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Merry Christmas!

Happy New Year!

Aleksey Stolyarov



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Fight against coronavirus under President's control

Aleksandr Lukashenko has already visited several medical institutions in Minsk and the surrounding regions

By Dmitry Umpirovich,
Yevgeny Kononovich

The President visited Minsk's 4th City Clinical Hospital: 70 percent of its 888 beds are occupied by coronavirus patients. However, Aleksandr Lukashenko is determined that other patients should not be neglected, *"We must understand that apart from our COVID patients, there are many others suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular or oncological diseases."*

The Head of State again went to the 'danger zone', visiting its wards in his customary style. Many people, of course, would hardly imagine meeting the Head of State on a ward and one of the patients, pensioner Raisa Mikhailovna, couldn't recognise Aleksandr Lukashenko until he took his face mask off. The President not only wished her a fast recovery and asked about her health and family, but also helped her to carefully sit up so that she could take a drink of water, for which she thanked him profusely.

"I'm shaking your hand. Let me know when you are recovered," the Head of State said warmly. "I will always answer!"

According to Healthcare Minister Dmitry Pinevich, the number of cases in Belarus has already reached a plateau across all regions. "Unfortunately, the figures are quite high, and we think we'll see similar figures for at least another month and a half, but more importantly, these peaks are not as high as they could be," he emphasised.

Vaccination: all options are being considered

The staff at the hospital asked Aleksandr Lukashenko when the vaccination programme would start in Bela-

rus. In turn, he thanked the doctors for their patience and perseverance when working in such difficult conditions and promised that members of the so-called risk groups would be the first to be vaccinated. These are primarily doctors and nurses. He then explained: regarding the counteraction of the spread of coronavirus infection, three main areas are now being investigated: firstly, the purchase of the Russian vaccine; secondly, the organisation of the production of vaccines from the Russian strain in Belarus; and



thirdly, development of our own vaccine. Relevant proposals have already been presented to the President by specialists from Vitebsk and scientists from the National Academy of Sciences. All these options are to be discussed very soon.

"I don't doubt that we will have to refer to all three options. We will need to buy a vaccine to urgently vaccinate the risk group. It would be good for us

to set up production as well. It's not even to sell the vaccine later, but we need to produce it for ourselves, for our people. In accordance with this, we'll follow these three paths. If the achievements of our scientists turn out to be significant, we will work on our own vaccine," the President explained, adding, "Why do I not exclude the production of our own vaccine? I am convinced that this infection will remain with us forever. So in time we'll need our own."

A global fight has unfolded for the

Everyone's life is important

A day later, the Head of State went to Mogilev's Regional Clinical Hospital, visiting several departments where COVID-19 patients are treated, talking with doctors from the 'danger zone', patients and also meeting the hospital staff. He thanked all the doctors for their calmness as they continued working during the pandemic, *"You are amazing. Your departments are running calmly and smoothly. If there is any money available, we'll allocate it to the healthcare sphere, since there's nothing more valuable than a human life."*

The Chief Doctor of the hospital, Anatoly Kulik, said that large-scale construction of a cardiac surgery building is now underway on the site of the hospital. It is planned to be opened next November. The President was asked to help equip the clinic under construction with high-tech equipment and Aleksandr Lukashenko assured that support will be provided.

Some of the world's most powerful economies, with the exception of probably China, are buckling under the effects of the pandemic. Belarus looks the best in comparison with its neighbours, having seen only a minimal drop in GDP at the end of the year.

"The economy is the key. If it succeeds, it'll do well," assured the President, adding, "We'll not get up to 100 percent of last year's GDP. It will likely be quite a bit less. We tried hard to sell our products and our villagers have done well."

Aleksandr Lukashenko promised that the Belarusian economy will maintain its social focus. This is as indisputable as the need to preserve the integrity and sovereignty of the country.

The President met with Apostolic Nuncio to the United Kingdom, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, who came to Minsk as a special envoy of Pope Francis. He is well-known and respected in our country. The cleric represented the Vatican in Belarus in 2011-2015 and his mission was constructive and successful — as acknowledged by the Order of Francysk Skaryna which the Nuncio was awarded two years after the completion of his Minsk term. Therefore, Aleksandr Lukashenko warmly welcomed our guest to the Palace of Independence, saying, "We are pleased to welcome you to Belarus as someone who has left their mark on our country. You spent a couple of years here... I'm very happy that His Holiness Pope Francis has sent you to Belarus. It's a pleasure for me to have a meeting with you. I have had good impressions from the meetings, talks and conversations that we had when you served here."

The Roman Catholic Church is the second largest religious denomination in Belarus. Over the past 20 years, the number of religious communities of the Roman Catholic Church has quadrupled — to 498 in the country. They operate 514 churches and another 31 are currently being built. From 1998 to 2020, the state transferred about 300 facilities to the church for religious purposes.

Belarus open for friends



By Dmitry Kryat

The President also spoke kindly of the Head of the Roman Catholic Church, "I have always said that the current Pope Francis, from my point of view — I have carefully followed his predecessors, they were not bad people — is a people's person."

Aleksandr Lukashenko asked Claudio Gugerotti to wish a Happy Christmas and New Year to Pope Francis and to wish him good health. "If he gets sick, he shouldn't worry, he would be

welcome to come to Belarus to be treated. But nowadays it's better not to get sick. Soon we will celebrate Christmas and New Year. But in any case, he can come to Belarus," the Head of State said with a smile.

The Archbishop assured that he would convey the message to Pope Francis. In his words, the Pope wanted to celebrate Christmas together with believers, but quarantine measures don't allow it at the moment.

Later, Aleksandr Lukashenko focused on the theme of the pandemic,

telling his guest about the situation in Belarus. "As of today, we have had a few good signs: there has been no exponential increase for two weeks, it stopped at a certain point. More importantly, the number of pneumonia patients has been reducing by 20-30-40 every day. Therefore, I am optimistic, and I believe that we will manage to keep it that way," he said.

