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INTERNATIONAL

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The first female cosmonaut from Belarus, Marina Vasilevskaya

The first Belarusian female cosmonaut has conquered space!

Marina Vasilevskaya, formerly a flight attendant at Belavia Airlines and now the first female cosmonaut in the history of sovereign Belarus, at 15:36 Minsk time, imprinted forever the day of March 23rd in the history of our country. Together with Oleg Novitsky, the crew commander of the 21st Visiting Expedition, and American Tracy Dyson, she successfully launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome to the International Space Station (ISS) on the Soyuz MS-25 spacecraft. On March 25th, at 18:02 Minsk time, the crew of the Soyuz MS-25 manned transport spacecraft docked at a port on the station's Earth-facing Prichal Module, a part of the Russian ISS Segment. The crew of the 21st Visiting Expedition to the ISS has a general task — to carry out the space flight programme, its scientific experiments and work on board the station. ➔ 4



Belarus is entering a new historical stage of development

The parliamentarians of the outgoing convocation demonstrated reliability and dedication to the people, as stated by the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, at a meeting with deputies of the House of Representatives and members of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the seventh convocation

The Head of State stressed that deputies of the House of Representatives and members of the Council of the Republic of the seventh convocation succeeded as politicians and proved in practice that they deserved the high title of people's representatives. In his speech, Aleksandr Lukashenko reminded about a number of challenges that the country had faced in recent years. This includes the pandemic, which changed the usual living conditions and the conduct of the economy in the blink of an eye; as well as the political events of 2020, when home-grown extremists encroached on the foundations of the Belarusian statehood with the help of their Western foreign sponsors.

"In those difficult days, most parliamentarians experienced monstrous psychological pressure from all sorts of radical extremists," Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised. "They tried to intimidate deputies, senators, their family members and relatives, and sometimes directly threatened them with physical violence. The goal of the instigators of the coup d'état was clear — to sow confusion and discord within state bodies. As you know, their plans failed completely."

Another problem faced in recent years is the geopolitical rift.

"It is a large-scale systemic crisis, the symptoms of which are obvious to all of us, happening not only in the military and political spheres, but also in the economic and humanitarian ones," the President stated. "The policy of sanctions is increasingly taking the place of diplomacy. Moreover, these are the sanctions for destruction."

Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that against the background of the events that are currently taking place in many neighbouring countries, Belarus lives a relatively normal, full-fledged life.



"We have significantly strengthened our Armed Forces. Our economy is growing, people work and receive their salary. There is peace and order on the city streets. The state fulfils its social obligations. Most importantly, our citizens feel safe and do not fear for the lives of their families. Parliamentarians also made a worthy contribution to the common cause," the Head of State pointed out.

On legislative activity

The work of the National Assembly of the seventh convocation resulted in the adoption of 364 laws, 11 of which were initiated by deputies of the House of Representatives and one — by the Council of the Republic.

According to the Head of State, the introduction of amendments and additions to the Basic Law of the country has marked a new stage of state legal construction.



"By voting in a referendum for the proposed changes, our citizens consolidated a strong state based on national traditions of people's power, ideals of peace, humanism and social justice as a model of development for Belarus," the President noted.

The updated Constitution was literally created by the people and for the people, the Belarusian leader stressed. According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, the adopted constitutional innovations in terms of the redistribution of powers between the President, Parliament, Government, local government bodies and self-governing bodies are aimed at ensuring that all branches of government work effectively, fully perform their functions, independently make decisions and, most importantly, are responsible for their implementation.

The President stressed that the adoption of amendments to the Constitution required bringing about 90 laws into line with it. This responsible and painstaking work lasted almost two years.

The Head of State made a special mention of the adopted new law On Founda-

tions of Civil Society. Its provisions aim to fully unlock the potential of constructive civic engagement. The law On Amendments to Laws on the Activities of Political Parties and Other Public Associations, in turn, allows the activities of only those political organisations that strictly follow the constitutional requirements.

"In the context of the hybrid war unleashed against our country, most of the adopted laws are related to ensuring national security. In response to the escalated military threat around Belarus, you have introduced amendments to the legislation designed to strengthen the defence potential of Belarus," the Head of State emphasised.

Thus, the law On People's Militia was adopted, as well as the necessary legal prerequisites for the development of military and technical co-operation within the Union State of Russia and Belarus, and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) were created.

On social priorities

"The approach, in which the state not only takes upon itself the solution of all problems of its citizens but creates conditions for a person to solve their problems independently, has become a guideline in the Parliament's work with the population. I think this is the most correct approach. Assistance to socially vulnerable categories has been and will remain one of the priorities of our policy, and Belarus will invariably remain a welfare state," Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed.

The President recognised the great work on the part of parliamentarians in providing targeted support to the most vulnerable categories of Belarusian citizens who sought help — families with many children, lonely old people, the disabled, and orphans.

In addition, deputies and senators participated in solving issues of concern to citizens, held thousands of personal receptions, direct phone lines, and meetings with labour teams. Many of the citizens' appeals became the subject of discussion when preparing draft laws and other regulatory legal acts, the Head of State noted.

The President positively assessed public discussion of draft laws as an effective institution of interaction with people, which made it possible to establish feedback with the population, and to take into account reasonable suggestions made by citizens when coming to a decision.

The President directed parliamentarians to respond promptly and decisively to high-profile issues raised on the ground, "It is necessary to stay ahead of the increased social demand for openness from the government and citizens' involvement in decision-making."

On international activities

The Head of State drew attention to the fact that the parliamentarians of the outgoing convocation had significantly expanded international contacts by strengthening positions in co-operation with counterparts from Russia and other EAEU countries, as well as by establishing contacts with parliamentarians from Latin American, Far Eastern and African regions.

According to the President, the parliamentarians' activities were aimed at defending national interests, promoting a peaceful, unifying agenda and reinforcing the image of Belarus as a reliable and, most importantly, predictable state.

"Despite all the efforts, the collective West failed to isolate Belarus in the international arena. Moreover, the country's international positions have even

strengthened," the Head of State emphasised. "This is confirmed by the election of Belarusian MPs to the governing bodies of the UN parliamentary dimension — the Inter-Parliamentary Union."

Aleksandr Lukashenko highlighted the active dialogue between the legislative bodies of Belarus and Russia.

The President took note of the organisation of annual forums of Belarusian and Russian regions, which are held under the auspices of the parliaments. The forums make a significant contribution to solving economic problems of the two states. Over the past 10 years, almost 600 co-operation agreements and commercial contracts worth nearly \$6.5bn have been concluded at such forums.

Aleksandr Lukashenko also drew attention to the traditionally constructive partnership with the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly. At the invitation of the National Assembly, Minsk hosted a visiting meeting of the CSTO PA Council in May 2023.

"Efforts were stepped up to develop contacts with parliamentary organisations of the countries pursuing an independent foreign policy and respecting the right of other nations to an independent path of development. The proposals to create parliamentary dimensions of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS are timely and, I think, promising," the Head of State underlined.

According to the President, it is noteworthy that the level of co-operation with the Chinese Parliament has increased to reach the high-level Inter-Parliamentary Committee.

"The majority of the world's population lives in the countries, which are our friends. Their economies account for a significant part of the world's gross domestic product. They are huge markets for our products and technologies," Aleksandr Lukashenko pointed out.

For the first time, the Parliament has formed a delegation to liaise with a new international structure — the Non-Aligned Movement Parliamentary Network, established in 2021.

The President carried out his constitutional mission and presented a number of deputies of the House of Representatives and members of the Council of the Republic with well-deserved state awards, which were conferred on them for fruitful state and public activities, considerable personal contribution to the development of legislation and parliamentarism.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

Belarus and Russia’s Omsk Region will co-operate with focus on import substitution

The Head of State noted that less than a week passed since the presidential elections in Russia, and the results were known. The Belarusian leader congratulated the head of the Russian region and all governors of Russia in his person on the result, emphasising that without their participation there would have been no result achieved by the Russian authorities and President Putin during the recent election.

“Yet, as time shows, under no circumstances must we relax. They will try to bend us over, shake us, put us on our knees. We talked about this with President Putin on the eve of the presidential election. They will not give us a quiet life. The developments will be more and more complicated, as, unfortunately, the latest events in Moscow Region have shown,” Aleksandr Lukashenko stated.

The President drew attention to the fact that at this difficult time, governors also bear a special burden of responsibility, including ensuring security. This is evidenced by the tragic events in Moscow Region.

“We have been in touch with President Putin these days. We have worked very hard. You know the result. This is precisely the evidence of how two presidents and intelligence agencies should work in our Union State,” the Head of State stressed.

The President noted that the head of the Russian region is probably well acquainted with Belarus, with its history, famous people, flagships of industry, and the level of agricultural development.

