvrability and dexterity. In the decisive battle for the right to be in Paris at the recent European qualification, Glinchuk defeated 39-year-old Estonian Heiki Nabi, who became world champion in 2006, at the time when our Pavel was a child. Abubakar Khaslakhana, the Belarusian 20-year-old star and an incredible talent, deserves a special mention. His main gift is the ability to work hard, although God also endowed the guy with great physical abilities. Therefore, onward and upward!

ARENA

● Alina Harnasko won five awards at international tournament in Dubai

At the UAE Gymnastika Solo Cup 2024 international rhythmic gymnastics tournament held in Dubai, the leader of the Belarusian team, Alina Harnasko, clinched medals in each type of the programme. The Belarusian won silver in exercises with the ball and clubs, and became the bronze medalist in exercises with the hoop and the ribbon. In addition, Harnasko showed the second result in the all-around, the first being Anna Popova from Russia. Russian Lala Kramarenko rounded out the top three. Anastasiia Salos, a representative of Belarus, won bronze in the ball exercise. More than 700 rhythmic gymnasts from 23 countries performed at the tournament.

● Aryna Sabalenka lost in the final of WTA-1000 tournament in Rome

In the 2024 Italian Open final, the Belarusian tennis player lost to Poland's Iga Świątek (WTA: 1) — 2:6, 3:6. Despite the fact that during the tournament, the Belarusian had to fight not only with her rivals but also with back pain, Aryna Sabalenka defeated Katie Volynets from the USA (WTA: 109) (4:6, 6:3, 6:2), Ukrainian tennis players Dayana Yastremska (WTA: 33) (6:4, 6:2) and Elina Svitolina (WTA: 19) (4:6, 6:1, 7:6), Jelena Ostapenko from Latvia (WTA: 10) (6:2, 6:4) and Daniel Collins from the USA (WTA: 15) (7:5, 6:2). However, she failed to cope with Iga Świątek, who has gained a phenomenal physique in this part of the season.

Sabalenka still deserves compliments for the way she performed at this prestigious competition.

● Minsk basketball players became champions of Belarus

In the final series, Minsk beat Horizont with a score of 3-0 (74:51, 80:64, 72:66) and claimed gold for the first time since 2020 and for the 7th time in history. Minsk head coach Andrei Vavlev commented on the victory, "No one believed that we would win the championship this year. Nevertheless, we went through the entire regular season as well as the playoffs without defeats. This is something out of fantasy stories! What is left now is to thank the team for their hard work."

Photo of the week



Aleksandr Kushner

Senior technician of the 3rd Special Forces Separate Brigade of the Interior Ministry's Internal Troops Mikhail Tsyurmasta with a lynx — a live fluffy symbol of the military unit

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



May 23rd is World Turtle Day established to honour the animal symbolising wisdom, wealth and longevity. The holiday is aimed at

drawing public attention to the problem of the decline in turtle population numbers due to human proximity.

On May 24th, 1884, American inventor Samuel Morse sent the first telegram with a special code (Morse code) using a telegraphic apparatus of his own design. The Morse telegraph became one of the most important inventions in the history of civilisation and opened a new milestone in the history of communication.



May 24th is known as Day of Slavic Writing and Culture in the Republic of Belarus. It is celebrated in honour of Slavic enlighteners and preachers of Christianity brothers Cyril and Methodius, who gave the Cyrillic alphabet to the Slavic world back in 863 and laid the foundation of Russian and other Slavic literatures.



On May 25th, 1904, Russian inventor, process engineer Aleksandr Loran filed an



application with the Russian Patent Office for a *Fire Extinguishing Method*, where he proposed a new remedy — 'fire extinguishing chemical foam obtained from a fire extinguisher'. Thus, Aleksandr Loran became the inventor of fire extinguishing foam and the world's first foam fire extinguisher.

May 25th marks Africa Day, also called African Freedom Day. It is dedicated to the anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity established by 30 African leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on May 25th, 1963. For the world community, this date symbolises the desire of African countries for unity to ensure independent development, peace and prosperity on the continent.



May 26th is Chemist's Day in the Republic of Belarus, celebrated on the last Sunday of May. It is a professional holiday for workers of the chemical and petrochemical industry, teachers and students of chemistry faculties. Every year, Chemist's Day is held under the symbol of a new element of Mendeleev's periodic table.



aircraft took place in St. Petersburg. It was created by a young engineer, Igor Sikorsky, as an experimental aircraft for strategic reconnaissance and could accommodate both two and four engines. The Russky Vityaz became the ancestor of all subsequent passenger airliners, heavy bombers and transport aircraft in the world.

On May 27th, 1930, American Richard Drew patented his invention — transparent adhesive tape. The world's first Scotch tape was made from rubber, oils and cellophane-based resins. It was originally used to seal food wrappers. However, soon people came up with many other ways to use Scotch tape at work and at home.



On May 28th, 2004, the first Children's Museum in Belarus, a branch of the Polotsk National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve, was opened in Polotsk. The two halls feature eight collections, the materials of which give visitors an insight into a variety of objects and allow learning about the history of their invention and development.

On May 26th, 1913, the world's first flight of the Russky Vityaz (Russian Knight) multi-engine



May 28th celebrates Border Guards' Day in the Republic of Belarus. At all times, protecting the Fatherland's borders has been one of the most responsible, difficult and honourable tasks. Border guards conscientiously carry out the most important tasks to ensure border security of the Republic of Belarus, protect its economic interests, and combat transnational crime.

On May 29th, 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay first conquered the highest peak of the Himalayas and the world — Chomolungma (aka Sagarmatha, Everest) — 8,848.86 metres above sea level. It took them over 30 years and the bitter experience of thirteen unsuccessful ascents to scale the peak for the first time.



May 29th is Military Motorist Day in the Republic of Belarus. For the Armed Forces of Belarus, automotive equipment has for a long time been the main means of performing most tasks — for the movement of personnel, transportation of artillery and rocket-artillery complexes, air defence systems, delivery of ammunition, cargo for various purposes, etc.