Addressing the special envoy, the President added, "Thank you for coming. It's a good sign. We've always had many topics for conversation. Some issues remain unsolved as more time is needed; however, we've made definite progress."

The guest noted that much had been done for the development of relations during his service in Belarus. The Head of State replied, "Unfortunately, you left us too early. After your post in the UK, you should return to Belarus." "I could retire here after the United Kingdom. We don't see much sun there — it's not very good for the health," the Archbishop also joked.

The whole meeting was held on good, friendly terms.



We are stronger together

Economy, security and the fight against coronavirus:
the CIS leaders discussed the future of the Commonwealth

Following the decision of the CIS Heads of State Council, Belarus will take over the presidency of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 2021. The summit was held in the format of a video conference. Minsk always takes a responsible and meticulous approach to the execution of such endeavours in the integration structures. Judging by the speech given by the President of Belarus, the Republic is ready to actively participate in the work on this occasion as well. Aleksandr Lukashenko clearly outlined the tasks that Belarus is likely to face during its presidency, naming the key ideas in this step-by-step plan, "Our strategic goal is to create a broad Eurasian zone of co-operation, as well as to strengthen peace, friendship, and good and mutually beneficial relations in the region."

By Dmitry Kryat, Yevgeny Kononovich,
Dmitry Umpirovich, Polina Konoga

Confront the threats together

Accepting the baton from Tashkent, the President of Belarus expressed gratitude to the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, for the active and productive efforts of Uzbekistan as the country presiding in the CIS. These were demonstrated in action against a truly inflammatory environment. One such 'fire' has recently emerged again in Nagorny Karabakh. Aleksandr Lukashenko suggested looking at the situation more broadly to see the need for even closer rapprochement to counter threats, "Don't forget about the events in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine has enough problems. In short, it's a true 'fire' there too. *It clearly shows that strengthening integration mechanisms in the post-Soviet space is not a matter of choice, but an inevitable necessity. I believe that we will be able to talk about the benefits only when we fully realise the potential of our Commonwealth. This will become a key priority of the Belarusian presidency in the Commonwealth next year.*"

Intentions for 2021

In the period of its presidency, Minsk intends to focus on strengthening the role of the CIS in improving the standard of living of the population, on solving the problems caused by globalisation and new challenges of the times. Aleksandr Lukashenko outlined the guidelines, "*The main focus will be on the development of a common economic space, trade liberalisation, reduction of restrictions and exemptions to a minimum, elimination of technical barriers, unification of rules and procedures for public procurement and the formation of common markets for goods and services.*"

Minsk has always been a leader of integration processes in the post-Soviet space. Therefore, next year, the Belarusian side intends to attach special importance to the work on interaction between



the Commonwealth and the Eurasian Economic Union. The President noted, "I'm convinced that, with closer co-operation of the executive bodies of these two most important associations, we will be able to significantly strengthen our ties. *At the very least, we should stave off a situation where deeper integration within the Eurasian Economic Union would turn into some kind of a dividing line in the trade and economic relations of the five member states [of Eurasian Economic Union] and other Commonwealth countries.*"

The President drew the attention of his colleagues to several pages in the history of integration work. At different times, different structures and organisations were created and there were sometimes opinions on their usefulness, the need to abolish or unite some of them. "We have not gone into this and have described this integration construction as a multi-level integration," the Head of State noted. "The highest level, of course, is seen in the Union State of Belarus and Russia."

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, the Eurasian Economic Union and the CIS then follow, "We then agreed that we will raise the level of co-operation from

the bottom up. In this case, we are talking about the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union — to create the same level of co-operation within the CIS at least as in the EAEU."

That's what we need

During the meeting, the Azerbaijani side invited companies from the CIS to participate in the restoration of the areas affected by the Karabakh conflict. Minsk welcomes this initiative.

As for industrial co-operation, the Head of State cited as an example some

proposals of the Russian Federation within the framework of the EAEU, "Vladimir Putin proposed a greater dedication to high-tech industries, such as aircraft manufacturing. He also suggested the creation of a medium-haul aircraft under co-operation, producing some units and aggregates in other countries. He also stressed that co-operation in this area with Uzbekistan is very important. This is exactly what we need right now and what the EAEU and the CIS miss, the opportunity to inspire interest and ensure we become attached to one another. In this case it'll be very difficult to separate one state from another."

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that Minsk would ensure continuity of the work, since several business initiatives of Tashkent require this.

The President of Belarus believes that no matter what sceptics say, the Commonwealth of Independent States has been formed for a reason. It has become one of the most effective tools for ensuring regional stability but still needs to be improved. Aleksandr Lukashenko explained, "New challenges are constantly emerging."

The initiatives announced by Belarus' Head of State are a 'framework' for our presidency in the CIS. A more detailed work plan for the Belarusian side will be developed in the near future and sent to all participants of the organisation.



SUMMIT RESULTS

During the meeting, the CIS leaders approved and adopted several

documents and a **draft concept for further development of the**



Commonwealth of Independent States has become key.

A joint statement on co-operation in the field of international information security was also adopted; the presidents here expressed concern that the use of modern information and communication technologies for destructive, military-political and other purposes that threaten international peace, security and stability poses an immediate threat to

the state, its citizens and society as a whole. The document calls on the international community to take all necessary measures to prevent the use of information and communication technologies to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states, as well as for terrorist and other criminal purposes. The leaders also reaffirmed the need to adopt a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of informa-

tion and communication technologies for criminal purposes under the UN auspices. Among the signed documents are a **programme of co-operation in strengthening border security at external borders until 2025, a concept of military co-operation until 2025 and a joint statement on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of foundation of the United Nations Organisation.**



History lesson: unite in order to win



Antonio Fallico

Italian expert shares his vision to overcome the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic

Every pandemic in the history of mankind has changed the world and had its own fateful consequences. Today it is quite difficult to assess the full scale of the issues our planet has faced due to COVID-19. It is true that in this 'viral situation' we still do not know enough. But now is the time to think: how do we want to see our united future as humans, does the world need a new economic model, how can countries withstand the intensifying competition, and where can we draw on new opportunities? The answers to these and other questions were searched for by the correspondent of *SB. Belarus Segodnya* jointly with Professor Antonio Fallico, the President of the Conoscere Eurasia Association and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Banca Intesa.