“We can start our work without any delay. Your arrival is a clear indication that we can accomplish a lot. We regard your



The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, met with Governor of Russia’s Omsk Region Vitaly Khotsenko

arrival as an interest in our country and in the development of the future between the two states,” the Belarusian leader stressed.

It is known that the annual volume of bilateral trade between Belarus and Omsk Region is at least \$110m.

“This indicator is fairly not big, and we need to considerably improve it. There are plenty of reserves for that,” the President gave his assessment.

Speaking about the specific points of growth in trade and economic co-operation, Aleksandr Lukashenko first of all focused on Belarus’ capabilities for collaboration in the field of agriculture.

Omsk Region has achieved significant success in the agricultural sector in recent years and is one of the leading regions in the production of agricultural products in the Siberian Federal District. The region is also one of the leaders in Russia in flax cultivation.

“It is only fitting that we should work together in this area, because, as you know, we pay great attention to agriculture in Belarus,” the President noted. According to the Head of State,

the attention will not weaken over time, because flax is one of the national symbols for Belarus and is depicted on the country’s coat of arms.

Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that Belarus has every opportunity to meet the needs of Omsk Region in modern and reliable flax harvesting equipment. This fully applies to other brands of Belarusian machine building — tractors, combine harvesters, which are well known in Russia.

The President said that he was informed about the joint work carried out by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and Omsk Agricultural Research Centre in the field of studying, preserving and using plant genetic resources. Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed,

“I am convinced that our scientists have something to work on. The main thing is that it should not be research for the sake of research. The economy should benefit from their results every year. Moreover, we increase funding for these purposes every year within the framework of the Union State.

I fully support such co-operation and believe that we are able to expand the range of crop variety testing.”

The President called import substitution, including in agriculture, one of the promising areas of co-operation with Russian regions.



Vitaly Khotsenko

Aleksandr Lukashenko is convinced that apart from industrial collaboration, trade and investment, it is important for Belarus and Omsk Region to expand co-operation in the humanitarian sphere — in culture, education, and sports. The President believes that in this regard, joint work aimed to preserve the historical truth and memory of the Great Patriotic War should become a special topic, “Many natives of

your land took part in the defeat of the enemy, died and were buried in Belarus. We carry out a lot of practical work on documentation and perpetuation of their memory. We invite scientists and researchers from your region to join this important mission.”

During the meeting, the Governor of Omsk Region spoke in favour of creating a multi-brand centre of Belarusian equipment and Belarus’ trading house in Omsk. Vitaly Khotsenko emphasised that Russian President Vladimir Putin always directs Russian regions to liaise with Belarus, “Therefore, we try to work out all directions as much as possible. Last year, Belarus was ranked fourth among our partners in the economy after Kazakhstan, China, and Türkiye.”

The Governor of Omsk Region said that during a recent visit to the region by Ambassador of Belarus to Russia Dmitry Krutoi, an agreement was reached to co-operate in all areas of the economy, “There is an interesting project related to the creation of a multi-brand centre for all Belarusian machinery in Omsk. There is an investor ready to do this. We would ask you, Aleksandr Grigorievich, to help us so that it is done in the same style.”

According to the Russian governor, at the meeting with Belarus’ Ambassador, the possibility of creating a Belarusian trading house in Omsk was also discussed, “We have selected the best sites and premises in the city centre. Therefore, if you give such an instruction, we would like to create a trading house of Belarus in Omsk. We boast a very convenient location — 600 km to the Urals, 600 km to Novosibirsk, and Kazakhstan is situated nearby. We can occupy a large niche with Belarusian goods.”

On the evening of March 22nd, a group of armed men staged a shooting at the Crocus City Hall, a big concert venue in Krasnogorsk, near Moscow. According to the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, the attackers were armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and had plenty of cartridges and munitions. After the shooting data, information appeared about smoke and an explosion in the complex, followed by a fire, which was assigned an increased difficulty rank. Aviation was involved in order to extinguish it. The roof of the building burned down and partially collapsed.

The Investigative Committee has reported that the number of people who died in the terrorist attack reached 139 people, including 3 children, with 180+ people injured. It is known



Aleksandr Kushnir

TERRORIST ATTACK IN RUSSIA

that 2 Belarusians perished. However, the exact numbers are being clarified. As a result of the operation, 11 people involved in the terror attack were detained, including 4 direct perpetrators.

On the same evening, the Head of State, Aleksandr Lukashenko, expressed condolences to Russian President Vladimir Putin in connection with the terrorist attack in Moscow Region, noting that Belarus strongly condemns the brutal murder of innocent people, for which there can be no justification.

On March 23rd, the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, had a telephone conversation with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. The Belarusian leader once again personally expressed deep condolences to the Russian counterpart over the terrorist attack that took place in Moscow Region.

The Presidents confirmed their readiness for further active co-operation between the two countries and maintaining contacts between the relevant security services in order to effectively respond to the threats of terrorism and extremism.

Belarusians responded to the tragedy in Russia with deep sympathy — members of the public, young people, and officials brought

flowers and lamps to the Russian Embassy in Minsk. On March 23rd, the National Library of Belarus was lit up in the colours of the Russian flag as a sign of solidarity.

In connection with the events in Moscow Region, Belarus’ Ministry of Internal Affairs has taken additional measures to ensure public safety. First of all, this refers to transport facilities and places of mass gathering of citizens.

“On the instruction of Minister of Internal Affairs Ivan Kubrakov, a set of measures aimed at ensuring security in places of mass gathering of citizens is being implemented. There have been identified facilities that require increased attention. The density of police squads has been increased, and these are reinforced by special purpose police units to ensure efficiency. The law enforcement personnel are additionally armed with automatic weapons,” the Ministry of Internal Affairs pointed out. “The personnel of the internal affairs bodies and internal troops of the Internal Affairs Ministry are taking additional measures to protect public order not only in places of mass gathering of citizens, but also in border areas. The current operational situation in the country is under control.”

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by

The first Belarusian female cosmonaut has conquered space!

► (Continued from page 1)

How it all started

The Head of State initiated a nationwide project to prepare a Belarusian cosmonaut for flight. Later, the President of Belarus said that in total, interviews were conducted with more than 3 thousand people. As a result, six of our compatriots became candidates for the title of the first Belarusian cosmonaut in the sovereign history of the country. Among them were representatives of a wide variety of professions — flight attendants, a state forensic expert, a pediatric surgeon, an obstetrician-gynecologist, a junior researcher at the Institute of Physical and Organic Chemistry of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

As a result, Belavia flight attendant Marina Vasilevskaya and pediatric surgeon Anastasia Lenkova became candidates for space flight from Belarus. Marina was assigned to the main crew, and Anastasia was assigned to the backup crew. The girls were trained at the Test Cosmonaut Centre, which is located in Zvyozdny Gorodok [Star City] near Moscow.

Oleg Novitsky, an experienced Roscosmos cosmonaut, born in the Belarusian city of Cherven, became the commander of the main crew of the 21st Visiting Expedition to the ISS.

Talented, with an incredibly strong personality

Marina Vasilevskaya comes from an ordinary working-class family, just like world-famous Yuri Gagarin. The girl is known for her incredibly strong personality and determination. As her parents note, she takes after her grandfather in that. “She has always moved only forward. She has always aspired to be the first and now — she has become the first cosmonaut of the independent Republic of Belarus,” told Marina’s mother Irina Viktorovna.

The cosmonaut’s brother, Aleksandr, recalled with a smile, “My sister has always been the talented one in our family — she paints, sings, dances, cooks delicious dishes. So, she will cope with space. I admit, as a child, I dreamed of being a cosmonaut myself, back then all guys dreamed of it. Yet life has decided differently — children, family, work.”

Preparing for a space flight is a difficult and responsible task. It includes a centrifuge, simulator training, working out various emergency situations, and more. The training of Marina Vasilevskaya and Anastasia Lenkova lasted about eight months.

One of the trainings was to work out the actions of the crew in case of the descent vehicle landing on the water. The crews

practiced survival skills after landing on the water surface, fitting equipment, simulating evacuation aboard a helicopter while in a hover, using bench evacuation facilities. Survival training in the winter forest became even more spectacular.

How the President of Belarus supported Marina and Anastasia

In early January of this year, Aleksandr Lukashenko met with Marina Vasilevskaya and Anastasia Lenkova in Minsk. The Head of State congratulated the participants of the space programme on the New Year and



Christmas, presenting flowers and wristwatches. “These are for you in case you get times mixed up. But I have set the exact Belarusian time,” the President smiled.

A few days before the start, the Head of State had a video conference call with Marina Vasilevskaya and Oleg Novitsky. The President invited them to visit him after the flight and promised to treat them to his signature salad.