By Marta Astreiko

— Mr. Fallico, what deep-rooted issues within the global community have been exposed by the coronavirus pandemic?

— The pandemic has exacerbated problems that already existed rather than exposed new ones.

I will outline a few. First of all, it's a systemic crisis of the prevailing model of global liberalism, which has ceased to provide high growth rates, especially for western countries. It began in 2008 and though new models have been searched for, they have not yet taken shape. It's not clear what the result will be.

However, we already see that globalisation, which to some extent still persists, is being replaced by regionalisation with elements of protectionism. For example, the European Union is liberal inside and being integrated — thus benefits the most powerful economies, though creating various barriers for the external world.

At the same time, the pandemic and the accompanying economic downturn simultaneously offer opportunities to overcome old systemic problems. It seems to me that it is fundamentally important for the new economy to be built around the people and their needs. Is it unrealistic?

The result of the previous economic model was the rapid growth of social inequality and the pandemic only exacerbated it.

Carlo Messina, who heads our parent bank Intesa Sanpaolo, in an interview with the Italian newspaper 'La Stampa' recently noted that this is the main problem for modern Italy. In other countries, the situation is similar. If you don't take measures to counteract the growth of social inequality, if you don't build an economic system that puts the people at the centre, then the risk of a social explosion will rapidly increase. There is nothing good about that for anybody!

I will mention one more factor: the previous economic model was built on the predatory use of nature, but nature will always take revenge. The destruction of ecosystems facilitated the transmission of pathogenic viruses from animals to humans. Therefore, the new economy must be careful and respectful of the environment. Man is part of nature, not its king.

— Why then, in reality was humanity (with our achievements, experience) not ready to face this invisible enemy?

— I believe that the pandemic and coronavirus are not a 'black swan', but

a completely predictable phenomenon. Lack of respect for nature gave rise to the transmission of this infection to humans, and the modern social system has accelerated this process. This is the first and foremost thing.

Furthermore, the medical systems, especially those in western countries, in the pursuit of optimisation were pre-reformed to such an extent that they found themselves without the structures required to resist infections.

What did we see in Italy, which was the first in Europe to be affected by coronavirus? The infected were placed together with other patients who also turned out to be infected. The issue then turned into an avalanche. There were no medical facilities, and doctors, orderlies, nurses and other personnel are still out-

and households accounting for half of this sum, and companies from little-affected industries, for the other half. This means that people have drastically reduced their consumption, and businesses do not know where, why and on what terms to invest. This situation reflects uncertainty, unpredictability and a demand for stability. It's also important to note that this money doesn't go abroad, as it might have done recently, as everything is unpredictable there too!

— What damage has the pandemic caused to business and the social sphere in the countries of the European Union?

— The European Union has suffered, like all other macro-regions. Everywhere the picture is the same; only the scale of the decline when expressed in numbers, differs. In western countries, the decline is larger, in Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union it is less, and in China,

communication is only good if there's no other way. But large matters can only be dealt with in person to build the necessary trust.

— You mentioned that the economic recession in the EAEU is on a smaller scale. Belarus has demonstrated a good position regarding economic growth not only among its neighbours, but also in Europe as a whole...

— Integration processes are unfolding in the Eurasian Economic Union, of which Belarus is an important member. This is the only way that will enable them to withstand the intensifying competition, while creating a basis for future development. In this economic area, Belarusian potential is in great demand and has good prospects.

— Mr. Fallico, now is the time to build bridges and unite. Why, in your opinion, does the West continue to choose to induce the pressure of sanctions? It is impossible to find a convincing example in history where sanctions have worked in helping to resolve controversial issues...

— Here we need to talk not only about sanctions, but also about tariff and trade conflicts, alongside the introduction of quotas and other restrictive measures. Various political justifications are invented for them, but they have become part of the methods of non-market competition and are part of the arsenal of politicians. Businesses are generally against them.

There are two ways to solve economic problems. Everyone is against one another, but the possible winners will achieve their desired result at the expense of others, which will in turn lay the foundations for new conflicts. This is a dead end.

The most promising way to overcome the health and economic pandemic is to look for common ground and solve problems together. European business supports it. In 2020, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe. Decades ago, the countries that were rivals and competitors managed to unite to fight against a common evil — Nazism — and they have won. Those generations today set the right example for us.

— Professor, if you had a chance to choose the word of the outgoing year, what would it be?

— A tricky move! You have chosen the most difficult question for the end of the conversation... It would be trite to say 'pandemic' or 'crisis' so I'll say 'hope'. The hope is that the world will emerge from the current trials stronger, more just, more social, more oriented towards people and nature.



Empty St. Mark's Square in Venice

numbered. The figures have reached tens of thousands! At the same time, Italy has made excellent achievements in cardiology, orthopaedics, neurology and several other branches of medicine, where Italian specialists are among the best in the world.

The main conclusion? Good health is becoming one of the drivers of economic development!

That is how it should be. I have already spoken about how the economy should be built around the people. This is one of the key elements of this design.

Today, not just sectors should be chosen for investing but rather a model — around people, around overcoming social inequality, and not around profit. Otherwise, you know, everyone will be left without profit.

There is money for investment. The economy of Italy was among the worst hit during the pandemic. Over these months, Italians have accumulated 120bn Euros in their bank accounts, with individuals

in general, a slight increase in GDP is expected by the end of 2020. Generally speaking, the businesses have stood on their feet.

Medium and, especially, small businesses in Europe are hardly holding their ground — to put it mildly. There are entire spheres of activity, which, because of the crisis, have crashed... I'm very worried about the future of culture as many venues are closed. Quality of education is also under attack, which is frightening. Digital learning systems are better than nothing, but they won't replace face-to-face teaching. This is already apparent, no matter what the supporters of total digitalisation may say.

A person is a social being. If they are deprived of socialisation, personal contact and live communication with other people, they might begin to lose their human essence, over time there is the threat of turning into a kind of biorobot.

This also applies to business. Digital

By the New Year, Belgospishcheprom's confectioneries to put 1.7m gift items on

Taste of the season

The New Year is just around the corner and the festive spirit is in the air: Christmas trees are decorated, garlands adorn windows, New Year gifts, tangerines and colourful boxes of sweets appear in a wide variety of shops. The latter are true symbols of our childhood. Belarusian confectionery factories are now working almost non-stop and Belgospishcheprom Concern tells us that, in Q4, its business usually sells up to 20,000 tonnes of confectionery products.

Chocolate candies with different fillings, marmalades, lollipops and chocolate bars... For a child, to find a box or a bag with sweets under the Christmas tree means that the holiday is a success. In reality, not only kids have a sweet tooth — but also adults.

According to a sample survey of households by standard of living, chocolate consumption last year stood at 2.6 kilograms per person.

In 2019, Belgospishcheprom sold 77,700 tonnes of confectionery products, with 75 percent of those sold domestically. In Belarus, 1.5m items were sold as New Year gifts, and more than 208,000 items were sent abroad. By the end of this year, it is expected that the concern's enterprises will produce at least 79,000 tonnes of diverse confectionery products.

Following its long-standing tradition of creating a festive atmosphere, Gomel's Spartak Confectionery has prepared a bright collection of sweet New Year gifts bringing together over 15 sets of sweets at different prices. The year of 2021 will be marked by the white metal bull and, with this in view, Spartak has produced a set of sweets packed in a soft toy 'Bychok Borka' [Borka Bull]. Also, some chocolate bars and boxes are stylised with the New Year theme.

The range of Kommunar-



Gomel's Spartak Confectionery. Engineer-technologist Galina Soroka

ka Confectionery's New Year sweets includes about 60 items, also using the symbol of the coming year in their packaging. As of early December alone, more than

200,000 sets have been shipped. Their weight ranges from 300 grams to 3 kilograms. Furthermore, the branded stores offer wooden or cardboard stylised

packaging on the customers' request. In addition to sweets, these New Year sets include a board for family games, as well as Christmas stickers and notebooks.

Commemorative coins

The National Bank of the Republic of Belarus has put into circulation a number of commemorative coins

Since December 15th, the National Bank of Belarus has put into circulation the commemorative coins 'Fine Art. Avant-garde. UNOVIS'. A silver coin was issued with a face value of Br20 with a cir-

ulation of 999 pieces while a copper-nickel coin was issued with a face value of Br1 and a circulation of 1,699 pieces.

On the obverse there is an image of the state emblem of Belarus while a styl-

ised composition — including a QR code containing the names of the members of the avant-garde art association — is placed in the centre.

The reverse side has the UNOVIS sign — a red square framed by a stylised composition consisting of concentric circles and arcs.

The coins were minted at the Kazakhstan Mint.

Moreover, the following commemorative coins were also issued: 'Sum-

mer Sports. Tennis', 'Belarus-Ukraine. Spiritual Heritage. Irmologion', as well as commemorative coins from the *Architectural Heritage of Belarus* series: 'Chechersk City Hall', 'Bernardine Catholic Church. Budslav', 'St. Boris and Gleb Church. Grodno', 'St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church. Kamai', 'Kossovo Palace', 'City Theatre. Mogilev'.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by



NEWS IN BRIEF

Belarus wins the rights to produce a new generation generic drug against HIV



During the international video conference at the Healthcare Ministry, experts discussed the work of our country under the license agreement of the Patent Pool and ViiV Healthcare Company, as well as prospects for further co-operation with the Patent Pool.

Summing up the results of the discussion, Healthcare Minister Dmitry Pinevich shared that Belarus now has the right to produce a new generation drug against HIV. The Minister noted that negotiations on this issue had been going on for quite a long time. This opportunity was given to Belarus due to the significant experience the country has accumulated in combating HIV infection and due to the good organisation of work in this area.

Photo report on the Belarusian Summer Biathlon Championship recognised as the best at the all-Russian competition

Moscow has hosted an official ceremony honouring the winners and laureates of the 10th *Energy of Victories* All-Russian



Sport Journalism Festival-Contest, organised by the Russian Olympic Committee and the Federation of Sports Journalists of Russia with the support of Gazprom. Denis Kostyuchenko, a leading specialist at the Information Department of the National Olympic Committee of Belarus and freelance correspondent for BelTA, won in the 'Best Photo Report/Coverage' nomination among other Russian-language media reporters based abroad, with his photo report dedicated to the Belarusian Summer Biathlon Championship. The organisers of the event received 317 works from 63 regions of Russia and 11 CIS and non-CIS states.

Beekeeping culture of Belarus and Poland on UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Beekeeping is an ancient forestry trade, the initial form of cultural beekeeping. It is based on breeding and keeping forest bees in artificial hives.

The Foreign Ministry stressed that the inclusion in the list is the result of the joint work of the national commissions for UNESCO, the culture ministries of Belarus

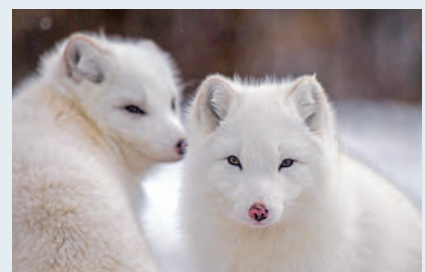


and Poland, local beekeeping communities, non-governmental organisations and experts from the two countries.

With the inscription of the 'Tree Beekeeping Culture of Belarus and Poland', the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity now includes four Belarusian elements: the festive rite of the Kalyady Tsars, the Celebration in Honour of the Budslav Icon of Our Lady, and the spring rite of Jurauski Karahod.