“We will be so much waiting for you! I would like you to be friendly there. Oleg, let’s cook our traditional salad [referring to the ‘Molodost’ (Youth) salad, which the Head of State had previously prepared together with Oleg Novitsky during one of the previous personal meetings — Editor’s note]. We’ll treat Marina. We’ll teach her how to make our salad,” the President noted.

ALEKSANDR LUKASHENKO SIGNED DECREE ON STATUS OF BELARUSIAN COSMONAUT

Head of State Aleksandr Lukashenko signed Decree No. 100 On Belarusian Cosmonaut’s Status on March 19th. As reported by the Belarusian leader’s press service, the document — which enshrines the rights and duties of a cosmonaut of the Republic of Belarus — was adopted in order to determine the legal status of cosmonauts and persons equated to them, taking into account the implementation of the first space flight project in Belarus’ sovereign history. In line with the decree, the status of cosmonaut is assigned to a Belarusian citizen who has completed a space flight, as well as to their understudy. In order to recognise the merits of a cosmonaut to the Motherland, the document envisages a number of benefits and preferences, including retaining the position, medical care at the Republican Clinical Medical Centre, retiring pension, and state support in housing construction. At the same time, it is determined that a cosmonaut should correspond to their high rank, be civic-minded, take an active part in the country’s socio-political life, and adequately represent Belarus in the international arena. The implementation of the decree will contribute to consolidating the positive image of Belarus as a high-tech state, promoting the country’s knowledge and competencies in the field of peaceful space exploration.



The cosmic scale tasks

Initially, the launch date of Soyuz MS-25 with Marina Vasilevskaya on board was set for March 21st. However, it was decided to fly on a reserve day. Before launching, the automation found an error. Roscosmos Director General Yuri Borisov pointed out then — it was unpleasant but not critical, “Twenty seconds before the lift-off, an abnormal situation occurred due to a voltage drop in a chemical current source. In this situation, the start returns to its original position. The crew was evacuated within an hour and sent to the hotel. Their spacesuits had been previously removed from them. The cosmonauts were not affected.”

Such situations happen. Thus, even Elon Musk’s famous Crew Dragon did not take off immediately; the date transfer happened more than once.

The launch of the Soyuz-2.1a launch vehicle with the Soyuz MS-25 manned transport vehicle successfully took place two days later, as thousands of broadcast viewers could see. The only drawback: on March 21st the cosmonauts could have reached the ISS in 3 hours, but now their journey took over 50 hours! During this time, the spacecraft made 34 orbits around the Earth.

Successful docking

The crew of the Soyuz MS-25 spacecraft successfully docked to the ISS on March 25th. The docking process took place in several stages. At 18:02 there was a touchdown, after which the spacecraft was docked to the Prichal Module of the ISS Russian segment.

After docking, the cosmonauts began to prepare for the transfer to the ISS. This process takes two to three hours — it is necessary to equalise the pressure at the station and the crew transfer vehicle, check the docking tightness, and carry out a number of other important procedures. The stage of opening the transition hatches begins only after that.

We will find out on April 6th how the Soyuz MS-25 flight went, what experiments the Belarusian performed on the ISS and what she is planning to do after returning to the Earth. It is on this date that Oleg Novitsky, Marina Vasilevskaya, and NASA astronaut Loral O’Hara, who is currently on the ISS, are scheduled to return.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by



Moving along the steady growth trajectory



The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,

"This year will be special for us. As I often say, economy is at the heart of everything. We have to prove to people once again that we have worked honestly and sincerely over these years."

During the appointment of Yuri Chebotar as Economy Minister, on January 4th, 2024

By Vladislav Sychevich

The dynamics are positive

Despite all the forecasts of skeptics, the domestic economy continues to develop dynamically. According to the statistics, following the results of work in January — February 2024, positive trends prevail.

One striking figure — Belarus' GDP has grown by 4 percent. This is even a higher rate than the one recorded last year, and higher than the forecast within the target plan.

"The growth drivers have changed a little," noted First Deputy Minister of Economy Andrei Kartun. "Two drivers remained the same, though — they are industry and trade. Agriculture has become the third driver now. Agricultural production has increased by 6.9 percent. This growth rate has been achieved due to crop production, as greenhouse businesses got actively involved in it in winter. Greenhouse production has risen by 2.2 times compared to the same period in 2023. This is not typical for us. Our greenhouse fund has expanded; we have begun to grow more crops that are traditionally found on the tables of Belarusians — tomatoes, cucumbers, greens. There used to be technological breaks, but now we have started to work all year round, and this factor has played a major role. Animal husbandry is also showing growth. Thus, agriculture, strange as it might seem, has become one of the leaders in terms of contribution to GDP growth in winter."

As for industry, the growth rate is 107.1 percent. Compared to January, it has accelerated. The leaders are mechanical engineering products, the production of cars and buses. Retail trade has increased by 12.6 percent; wholesale trade is growing, too. The transport industry is actively recovering — while last year it recorded a minus, now it has marked an increase of more than 4 percent.

"Moreover, it demonstrates growth both in cargo and passenger turnover," emphasised Andrei Kartun.

Prices are under control

It goes without saying that the crucial indicator of the economy is household income and the price situation. A positive trend is observed here, as well. The real disposable income of the population has grown by 5.1 percent in January 2024 compared to January last year. The nominal accrued average salary of Belarusian employees in January was 1991.2 BYN. In addition, labour pensions have increased since February. Inflation, on the contrary, has slowed down.

"Annual inflation has slowed down in Belarus, including due to low price growth for fruit and vegetable products. This is related to the fact that the market has increased the supply of Belarusian-made

Household incomes are growing while inflation is decreasing — positive trends prevail in the Belarusian economy

Last October, the President approved the most important forecast parameters for the country's development in 2024. The main goal is to ensure the sustainability of the economy and an increase in the welfare of the population. The gross domestic product is projected to grow by 3.8 percent due to large-scale investment and production programmes, the sale of Belarusian products to foreign markets and the expansion of domestic demand. As for inflation, it is not expected to exceed 6 percent. Real salary growth is anticipated, as well. The results of the work over the first two months have shown that there are all prerequisites to reach the benchmark set.



products. In two months, inflation amounted to 1.7 percent. We had predicted a higher figure," the First Deputy Minister of Economy pointed out.



External contour

As for foreign trade, the growth rate of exports of goods and services has not yet gained the desired momentum. Nevertheless, a positive balance of almost \$100 million has been secured.

"The main drivers of export growth are consumer goods and the so-called intermediate goods, which are used not for final consumption but for further production of goods and services," Andrei Kartun stressed. "We keep maintaining high rates in terms of physical export volumes. An increase of almost 13 percent has made it possible to compensate for the decline in export prices. They have dropped by over 9 percent — this is how the global market environment has developed. We expect that towards the end of the first half of the year, the cost factor will cease to affect our performance indicators, and the export growth rate will rise with the same physical volumes."

At the same time, a positive trend has emerged in the diversification of external supplies. According to the Ministry of Economy, sales to Asian countries, including China, as well as to African countries have increased significantly.

EXPERT OPINION

Academic economist Mikhail Kovalev,

"The results of the first two months are encouraging. First of all, I am glad that inflation remains low. The last February to current February increase is 5.6 percent. This is below the targeted 6 percent. There is also hope that the National Bank will reduce the cost of money. Cheaper money, in turn, may bring about the revival both in the economy and in housing construction. The overall economic growth results are not bad. Our manufacturers are actively occupying the niches vacated after the departure of Western companies from Russia. The population is particularly pleased with growing incomes. This, in turn, has led to a phenomenal 12.6 percent increase in trade. Our citizens have begun to go to restaurants and cafés more. I would like to note the fact that the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves have exceeded \$8.2 billion. Moreover, they have grown not only in terms of gold but also in terms of 'live' currency. This is a consequence of the fact that exports are increasing this year. In fact, it is ahead of imports. Therefore, the trade balance is positive, which means there are no problems with the currency in our country."

Deputy of the House of Representatives Denis Karas,

"The positive dynamics in the industry remains. Moreover, Belarus is the leader among the EAEU countries in industrial production. Our country can offer high-quality industrial products at an affordable price. Today, the enterprises of the Ministry of Industry alone supply products to 65 countries of the world. Amid a difficult geopolitical situation, we are actively diversifying exports, ramping up supplies to Asia, Africa and China. The ongoing comprehensive modernisation of the existing production facilities allows us to enter the market with competitive and in-demand products. The implementation of import substitution projects with the Russian Federation began in a timely manner. It is important that investors who want to implement major projects come to our country. They are attracted to a healthy and decent business environment. Belarus is a predictable country. It is feasible and necessary to work here."