Lady and the Tramp: a pair of white foxes appeared at Minsk Zoo

A new species of animal has arrived in the capital from the Zhlobin Zoo. This event has been long awaited. Since this is a new experience for the zoo staff, they undertook special research on the keeping of white foxes so that they could feel as comfortable as possible. A couple of white foxes were temporarily housed in an open cage. Typical habitats of this species in the wild are open tundra with some hilly terrain, therefore, in the future, the animals will be relocated



to enclosures with artificially created hills and secluded places.

Minsk Zoo has been operating since 1984. Its collection includes both exotic animals and rare representatives of the Belarusian fauna. In total, about 2,000 animals are kept here.



It is not without reason that it's called the highest form of democracy and the brainstorming for a five-year period. The strategy and tactics of the state's development and the most acute issues of society have been traditionally discussed directly with the people — of different social groups, professions and ages — in our country for two and a half decades. The President has repeatedly stressed, "Only the Belarusian people will decide how our country will develop!"

So it was, and so it will be. This is especially relevant today, given the unprecedented interference of external forces in the internal affairs of Belarus. The 6th Belarusian People's Congress is scheduled to be held early next year. On the eve of this large-scale event, it makes sense to evaluate and analyse what has been done over the past years and in what direction to move forward.

By Yevgeny Kononovich,
Dmitry Umpirovich

Our fate is in our hands

The 1st Belarusian People's Congress took place on October 19th-20th, 1996. Those times were truly hard. The consequences of the 1990s crisis were very painful for the country: inflation, the state budget deficit, the growth of the external debt were on the list of challenges that Belarus had to overcome in that difficult period. No one knew what to do with the industrial flagships and how to revive villages, medicine and education.

"A concrete practical task was set: to keep the country from falling into the abyss, not to freeze enterprises, avoid hunger and so save workers," says Sergei Ling who headed the Government from 1996 to 2000.

Against the background of economic chaos, a political crisis reigned, and there was no unity between the branches of power. The contradictions between the Head of State and Parliament worsened. The outspoken political bias of the members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet often led to the lack of a clear path for all, while legislative work was constantly replaced by political chatter.

"To get out of this situation, in August 1996, Aleksandr Lukashenko proposed to hold a referendum on amendments and additions to the Constitution, turning the Republic from a Parliamentary-Presidential one into Presidential. At the same time, deputies decided to submit for public discussion the issue of introducing alternative amendments to the Constitution, abolishing the post of President and turning the Republic into a purely parliamentary one", wrote the



These are the people who decide

Preparations for the 6th Belarusian People's Congress continue in Belarus

The Belarusian People's Congress is held in full compliance with the current Constitution, whose third article reads: 'The people shall be the sole source of state power and the bearer of sovereignty in the Republic of Belarus'. The Basic Law of the country guarantees that citizens of Belarus shall have the right to participate in the solution of state matters, both directly and through freely elected representatives.

SB. Belarus Segodnya newspaper in *The Will of the People* article published as part of the '25.by' project.

However, before bringing the issues of the conflict between two branches of power to a democratic people's court, the 1st Belarusian People's Congress was held in Belarus — at the Sports Palace: the venue was the only one at that time in the country able to seat over 2,000. As a result, 4,787 delegates gathered to discuss the future of the country and find a way out of the situation. Those were the most authoritative representatives of various associations, enterprises, educational institutions, military units... Their candidacies, by the way, were proposed from below — directly by working groups. Aleksandr Lukashenko made a report on *Only the People Have the Right to Decide Their Fate*. His words then are still relevant now,

"We face a choice: either Belarus will remain a hostage in the hands of politicians who want revenge for their defeats, or we will establish proper law and order and direct all the forces of our people to solve urgent problems. These days, the fate of all Belarusian people,



the future of our children and grandchildren is being decided — not that of the President or of the institution of the presidency. Here, the authorised representatives of the people — delegated by all Belarusian working groups — are present and it's your opinion that will be decisive for me when making major political decisions."

Adoption of the first (in the history of sovereign Belarus) five-year programme of socio-economic development for the country became the result of the 1st Belarusian People's Congress. The society representatives decided that the country needed to work more for export, build housing and develop its agro-industrial complex — in fact, doing everything without which ordinary life is impossible. Even today, 24 years later, no one can challenge the validity of these conclusions. Back then, it helped keep the country from collapse and anarchy.

Words and deeds

The Belarusian People's Congress is held every five years and, each time, it opens a new stage in the life of the state and society.

The 2nd Belarusian People's Congress was held on May 18th-19th, 2001 — making history by adopting the modern Belarusian model of development based on the 'For Strong and Prosperous Belarus!' slogan. While the first programme set the task of feeding the country, the second focused the agricultural sphere on food exports. It seems hardly possible now but, in 2002, agricultural sales abroad stood at just \$234m, while the figure is \$5-7bn now. Few could imagine that grain yields of 35-40 hundredweight would become commonplace for farmers. Moreover, some farms even harvest 100 hundredweight per hectare, surprising even Cuban grain growers. Over this time, more than 3.5m square metres of housing were put into operation in the country every year. The production volumes of industry, consumer goods, real monetary incomes of the population and other indicators became the best in the CIS. Taking all these factors into account, the forum delegates adopted the country's development programme for 2001-2005 — focusing on the solution of the housing problem and ensuring food security. In addition, the task was set to create modern research medi-

cal centres in the country and strengthen the material and technical base of medicine.

The motto of the 3rd Belarusian People's Congress — held on March 2nd-3rd 2006 — and the new five-year programme was the 'State for the Nation' principle. In the first years of the formation of statehood it was necessary to save it, later — to strengthen it by all means, and then the time came to set different goals. The main one was to improve the quality of life. Social tools were launched to stimulate the birth rate, provide state support to large and young families in the construction and purchase of housing. Significant funds were allocated for modernisation of the healthcare system, which caused explosive progress in transplantology. A significant achievement was the gasification of all regions of the country. Agro-towns — based on our projects — began to be built in Russia, Kazakhstan and Venezuela, and Belarus was ranked 33rd globally in terms of education.