Heroes... They are people who set an outstanding example, who proved that there are truly eternal values and more important things than personal well-being and even their own lives. They confirmed the verity of the life formula — courage plus professionalism equals a heroic deed!

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



Vladimir Karvat — the first Hero of Belarus

Vladimir Nikolayevich Karvat was born on November 28th, 1958 in Brest. As his teachers recall, Vladimir studied easily and willingly, although he did not particularly strive to be an excellent student. He stood out for his athleticism, was passionately keen on football, and the coaches predicted him a bright football career. But Karvat dreamed of the sky. As a child, the boy was interested in the military history of his native land, so he used to spend his free time with his teacher and friends in the Brest Fortress. Exploring the casemates and ruins of the citadel and listening to the stories about its defence made a great impression on Vladimir, and inspired him to become a military pilot.

In 1977, he entered the Armavir Higher Military Aviation School of Pilots. After graduation, he was sent to the Far East. Vladimir Karvat rose through the ranks from a pilot to a deputy regiment commander for flight training. He flew the MiG-23 fighter aircraft, mastered the L-29 jet trainer and SU-27. His career was going well.

Vladimir's personal life could not get any better. He met his future wife Nina back in his school years, and Nina followed her husband to the Far East. They lived in the military settlement of Kalinka in the Khabarovsk Krai for 13 years. The Karvat family was known to be friendly and close-knit — such spouses are called 'one bone one flesh'. They had two children, a daughter and a son.

In the summer of 1994, Vladimir Karvat arrived to serve in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus and was appointed head of airborne-firing and tactical training of the 61st Fight-



AWARD

The Hero of Belarus title is the highest degree of distinction, which is awarded only once for exceptional services to the state and society associated with a heroic deed performed in the name of freedom, independence and prosperity of the Republic of Belarus. Currently, thirteen citizens of Belarus have been honoured with the highest state award.

Persons awarded the Hero of Belarus title are also given a special insignia — the Hero of Belarus medal.

The Hero of Belarus medal is a five-pointed star with smooth multifaceted rays on the front side. The reverse side of the medal has a smooth surface, with the medal number in the centre. The medal is attached to a rectangular suspension device covered with a red moire ribbon with a green stripe.

The medal and its suspension device are made of 585 gold and weigh 19 grammes.



er Air Base in Baranovichi. The accumulated experience allowed Vladimir Karvat to feel confident from the first days of his service and to successfully cope with difficulties in his new post. In addition, Vladimir was an open and cheerful person, tactful and considerate, with a good sense of humour, which made the airbase staff immediately welcome his appearance at the base. Vladimir Karvat was a top-notch professional and he generously shared the secrets behind his skills and flying techniques with his subordinates. It is his high professionalism that helped him to make a difficult, yet the only right decision in the critical situation.

On May 23rd, 1996, Lieutenant



Colonel Vladimir Karvat carried out a training mission on the SU-27P aircraft, which included flying in clouds with large roll angles and practising air combat tactics at low altitudes in adverse weather conditions at night. When the aircraft was flying at an altitude of 900 metres, a fire broke out. The plane got out of control and started falling down. The situation on board was critical. The pilot was ordered to eject himself from the aircraft, but at that time the plane was flying over the villages of Arabovshchina and Bolshoye Gatishche in Baranovichi District. Despite the danger of explosion, Karvat tried to turn the aircraft aside until the very last moment. Fourteen seconds after the reported failure, the SU-27P crashed one

kilometre away from the village of Arabovshchina and exploded at a considerable distance from residential houses. It was not just one kilometre — each metre deprived the courageous pilot of the chances of life. At the cost of his own life, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir

Karvat prevented the aircraft crash on the populated area, thus saving dozens of human lives.

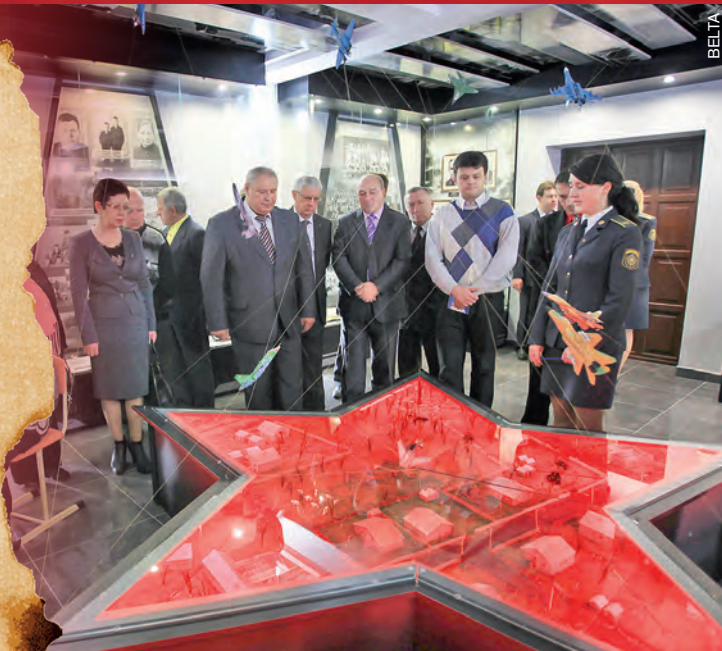
Many local residents witnessed the crash and rushed to the burning wreckage of the plane to help the pilot. A fire brigade from the urban settlement of Gorodishche arrived 20 minutes later. The fire-fighters managed to bring down the flame preventing the cockpit from inflammation, but the pilot perished in the crash. According to the commission investigating the causes of the crash, it was established that Vladimir Karvat had done everything possible to prevent the plane from crashing into the populated areas until the last second.

Aviation Lieutenant Colonel, first-class military pilot Vladimir Karvat died at the age of 37.

On November 21st, 1996, by Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus, Lieutenant Colonel Karvat was awarded the Hero of Belarus title (posthumously) for the exemplary courage and heroism shown in the performance of military duty.

MEMORY

- ★ Minsk and Brest streets are named in honour of Hero Karvat.
- ★ A nominal scholarship of the Hero of Belarus was established — it is given to the best cadet of the Aviation Faculty of the Military Academy of the Republic of Belarus.
- ★ Karvat's name was given to the square in Baranovichi, located next to the 61st Fighter Aviation Base.
- ★ The Karvat Museum was set up on the territory of the 61st Fighter Aviation Base.
- ★ The bust of the first Hero of Belarus was installed on Kosmonavtov Boulevard in Brest.
- ★ A monument to the heroic deed of Vladimir Karvat was erected in the village of Arabovshchina in Baranovichi District.
- ★ The Vladimir Karvat mini-football tournament is held annually.
- ★ In 2012, a museum dedicated to the first Hero of Belarus was opened at School No. 8 in Brest, which is named after Vladimir Nikolayevich Karvat. The exposition contains about 200 exhibits that tell about the life and heroic deed of the pilot. These include documents, photos and personal possessions. The centre of the museum features a stand made in the form of a five-pointed star with a mock-up of the villages of Arabovshchina and Bolshoye Gatishche of Baranovichi District.
- ★ Documentaries 'An Ordinary Hero' and 'The Sky Remembers' were shot about Karvat.
- ★ A personalised postage stamp and a silver commemorative coin 'Vladimir Karvat. Heroes of Belarus' were issued.



Based on the materials of BelTA and *Heroes of Belarus* by Nikolai Machekin

Genocide. With special cynicism

March 22nd marks the anniversary of the Khatyn tragedy. Here are the facts that we must remember.

The case of Vladimir Katriuk, who served in the 118th punitive Ukrainian national battalion of the SS and whom the Supreme Court on March 18th found guilty of genocide (Article 127 of the Criminal Code) of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War, is the first of a kind in the history of sovereign Belarus



By Lyudmila Gladkaya

A single plan

It is one thing when troops confront each other in a battle, and quite another when slaughterers exterminate innocent children, women, and old people. Only because they live on their land and this is at odds with the general plan of Nazi Germany. According to the plan, most Belarusians were to die, the rest were to become slaves of a higher race.

The Katriuk case confirms that all war crimes and punitive operations were carried out on our land when Führer and his henchmen demanded that. The Nuremberg Tribunal pointed out that an attack on the Soviet Union had been considered since the autumn of 1940, and methods of the upcoming total aggression had been discussed in advance.

The plan envisaged the destruction of the USSR as an independent state and its dismemberment, the creation of the so-called imperial commissariats and the transformation of Byelorussia and other territories into German colonies. In order to clear the way to the East.

The methods of genocide included terror and taking hostages (who were often shot at the slaughterers' discretion), murders and tortures of prisoners of war and civilians, looting and violence. Towns and villages were completely devastated — this cannot be justified by any military necessity.