Unsurprisingly, at the 4th Belarusian People's Congress — held on December 6th-7th, 2010 under the 'Together for the Future' slogan, its delegates supported the preservation of the national model of a socially oriented economy, deciding to develop it by creating fundamentally new industries and enterprises. Over the next five years, large-scale modernisation of factories was carried out, new roads and metro stations were built. Construction of a nuclear power plant was launched and the Chinese-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial Park — aimed to attract ultra-modern high-tech companies — was founded. Our country confidently joined the club of space powers, launching its own communications satellite into orbit.

That became a good basis for a new economy: the so-called knowledge economy.

The 5th Belarusian People's Congress took place on June 22nd-23rd, 2016 — under the slogan 'Jointly for a Strong and Prosperous Belarus'. The President named peace, tranquillity, independence and security as the main values and achievements of Belarus. At the same time, he said, "We are convinced by the example of our neighbours: peace is the greatest value. It is very easy to lose it, while the path from peace to war can be very short."

During discussions of the draft five-year programme, about 150 concrete proposals were received from delegates — dealing with emancipation of business initiatives, loans for the real sector of the economy, securing young personnel, increasing the tourist flow and much more. The development of education, medicine and support for families with children were identified as social policy priorities in the new strategy.

Where to make a wish for the New Year

By Sofia Arsenyeva

Everything that is wished for will surely come true!

Grinding all the bad

Belovezhskaya Pushcha is the number one place for New Year travels, with miracles awaiting behind every tree. One can see herds of stately bison and shy deer in the picturesque winter forest. After walking in the cold, visitors are welcomed to the carved huts where Father Frost and his retinue live.

In Skarbnitsa, perky snowflakes — assistants of the white-bearded wizard — answer hundreds of thousands of letters. In the Snow Maiden's mansion everything sparkles and shimmers making your head spin. It's also worth looking at the local mill, which, according to legend, grinds away everything bad. You just need to touch the wall with your hand, remember all the bad thoughts and actions and say: 'The mill, the mill, everything will grind', as the rosy-cheeked mistress advises. However, the best place to make a wish is to go to the Meadow of Twelve Months. Just like in Marshak's fairy tale, summer and winter rulers dwelt here. You can approach anyone and ask what your heart desires. Together with Father Frost they will make everything happen.



Father Frost's residence in Belovezhskaya Pushcha

Visiting Vseslav the Magician

The legendary duke was the great-grandson of Vladimir Svyatoslavich and the grandfather of St. Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya. This wise ruler and real hero went down in history as a Magician. In folk legends, he appears either as a werewolf or as a wizard (that is, a magician). Whether it was so, no one knows. But it was under Vseslav the Magician that the Polotsk Principality reached its peak. At the same time, the majestic St. Sophia Cathedral — brother to the Kiev and Novgorod churches — was built in the ancient city above the Dvina River. It has survived to this day in an updated form. However, on the foundations you can still see the names of architects from the distant 11th century: 'Dovyd Touma', 'Mikuola Kopes', 'Petr Vorishko'.

Believers go for a miracle not only inside the Sophia Cathedral, but also ask for the fulfilment of desires outside the church. In front of the entrance to the cathedral there is a mysterious boulder: the so-called Borisov stone with carved inscriptions from a thousand years ago. You can put your palm on it and feel the warmth even in winter.



Polotsk



Minsk's railway station

Finding the golden mean

On arrival in Minsk don't rush to run away from the railway station. The huge and architecturally complex building has its own 'secret place'. On the bridge — buried in greenery and connecting the halls on the second floor — one can see... gold under your feet! Glitter tiles are one of a kind. If you stand on them and raise your head, you will find yourself directly under the centre of a huge glass pyramid. They say that on sunny days, the energy here is incredible, and whole queues of travellers line up to make a wish.

Counting the stars

It's also possible to try your luck in Mogilev. In the centre of the city stands a thoughtful seven-metre stargazer made of bronze. The sculptor, Vladimir Zhbanov, raised one of his hands to the sky and directed the other to the ground. According to the legend, if one touches the hand below and asks the astronomer about the most important thing to you, he will help. Locals say it comes true!

Moreover, an impressive telescope stands next to the mysterious astrologer. During the day it serves as a sundial, with its arrows considered to be one of the largest and most original in the world. Twelve chairs act as a dial: each corresponds to the sign of the zodiac. At nights, a powerful searchlight (directed upwards) lights up in the telescope. The light is so strong that even from space you can see Mogilev.



The sculpture of a stargazer on Star Square in Mogilev



The Golubaya Krynitsa

Experiencing the power of living water

The source with the most powerful ascending flow in the East European Plain is located near the village of Dubno. The Golubaya Krynitsa [Blue Well] has been known for a long time — and it is believed to be here that the Radimichi (ancient Slavic tribe) were baptised. Crystal water is considered healing. The depth of the lake is only two metres, and water comes to it from a round shaft. No matter how hard the divers tried to probe the bottom, they were unsuccessful.

People come here not to quench their thirst or curiosity, but for a miracle. All year round, the temperature of the emerald-blue water is about five degrees, but this doesn't stop anyone, and people dive in both summer and winter with their most cherished desires. Moreover, they also believe that a person who has crossed the source three times will have good health for a long time and a long life.

INSIDE

The Minsk Times
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7



Christmas under lockdown

European countries have tightened restrictions as Christmas approaches. The measures vary from strict lockdowns to night-time curfews, but all plan on allowing some leeway for Christmas.

Germany entered a stricter lockdown, closing non-essential shops and sending children home from school while theatres, pubs and restaurants were also shut.

The Mayor of Leipzig, which traditionally has a large festive market, said, "I'm a big fan of the Christmas market myself. But we have to face realities. Health comes first. I am pleased that we can still decorate the streets and squares and thus offer the people of Leipzig a bit of a Christmas atmosphere."

A brief window of special restrictions has been introduced across the UK to allow people to celebrate Christmas. Between December 23rd and 27th there are no travel restric-

tions and people are able to mix indoors and stay overnight. The number of people who can mix is limited, however. So-called 'Christmas bubbles' can include a maximum of three households in most of the UK.

France began a curfew which will run from 8pm to 6am — this will be lifted for Christmas Eve but not New Year's Eve. France has seen its case numbers fall in recent weeks, but the numbers were still too high for a further easing of restrictions as the country enters the holiday period.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has told Italians to expect a 'more sober Christmas, without Christmas Eve gatherings, hugs and kisses'. Meanwhile, he reassured the

children via a Facebook post that Santa Claus will be able to deliver presents as normal this Christmas, because 'he is good and he will surely wear a face mask to protect himself'.

Meanwhile, the Spanish Government has approved a set of rules for the period between December 23rd and January 6th. Regional governments, however, have the power to toughen these common rules if they deem it necessary.

Nevertheless, squares and boulevards across cities are magnificently decorated: when the holiday season begins, cities in Europe light up. The lights are to bring hope and optimism, which is more important than ever in these times of coronavirus.

New data for influenza immunisation

Only Belarus in the WHO European Region has fulfilled the plan to vaccinate the elderly against influenza

WHO set a target in 2003 that 75 percent of elderly people should be vaccinated against influenza each year. The most recent data (2018/2019), published recently on the European Health Information Gateway, reveals that only 1 country out of 28 reporting coverage in the WHO European Region achieved that target — Belarus. More than 60 percent coverage was achieved by only 4 countries — Ireland, Portugal, Russian Federation and the United Kingdom.

Most countries recommend vaccination of the elderly, but in half of the countries less than 35 percent of their older population were vaccinated in 2018/2019, the lowest coverage was less than 1 percent. Many countries also lack mechanisms to monitor vaccination coverage in target groups such as the elderly.

"There is clearly work to be done in this area," said Dr. Richard Pebody, Team Leader, High Threat Pathogens, WHO/Europe. "Every year there are up to 60,000 influenza-associated respiratory deaths in the European Region; vaccination can dramatically reduce those numbers. WHO/Europe is keen to work with all our member states to reach this important and achievable target."



The European Health Information Gateway also covers immunization among healthcare workers. Immunisation rates among healthcare workers are high (over 80 percent) in Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation.



The catwalk in a baobab forest

Organisers of this year's Dakar Fashion Week have a message for the world: sustainability is in style

Forced by coronavirus restrictions to hold the show outside, models emerged beside the trunk of an ancient baobab tree to stride down the catwalk.

The event, held in Senegal's capital with the theme of environmental responsibility, featured twenty designers whose collections have long been handmade on the continent rather than mass produced in factories.

The majority of the fabric used at this year's Dakar Fashion Week, though assembled in Africa, was imported from

abroad. Even wax fabrics are typically manufactured in China and Europe.

"We don't make everything here, so we can't create a collection that's 100 percent Senegalese," said Ndiaye, whose line used imported material from Thailand.

Bel Jacobs, a co-founder of Fashion Act Now, a campaign group born out of Extinction Rebellion, said Dakar Fashion Week should be recognised for engaging in a conversation around sustainability and overconsumption.

Etna volcano erupts

Mount Etna has erupted in Sicily sending plumes of dense ash and spewing lava fountains into the sky

The Italian volcano is Europe's largest and Etna's frequent blasts are often accompanied by large lava flows.

The crater produced lava fountains of up to 100m high and a dense ash plume rose to an estimated 5km high, according to the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre Toulouse. Sandfalls on villages and towns south of the Sicilian volcano have also been reported.

Loud roars have been heard in Calabria as smoke was seen heading

towards Catania. A magnitude 2.7 earthquake was recorded on the slopes of Etna before the blast, but it's not known if it was linked. It's likely that the blast was a paroxysm as it lasted for a short period of time but was of high intensity.

Etna erupts frequently because of its position between the African and Eurasian tectonic plates, as well as the fault between the African and Ionian microplate.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



Miracles on every branch

New Year is a bright, festive, long-awaited holiday — full of gifts, adventures, bells and whistles. It was rightfully so during Soviet times, thrilling people with the essentials of champagne, salads, the bright *Blue Light* TV show and, of course, a green fir tree shining with decorations! Balls, beads, cosmonauts and hares mixed up in the Soviet New Year culture. Interestingly, the toys have also transformed in line with fashion and these changes also reflect both political issues and the release of popular movies.

By Stanislav Galkovsky

Replacement for Christmas

In the USSR, the New Year celebrations replaced the Christian Christmas since they seemed to Soviet authorities as an excellent substitute for the religious holiday. Fir tree angels were removed, and only balls and sweets were left, while the star of Bethlehem on top became associated with a Soviet star. It wasn't easy, though. Lenin loved New Year holidays and his *Fir Tree in Sokolniki* fest was huge. However, after his death, the New Year began to be openly called 'a bourgeois relic' and was eventually banned. The holiday was rehabilitated only in 1935: the ban on official celebrations was lifted and production of New Year toys was launched. Some of the latter featured state symbols — such as a hammer and sickle, flags or photos of famous political figures, while others were made in the form of fruit and animals, airships, gliders and even corn, which was an image from the Khrushchev era.

Cosmonauts, stars, corn

In Soviet times, the toy was not only about beauty: it aimed to generate high socialist and cultural values in society. Its production had to be large and needed to be approved by many commissions. Only then was a state order issued and production began. Therefore, such decorations often appeared on special occasions. For example, in 1949, to mark the 150th anniversary of Pushkin's birth, figurines — characters from his fairy tales — were made.

The Khrushchev times of agricultural innovation then followed — giving birth to such toys as yellow corn and other food products. The friendship of Soviet peoples was strong and sets of 15 figurines in the form of girls dressed in national costumes of all the Soviet republics became popular. After Gagarin flew into space, all the New Year trees were decorated with cosmonauts...