“The scale of the genocide policy by Nazi Germany and its accomplices against the population of Belarus and the Soviet peoples from the first days of the Great Patriotic War had no precedent in the world history, and this fact is undeniable,” stressed the state prosecutor on the genocide case, Deputy Prosecutor General of Belarus Aleksei Stuk at the oral hearing in court. “The occupation of the BSSR lasted 1,133 days. Each of those days, the Nazis exterminated innocent civilians and prisoners of war, having killed about three million residents of Belarus. Each of those days became a tragic and at the same time heroic page of the struggle of the Belarusian people.”

Historians have established that in preparation for the attack on the USSR, German intelligence agencies actively co-operated with nationalist and emigrant organisations.

Collaborationist formations, including Lithuanian, Latvian and Ukrainian units, tried especially hard. The predecessor of the Schutzmannschaft Battalion 118, where Katriuk served, was the Bukovina Kuren — a formation created under the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists. Ukrainian historians try to present them as fighters for the national idea, heroes of the liberation movement; yet, they will forever be remembered precisely as punishers of the civilian population.

The current US and EU state policy towards Belarus and Russia is based on the ideology of fascism since the forms and methods of modern Nazis are essentially the same. They aim to divide nations and peoples again, recognising some as civilised and others as unworthy. Having thrown off their masks, they have launched a massive campaign to discredit the heroic deeds of the Soviet people, who at the cost of millions of lives freed them from the brown plague of the 20th century.

Katriuk was charged with genocide back in 1987

In Belarus, the 118th Ukrainian national police battalion participated in punitive operations *German, Daredevil, Cottbus* and others. This is a well-known fact, and some of the criminals were convicted. However, thousands of slaughterers like Katriuk disappeared into the countries of the collective West, which kindly provided Nazi war criminals with shelter, openly and cynically disregarding international legal obligations as well as the verdict of the Nuremberg trials.



FOR REFERENCE

Vladimir Katriuk was an accomplice of Nazi criminals. Having the USSR citizenship, he carried out a number of punitive operations, as part of the 118th Ukrainian SS battalion, in the Belarusian villages of Khatyn, Chmelevichi, Selishche, Zarechye, Koteli, Guba, Rassokhi, Malye Nestanovich, Dalkovich, Kozyri, Vileika, Osovy and Luchinsky Bor near the village of Kamenskaya Sloboda... As part of an armed battalion, he killed at least 393 people, including 125 children, attempted to kill at least 21 more people, robbed and burned their homes, forced the population into labour slavery in Germany. There was collected irrefutable evidence on 12 criminal episodes of the accused, whose guilt was confirmed by the interrogation protocols of his crime partners, surviving villagers, archival documents, including German ones, and more.

When commanding the squad of the first platoon of the first company of the battalion at the rank of sergeant, the accused voluntarily implemented criminal orders and was involved in the most brutal acts of violence against the civilian population. He conducted punitive operations jointly and in co-ordination with Hryhoriy Vasiura, Chief of staff of the

Schutzmannschaft Battalion 118, Commander of the first platoon of the first company Vasyl Meleshko (convicted by the verdict of the Military Tribunal of the Belarusian Military District of December 26th, 1976 and May 22nd, 1975 under Part 1 of Article 61 of the Criminal Code of the BSSR), Squad leader Lakusta, low-ranking policemen of the same battalion Kurka, Knap, Lozinsky and Sakhno (convicted by the verdict of the judicial board for criminal cases of the Grodno Regional Court on March 15th, 1974 under Part 1 of Article 61 of the Criminal Code of the BSSR).

Wreath from Aleksandr Lukashenko laid at Khatyn State Memorial Complex

On March 22nd, during a commemorative ceremony at the Khatyn State Memorial Complex, a wreath from Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko has been laid at the Eternal Flame. Senior officials, heads of state bodies, labour teams, and the public have taken part in the ceremony.

Few people know that Katriuk was actually charged as long ago as 1987, long before his death in Canada in 2015. And he knew about this, which is confirmed by the documents obtained from Canada by the investigation group. The slaughterer denied all charges and claimed that his 118th police battalion of Ukrainian nationalists was just maintaining law and order in Belarus, protecting residents from partisans, and swore that he had not heard anything about punitive operations, had not shot, had not killed...

Back then, legal tricks and subterfuges allowed the criminal to avoid extradition and punishment.

The survivors wanted to die from what they saw

The investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office allowed to establish the scale of Katriuk's crimes. Here are just a few episodes.

From the testimony of Antonina Smolenskaya, who told about the punitive operations in the spring of 1943 in Vileika, *“Germans drove us all from the end of the village to one place and sorted there. Those who were to be burnt were sent to one barn, those to be sent to labour slavery in Germany — to another barn, and those to let go — to the vegetable garden.”* She was released. The men who were to be burnt were first tortured, fascists carved stars on their bodies.

It is also known from the testimony that the criminals were wearing Nazi uniforms and speaking Russian and Ukrainian.

“On March 22nd, 1943, as part of the 118th battalion in the area of the Pleshchenitsy – Logoisk highway near the village of Guba, he killed at least 30 people by shooting and tried to take the lives of at least 12 more people who were engaged in wood cutting along the specified highway.”

In Khatyn, on March 22nd, 1943, the accused took the lives of 149 people, including at least 77 children, as part of the 118th battalion, together with the SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger.

A lot has been said about this unthinkable tragedy. The Khatyn massacre survivor, Iosif Kaminsky, recalled in his testimony how people were being burnt alive in the barn, how the dead and wounded were falling upon him, how the burning roof collapsed, and how he got out from under the bodies of his fellow countrymen and crawled to the door. He found his son, still alive but almost cut in half by machine-gun fire, who before dying managed to ask if his mum was alive...

According to the testimonies of Vasiura, Meleshko, Kurka and other Nazi collaborators, the squad under Katriuk's command took an active part in those atrocities. He drove people into the barn, stood in a cordon, set fire to them and shot them dead. They say, he displayed particular cruelty.

The children and grandchildren of those who know and who personally experienced horrible things spoke in court. Thanks to the archives, both victims and punishers speak, as well as court verdicts... It hurts as they speak. Our people, like cattle, were slaughtered. The Nazis burnt people alive, mutilated their bodies, and hid the traces of their crimes deep underground. Yet, as our people say, even the dead can talk. And we must remember and not let others forget.

No matter how hard the West and the semi-official time-servers of ‘Nezalezhnaya’ [Ukraine's nickname] try to present people like Katriuk as fighters for the national idea, they will forever remain slaughterers and traitors in the world history.

MEMORY



Decline in German living standards

The refusal of Russian energy resources after the start of a special military operation in Ukraine has led to the biggest collapse in German living standards since WWII and a downturn in economic output comparable to the 2008 financial crisis, *The Guardian* reports

In a joint paper designed to underline the depth of the economic crisis in Europe's erstwhile powerhouse, two former economic advisers to the German government have said that real wages in the country slumped further in 2022 than in any year since 1950.

A failure to protect German industry from the energy price spike may turn the 2020s into 'a lost decade for Germany' and further fuel the rise of the populist far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the authors warned in a working paper.

Isabella Weber, Associate Prof. of Economics at the University of Massa-

chusetts, noted, "In an age of conflict, climate and geopolitical crisis the rise of the AfD is a wake-up call. The collapse in living standards experienced by Germans is unprecedented since WWII. While it is true that the factors that fuelled the rise of the AfD go beyond economics, it is also impossible to ignore how this unprecedented slump in German living went hand-in-hand with the rising popularity of the far right."

Weber served on a high-level expert commission that was charged by the German government with designing an energy price brake for firms and households

in 2022. Her co-author, Prof. Tom Krebs, was a senior adviser at the Finance Ministry under Olaf Scholz, now the German Chancellor.

Germany's economy shrank by 0.3 percent in Q4 2023 and is expected to contract again in Q1 2024.

Weber and Krebs calculated that real wages measured against pre-crisis forecasts fell by 4 percent from April 2022 to March 2023, while output fell by 4.1 percent. Once the damage to output caused by the COVID crisis is included, actual output at the end of 2023 was about 7 percent below the pre-crisis trend.

Torture in Ukraine

People accused by the Kiev authorities of collaborating with Russia are subjected to torture and arbitrary detention — according to the facts indicated in the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published in Geneva, TASS reports

This refers, in particular, to residents of the areas from which Russian troops — participating in a special military operation — were withdrawn. "OHCHR documented cases of torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and violations of fair trial rights in 12 criminal cases by Ukrainian authorities against individuals accused of 'collaboration activities'," the report reads. "At least nine people were held in custody incommunicado before their detention was formalised, and these cases may be akin to arbitrary detention," OHCHR explained, adding that 'at least five people were subjected to torture or ill-treatment in order to extract confessions of co-operation with Russian Armed Forces or occupation authorities.'

Referring to information received from the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, the authors of the report indicate that as of December 31st, 2023, 6,762 criminal cases were opened for 'collaboration activities'. "Almost all charges of co-operation led to convictions. Since May 2022, Ukrainian courts have issued convictions in all but three cases under Article 111-1 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code for co-operation [with Russia]," OHCHR stated.



Earth is hotter than ever

February 2024 was the hottest February on record for the world, which makes it the ninth month in a row to be the hottest on record, the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service announced

Although naturally occurring weather has had an impact, environmental scientist, Professor Celeste Saulo, from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) says 'heat-trapping greenhouse gases' are the 'main culprit'.

According to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service, which studies the impact of climate change, greenhouse gases that trap heat and warm the planet made February 2024 about 1.77°C warmer than 'pre-industrial' times — before humans started burning large amounts of fossil fuels for heat and energy.

The recorded temperature for February breaks the previous record from 2016 by around 0.12°C.

The temperature highs saw particularly severe heat in western Australia, southeast Asia, southern Africa and

South America, which are all areas of the globe's southern hemisphere, where it's currently summer.

Global sea temperatures are also the highest on record and the levels of Antarctic sea ice are also lower than usual. There are signs that the run of global temperature records may finally come to an end in the months ahead. That's because a weather phenomenon known as El Niño has also contributed to the months of warmer than average temperatures.

In 2015, a deal known as the Paris Agreement was made between 195 countries to reduce greenhouse gases and keep global temperature increases 'well below' 2°C — and to try to limit it to 1.5°C.

Last year was the hottest on Earth since records began, with a 12-month average temperature now at 1.56°C.

Robot dog on trial patrol

Police in Malaga took a robot dog on a trial patrol through the centre of the Spanish city to the joy of bystanders, some of whom imitated its clunky gait or introduced their pets to the whirring contraption with flashing lights on top

Designed by University of Malaga researchers over the past two years to support police work and spot traffic violations such as the use of electric scooters in prohibited areas, the green-and-black, four-legged robot is remote-controlled for now, but will eventually integrate AI to work on its own.

"What stands out in this project is that we are using 5G technology for the remote operation of the robot, to carry out image analysis and detect dangerous situations," said researcher Almudena Diaz.

To start with it will be accompanied by

local police officers and an operator to carry out various tasks. However, soon it will use AI to carry out its own patrols. It will be able to record videos, analyse images and report present incidents like robberies and pick pocketing. The 'dog' can also warn pedestrians of incoming e-scooters, which are banned in the historic centre.

The project, known as *5G Tactile*, was designed by the Institute of Technology and Software Engineering (ITIS). It is currently in the testing phase as researchers investigate how it responds to different events.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

The West is yet to recall the Minsk agreements a good many times



The main trend in recent weeks has been related to attempts by the West to once again mislead the international community by imposing some kind of peace talks on Ukraine in Switzerland. All this looks like a banal scheme of an old fraudster, which everyone has recognised and is, therefore, not ready to be deceived yet again.

Deceiving means admitting defeat

By Aleksey Avdonin,
analyst at Belarusian Institute
for Strategic Research

The peace formula

The situation in Ukraine has reached an impasse. The USA, the EU, the UK, Türkiye, the Vatican, Switzerland are all outlining their positions, making vivid statements — bargaining, in a word. In this regard, it is important to remind that it was Belarus on the initiative of our President that acted as the first and only open negotiating platform on the Ukrainian conflict. The Minsk platform set the foundations and key approaches to resolving the crisis almost 9 years ago. *The West was playing its game, hoping to fraudulently buy time, arm Ukraine and push it against Russia on the battlefield. Now, after the 2024 presidential elections in Russia, there is no more talk on the part of the West about any negotiations from a position of strength.*

Now it is important for the Anglo-Saxons and France, which joined them, to save face in world politics and in the history of mankind as a whole. And try not to suffer the fate of Napoleon or Hitler.

Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, set forth a new Russian peace formula in the post on his self-named Telegram channel. This is virtually a negotiation ultimatum to the collective West, for which the failure of the ‘Ukrainian project’ is tantamount to global defeat and loss of prestige and authority for decades. The Anglo-Saxons and the French are in a rush, having pledged to participate in radical and reckless attempts. In this regard, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), stated that France is already preparing a military contingent to be sent to Ukraine; at the first stage, it will amount to about 2 thousand military personnel. According to him, the French soldiers in Ukraine ‘will become a legitimate priority target for attacks by the Russian Armed Forces’.

The West believed that it would be able to disrupt or mar the Russian presidential election process. Attacks on the regions of Russia bordering Ukraine, on infrastructure inside the country, an attempt to break through the border by sabotage and reconnaissance groups and to penetrate into the territory of the Russian Federation, active DDoS attacks on computer networks — all these actions were aimed at intimidating ordinary Russians, discrediting the

government and undermining confidence in it. Yet, this had the opposite effect and increased voter turnout in the elections.

Already on March 19th, Vladimir Putin clearly indicated that ‘all attempts by subversive gangs comprising regular enemy troops and foreign mercenaries to break through into our land have failed’.

Such harsh instruments of struggle testify only to one fact — the collective West led by Washington is not ready for negotiations, it retains belligerence and duplicity.

A struggle of attrition?

The announced ‘peace’ talks in Switzerland are clearly needed by NATO in order to regroup its troops in Ukraine, to supply a new batch of weapons and military hardware, as well as to transfer military contingents of the alliance countries there.

The West will continue to wage a war at any cost and is ready to suffer great losses and casualties — in fact, it has chosen a war of attrition scenario.

Foreign Minister of Türkiye Hakan Fidan said that his country sees 2025 as the year of hope for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, stressing that ‘there is no basis to expect development on this issue in 2024’.

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham published recommendations on his website. “All Ukrainians must join the army voluntarily, regardless of age. I hope that those who are fit to serve in the Ukrainian army will join. I can’t believe she’s been since she was 27... You have to serve, and not since you were 25 or 27.” He also called on Ukrainian lawmakers to adopt a bill tightening mobilisation as soon as possible.

At the same time, a great number of casualties are already putting European elites into a state of shock and paralysis. Thus, SVR head Sergei Naryshkin noted, “As they say in the Elysee Palace, the number of French killed ‘has already crossed a psychologically significant threshold’.”

Former Chief of the General Staff of the Polish army, General Rajmund Andrzejczak, claimed in a recent interview with Polsat TV channel that Ukraine is losing the war against Russia; the losses of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the confrontation with the Russian Armed Forces are huge. The German broadsheet Die Welt has reported that the West has ceased to believe in the victory of Ukraine.

In the absence of the previous strong US support for the Ukrainian project, the NATO leadership is moving to simulate support instead. Along with that, the European NATO countries are focused solely on strengthening their own defence; it is clear that Ukraine no longer counts.

A regular meeting of the Contact Group on military assistance to Kiev in the Ramstein format has been held recently at the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany, at the invitation of US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin. According to the DPA news agency, the meeting mostly discussed not the situation in Ukraine, but the issues of NATO countries’ own security.

In particular, it became known that next July, Poland and Germany will jointly create a combat rapid reaction force with up to 5,000 troops. At the same time, the United States has delivered a large



The President
of Belarus,
Aleksandr
Lukashenko,

“The beneficiaries of the war have no interest in stopping the slaughter inside a nation that is alien to them. The stakes are too high, and the profits are fabulous. The price of one NATO 155-millimetre artillery shell, for example, has increased 4 times since the beginning of the war in Ukraine — from €2,000 to €8,000. As they say, no comments. I would like to characterise the current phase of the civilisational confrontation between East and West as follows — the masks have been completely dropped.”

At a meeting with the leadership of the national security state bodies, on February 20th, 2024

shipment of military equipment to Greece intended to strengthen NATO in Europe.

From the perspective of geopolitical interests

NATO has launched the construction of new aviation infrastructure with hangar facilities for fighter jets and drones on the basis of the existing 57th Air Base at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Airport in the southern Romanian region of Constanța. It is expected to control the waters of the Black Sea. The project is estimated to cost €2.5bn.

While NATO members are strengthening their self-defence, Ukraine is experiencing a shortage of manpower and military hardware, which does not allow Kiev to rotate troops.

In these difficult conditions, China has expressed its position. As reported by *Politico*, Xi Jinping will travel to France to convince European countries to invite Russia to the summit in Switzerland. According to the newspaper’s sources, China may refuse to participate in future peace talks on Ukraine if Russia does not participate in them.

No matter how the West plays its game and creates illusory models of negotiations, no peace formula works without Russia. And in the current conditions, official Moscow will act solely from the position of its own historical and geopolitical interests.

Thus, it turns out that the former Minsk agreements are now the most desirable outcome for the West. Yet, the time passed — the West made its choice and deceived itself.

FOR REFERENCE

The week before
March 17th, 2024,
more than 130 people
were injured in
the border areas



of the Russian Federation as a result of shelling attacks by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. According to the Central Election Commission, 12.6 thousand dangerous cyber attacks on the website of the Russian Federation CEC and four DDoS attacks were recorded during the day, all of which were blocked.



The *Museum Item* exhibition is a traditional project for the Gomel Palace and Park Ensemble. For almost 15 years now, it has been a kind of report for visitors about the novelties received by the museum collection. It turns out to be a rather motley set, featuring exhibits from archaeology to modern painting. In fact, there is an offbeat story behind each item, and restorers had to work magic to revive many of them.

Mammoth, furniture and icons

The Gomel Palace and Park Ensemble has been replenished with about 700 items during the year

By Olga Valchenko

Millstone from the grave

The organisers combined all the items into one interior — it turned out to be either a museum laboratory of the 19th century, or a private collection of a manor of the nobility. The exhibition supervisor and head of the scientific and repository department, Tatiana Zygmantovich, suggested starting the tour with the most mysterious item of the collection, “This is a gravestone-millstone

River near the village of Svetilovichi, Vetkovsky District! Professional divers of Belarus’ Ministry of Emergencies found it during the scheduled work on bottom cleaning. This is just the third case like that in the last 126 years. Yet, it is impossible to see the valuable find at the exhibition now. Tatiana Zygmantovich explained why, “The mammoth’s skull is being prepared for display. When the skull was taken out of the water, it got into a different environment. In order for it not to collapse, it was necessary to



with preserved fragments of an inscription in Hebrew. It was brought to us by a resident of the village of Pokolyubichi near Gomel. This millstone was used for grinding grain, but now it is difficult to say when it began to perform such a household function. It is known for sure that first the stone had been a gravestone on a Jewish grave of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. With the help of Gomel translator Oleg Lisovsky, we managed to restore a fragmentary inscription, ‘A woman of integrity is buried here’. It means the one without sins or bad qualities.

Local residents also brought other unexpected finds — for example, a mammoth’s tooth found in construction sand. A regional organisation, the OSVOD lifesaving society, handed over the bones of the bison’s forearm from Lake Otolovo to us. And a local collector gave us a mammoth’s femur once discovered in a construction pit intended for a house in Gomel.”

We are certainly interested in the fate of another new arrival. In summer, a mammoth’s skull was fished out of the Besed

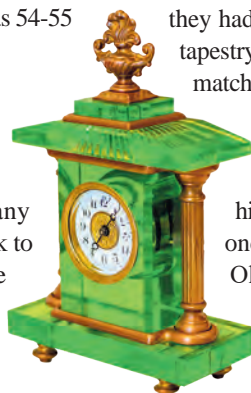


urgently preserve it. Therefore, it is treated with a special solution now. I will reveal a secret — specialised equipment is being purchased for its display. By the way, it is already known that the skull belonged to a young male mammoth; it was 54-55 years old when it died.”

How to restore the history

The restorers had to work hard to restore the mahogany furniture set, which dates back to the 19th century and was once kept in a family in Gomel.

“When working with such items, it is important to apply the same technologies that were used to create the furniture, as well as the same materials, preferably seasoned ones,” clarified Nikolai Fei, Head of Restoration Department. “That is why we retain a collection of materials, the same pieces of mahogany that may one day be needed during restoration.”



Tatiana Zygmantovich



got two separate boards. The Fei family, through joint efforts, exquisitely glued and cleaned the icon, and managed to repair some wear and tear.

Selfless gifts

“If we talk about how new exhibits appear, in most cases they are brought to us as a gift,” noted Tatiana Shoda, Chief Repository Keeper. “These include a variety of items. As they say, some of them need to ‘lie for a while’ and over time they will have real historical value.”

The complex of works by artist Veniamin Siper was handed over to the museum by his relatives. Modern paintings were acquired by the museum. In addition, Gomel customs officers seized medals from the Great Patriotic War at the border. The handicraft by craftswoman Tatiana Titova was brought by the museum staff from an expedition to Buda-Koshelevo District. A fairly rare Soviet porcelain statuette *The Mistress of the Copper Mountain* was presented by a resident of Gomel last year. Minsk collector Andrei Fedosov, an old friend of the palace, shared a copy of the *Stolitsa i usadba* [Capital and Manor] magazine. The issue contains an article by art historian Georgi Loukomski, who visited Gomel on the eve of the First World War and was delighted with the Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace.

“A black-and-white copy of this article was once kept in our repository,” mentioned Tatiana Shoda. “I especially like the author’s idea that the new owner of the Gomel manor should preserve this beauty and grandeur. This is exactly the task that our museum performs today.”

Toccata and fugue in D minor — the Olympic version

How Thomas Bach rewrites the music of his famous namesake



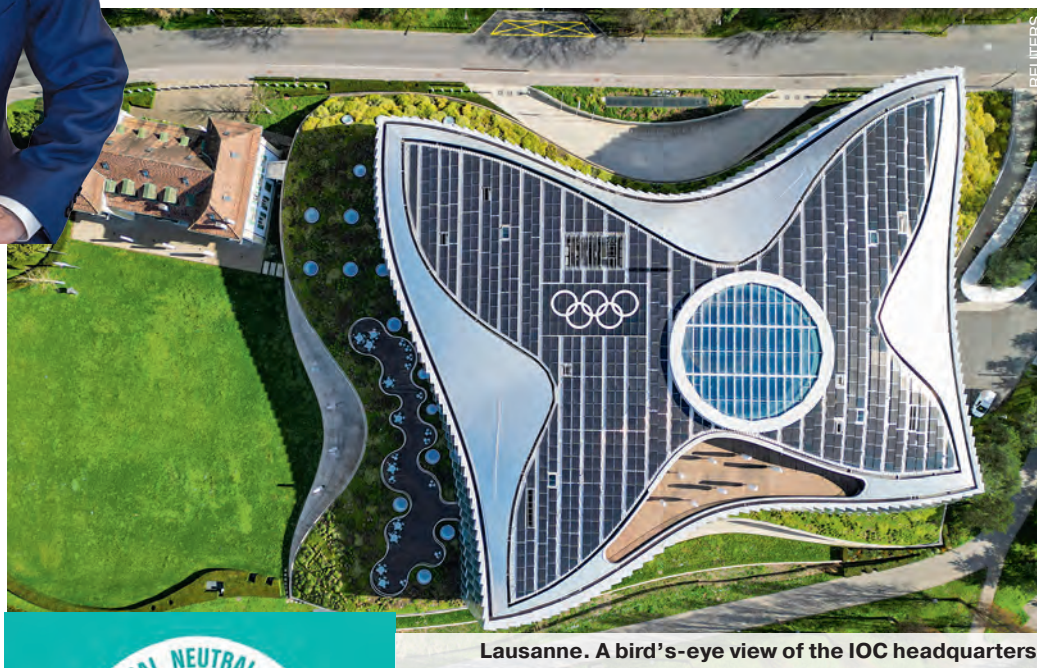
Despite a number of highly contradictory statements regarding the admission (or non-admission) of Belarusian and Russian athletes to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, some light was finally thrown upon the situation last week. Special rules accepted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the participation of Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN) with Belarusian and Russian passports at the Games allow us to state that the disposition has been determined. However, some questions still persist.

By Kirill Knyazev

What does the IOC offer?

The IOC Executive Board has confirmed that 12 AIN with Russian passports and seven AIN with Belarusian passports have qualified for the Games so far. According to the IOC experts, 55 Russian and 28 Belarusian athletes will most likely be able to qualify for Paris. For sure, this is a significantly smaller number than that for the Tokyo Olympics, where the Russian team consisted of 330 athletes, and the Belarusian team — of 104.

Nevertheless, to qualify for the Games based on a sporting principle (or rather, non-sporting — this principle can safely be called like that) is absolutely not enough to secure a place in the protocols of Olympic competitions. The IOC Executive Board has established an Individual Neutral Athlete Eligibility Review Panel (AINERP) to assess the eligibility of every athlete with a Russian or Belarusian passport who has qualified or could qualify to participate in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. Of course, you are right assuming that an offer that contains the word 'eligibility' presupposes certain conditions. The panel includes Spanish former basketball player and two-time NBA champion Pau Gasol, Olympic table tennis



Lausanne. A bird's-eye view of the IOC headquarters



It is assumed that Russian and Belarusian athletes will compete at the Olympics under this flag

champion from South Korea Seung Min Ryu, as well as former synchronised swimmer and IOC Vice President Nicole Hoevertsz who will chair the panel. The AINERP will monitor the process of obtaining Olympic licences by Russian and Belarusian athletes, and then admit (or not admit) for participation in the Games. The panel will evaluate statements made on social networks (as reported by sports.ru, an external company has even been contracted for this purpose), belonging to a Dinamo club or CSKA [the club associated with the army] (based on the wrestlers' experience, the

fact of performance in itself does not necessarily mean a red light), information from anonymous sources, and more. Actually, it was about the same with Russian athletes before the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics. Back then, it still remained unknown what principles the IOC

was guided by when it eventually invited some athletes and did not invite others.

What about the SMO?

It has just become known that Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion in Greco-Roman wrestling Musa Evloev was not allowed to participate in the Olympic qualifying tournament because of a photo with a 'No to Nazism' poster. Interestingly, to the question if it is required for Belarusian and Russian athletes to sign any additional documents condemning Russia's special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine, the IOC gave this

answer, "We will not be asking Individual Neutral Athletes to sign anything in addition to what everyone else is signing. So as you will recall the IOC changed the condition of participation form for Paris 2024 for everyone to ask them to sign up to the IOC's Olympic movement peace mission and that is applicable to every athlete that will be going to the Games and indeed every accredited person." We will find it out later whether the committee was sincere making this statement.

On a turquoise background

Since it is assumed that individual neutral athletes will represent themselves personally and not the national team, they will not be allowed to take part in the parade of delegations during the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics. IOC Director James Macleod has promised, though, that 'they will be given the opportunity to experience the event'. Apparently, this hint refers to providing athletes from Russia and Belarus with seats in the stands among the spectators. The same principle was used in the 1992 Barcelona Games for participants from the former Yugoslavia and Macedonia.

A separate, white flag with the IOC-provided AIN emblem has been created for neutral athletes, and even a neutral anthem has been composed. The flag is basically represented with a white circle caption against a turquoise background — somewhat resembles those flags that have already

STRAIGHTFORWARD QUESTION

Along with the announcement of the position on the admission of the AIN athletes to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, the IOC has just issued an extremely harsh statement regarding the World Friendship Games to be held in Russia in September. Having called the projected competitions 'purely politically motivated', the IOC went further and called on 'all stakeholders of the Olympic movement' and all governments to 'reject any participation in, and support of any attempt to politicise international sport'. In other words, the IOC has called for athletes to boycott the upcoming Friendship Games due to take place in Moscow and Yekaterinburg on September 15th-29th. And now is the question. Doesn't it seem strange to you that despite blasting the Friendship Games and traditionally criticising Russia for an opaque anti-doping programme, the IOC remains silent about the BRICS Sports Games, which are to be held in Kazan on June 11th-24th? Don't you think that the International Olympic Committee does not have the guts to raise its voice against the right of Russia, China, Brazil, India, South Africa and other member states of the organisation, where half of the world's population lives, to arrange sports competitions at its own discretion?

been used by the IOC to designate neutral athletes before. IOC Director James Macleod spoke separately about the music, "If you recall, for the Russian Olympic Committee there was a discussion relating to the Tokyo Games, which involved a piece composed by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, which received a lot of pushback. So, in this case, we have decided to produce the music independently. It has no lyrics, but I hope that when you listen to it you will understand that this anthem at least will give the AIN athletes, who have won a medal, the dignity and the opportunity to listen to something uplifting. I am no music critic, but it seems to work."

ON MUSICAL TERMS

Toccata (from Italian 'toccare' — 'to touch') is originally any piece of music typically for a keyboard or plucked string instrument.

Fugue (from Latin 'fuga' — 'run') is a composition technique and a form of polyphony, where the general melodic line of a polyphonic piece 'runs' from one voice to another.

The Toccata and Fugue in D Minor is a world famous piece of organ music by Johann Sebastian Bach.



A R E N A

● In the air

Ivan Litvinovich became third at the Trampoline World Cup in Germany.

The final, fifth stage of the 2023/24 Trampoline World Cup was held in Cottbus, Germany. A total of eight Belarusian athletes competed in Cottbus.

The only representative of our team, Olympic champion Ivan Litvinovich, made it to the men's

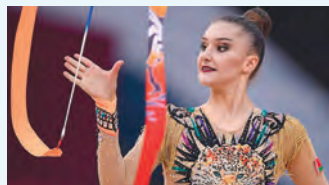


final. The Belarusian received 61.330 points for his performance and claimed bronze. The first and second results were shown by China's Yan Langyu (61.870) and Wang Zisai (61.800), respectively.

● On the carpet

Alina Harnasko won gold and bronze at the World Cup in Greece.

The first stage of the 2024 Rhythmic Gymnastics World Cup took place in Athens. The only Belarusian athlete, the leader of the national team, Tokyo Olympic medalist Alina Harnasko, participated in the competition. In separate types of the programme, the



Belarusian grace performed the ribbon exercise in the final. Harnasko received 31.550 points for her performance and could not be surpassed by any of the competitors. The gold medal became the

second for Alina at the stage in Greece; the day before, our athlete claimed bronze in the all-around.

Representatives of rhythmic gymnastics from our country will not be able to compete at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. The last licence for the Games from Europe will be played at the Continental Championship in May, to which Belarusian and Russian graces are not allowed.

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March 28
2024

Photo of the week



Lokomotiv Minsk became the winner of the republican competitions among children and teenagers in hockey Golden Puck for prizes of the President of Belarus

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



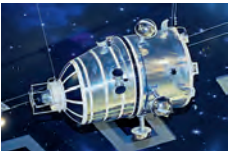
March 30th, 1853 marks the date of birth of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), a Dutch post-impressionist painter, whose works had a significant influence on 20th-century painting. In a little over ten years, he created more than 2,100 pieces of art, including about 870 oil paintings. Among them are portraits, self-portraits, landscapes, still lifes and art panels depicting olive trees, cypresses, wheat fields and sunflowers. During his lifetime, van Gogh was almost ignored by critics. Recognition came to him after his death.

On March 31st, 1889, the grand opening of the Eiffel Tower took place in Paris. On this day, designer Gustave Eiffel climbed the 1,710 steps to hoist the French flag on top of the tower. Today, the Eiffel Tower structure is the most recognisable architectural landmark in Paris. It is known all over the world as a symbol of France. The designer called it simply a 300-metre tower.



On March 31st, 1893, a new fastener was invented, later called the 'zipper'. It was originally patented by American Whitcomb Leo Judson

as a fastener for shoes. Twenty years later, Swedish engineer Gideon Sundback made the zipper thinner, more flexible and more reliable — then it became widespread. Today, Japan, Bangladesh, India and China are considered to be the world's largest zipper manufacturers.



On March 31st, 1966, Soviet specialists launched the first artificial satellite of the Moon. A Molniya-M rocket was launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome and put the Luna-10 automatic interplanetary station on a flight path to the Moon. The satellite was equipped with research gear and weighed 240 kg. On April 3rd, 1966, the Luna-10 station entered orbit around the Moon for the first time in the world.

April 1st marks April Fools' Day — an international holiday celebrated all over the world. On this day, people traditionally play harmless practical jokes and pranks on their relatives, friends and just acquaintances to make each other laugh and have fun.



April 1st is known as International Bird Day — an international ecological holiday. Its aim is to preserve the species diversity and numbers of birds. Ornithologists warn

that the extinction of birds will lead to an ecological disaster, the consequences of which can be unpredictable for humans. Now, one in eight bird species of our planet is included in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.



Bay of Naples, which fell victim to the deadly volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The excavations became systematic from 1869. Since 1961, they began to carry out extensive restoration work. About a quarter of the Pompeii territory has been uncovered so far. It is a vast open-air museum now, and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

April 2nd is International Children's Book Day, which is celebrated on the birthday of great Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen. Children's literature plays a crucial role in



shaping the spiritual and intellectual image of the new generations of the Earth. The holiday aims at drawing attention to literature, book art and book culture for children, at the problems of accessibility of children's books and the spreading of children's reading.

April 2nd is the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia — a holiday symbolising the unity of historical destinies, centuries-old strong friendship and spiritual brotherhood of Belarusians and Russians. It was on this day in 1996 that a Treaty on Formation of the Community of Russia and Belarus was signed in Moscow. Every year on April 2nd, both countries hold celebrations dedicated to the holiday — various conferences, festive concerts and other cultural events.



April 3rd celebrates the birthday of the barcode — one of the most advanced inventions of the 20th century, which opened the way for automated accounting and release of goods. It was on this day in 1973 that IBM officially introduced its development of the Universal Product Code (UPC), one of the most common linear barcode symbols. Today, a barcode is a routine daily operation of any store and retail facility.