"New Year toys reflected not only the political life, but also film fashion," says Tatiana Borisova, a senior custodian of the G. Vashchenko Gallery's archives. "For example, after the *Carnival Night* film was released and its *Five Minutes* song captured people's hearts, toy-watches were put on all Soviet fir trees. In the 1970s and 1980s, more attention was paid to the characters of children's cartoons: Cheburashka, Winnie the Pooh, Carlson, Umka. The 1980 Olympics made a toy-bear popular."

Everything repeats

Until the 1960s, old fir tree toys made of glass beads — tubes and lanterns strung on a wire — were common but later designers began experimenting with shape and colour, making figurines, icicles or cones. They started using plastic for transparent balls, stamped animal profiles and polyhedra.

In reality, decorations were much more colourful, recalls designer Yelena Zhdanovich, "Today everyone can go to a supermarket and buy a set of bright imported balls. However, previously, fir tree decorations were in short supply and decorations were collected for more than a generation, being carefully stored. Decorating a tree was a ritual, with everyone happy to put silver tinsel on or cover it with cotton wool. Sweets and tangerines were placed on the tree; these are openly sold now but were rare in the past. Many made decorations with their own hands. What are the current trends? Against the background of variety, handmade work, including embroidered decorations, is back in fashion.

The modern world is ruled by individuality, so the New Year tree should be special."



Who came up with the idea of decorating the fir tree?

Many researchers believe the tradition of decorating the fir tree spread around the world from Germany. Even ancient Germanic tribes believed in the power of spirits that supposedly lived on the tops of evergreen trees. They tried to appease them by decorating the sacred tree with fruit and nuts. Later, the famous Christian reformer, Martin Luther, tried to eradicate this pagan habit. Legend says that Luther saw a spruce tree at night shining in the moon-



The photos taken from open sources

various countries not only as a Christmas, but also as a New Year element.

Diamond glitter

The most expensive Christmas tree toy in the world is a product of Hallmark Jewellers: it's a white gold ball studded with 1,500 diamonds and 188 rubies. The ball is kept in the British Hampshire castle. It took 130 hours of manual work to create this masterpiece by designer Mark Hussey. Initially, the jeweller expected that no one would buy his Christmas tree decoration. After the show, he was going to take it home but the viewers appreciated his work. This decoration costs 82,000 Euros and is mentioned by the Guinness Book of Records as the most expensive Christmas tree decoration in the world.

Smart toys

Planetary automation and computerisation have also reached New Year and smart lights are in fashion in our 21st century. These follow the mood of their owners — 'reading' their wishes and thoughts. The main feature of the smart lights are the ability to customise them from a smartphone and sync with music. The colour, brightness and speed of the lights are fixed with help of a special app. As a result, an ordinary-looking string of lights boasts a huge number of visual effects. It also works independently. It is convenient that the lights can be connected to a smartphone or directly to a home Wi-Fi network.

Meeting all tastes and colours

Each nation has its own favourite characters and materials for Christmas decorations. In Sweden, the most popular are made from straw: figurines of a Christmas goat are made from it. This character is popular in Sweden, Norway and Finland. In the Belarusian tradition, this is a carolling goat. In Germany, people love Christmas nutcrackers and, in Ireland, toys are usually made in a certain colour scheme: i.e. a snowman can only be wearing a green scarf. In the USA, the top of a tree is most often decorated not with a star, but an angel, while mistletoe ornaments are very popular in the UK. In Spain, Christmas trees are always full of sweets and, in Italy or Mexico, puppet shows on the Nativity are more common instead of decorated fir trees.

In the East, the New Year tradition has its own (not Christmas!) flavour: here, people simply decorate trees on the eve of the Eastern New Year. In China, all kinds of paper pieces are used — lanterns, garlands, flowers — and, in Japan, small dolls, paper fans, bells and, of course, origami are popular. Temari hand-made balls covered with embroidery are especially valuable decorations here.



light — resembling the star of Bethlehem that led the Magi to Jesus. Then he was the first to bring a fir tree into the house and decorate it with candles, and at the top he placed the symbol of Christmas: a star. This was in 1513. Since then, decorating a fir tree before Christmas has become common all around the Christian world. In the 20th century, when the religious component of the holiday began to be replaced by atheistic, tree decorations became popular in





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In the courtyard of Nesvizh Castle

Following tradition, many people prefer to celebrate the New Year with their families, at a festive table — once again watching *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Steam!* movie, drinking a glass of champagne when clocks strike twelve and making wishes. What about other ideas? It is, for example, possible to celebrate the New Year in a new city and to spend January 1st not watching Soviet comedies but going on an interesting trip. We've investigated what destinations to choose during the forthcoming holidays, compiling a guide to the most interesting places in Belarus.

By Victoria Derzhanovich

Nesvizh

In the first week of 2021 — from January 2nd-10th — the Nesvizh Museum-Reserve is inviting people to recall an old custom: Kuligi. This was the name of the tradition of Christmas visits, especially popular in the 18th century Rzecz Pospolita. From Christmas to Lent, companies of friends toured the estates and palaces, where they spent several days. Hosts welcomed their guests with true generosity. In addition to a festive table, special Christmas entertainment was also prepared. However, modern visitors to the reserve would be able to enjoy not only a fascinating tour but also a meeting with the Radziwills (their role will be played by guest-actors). They will 'arrive' from different centuries for a short time to visit their family palace and tell interesting stories.

Many more attractions are available in Nesvizh. It's worth visiting Zamkovy [Castle] and Stary [Old] parks, finding Undina's well and meeting the Black Lady (if you're not afraid, of course). Guests to the city may also tour the town hall and the Local Folklore Museum, also visiting the Slutsk Brama [gates] — a unique Baroque monument that once served as the city's fortified gate. Be sure to check out the souvenir shops which offer a rich variety of gifts.

Grodno

What about the idea of going on a three-day bus tour to the

New Year journey

Take a walk along the eco-path to visit... the Black Lady. We know how to spend interesting New Year and Christmas weekends.



Brest Fortress



Brest



Braslav Lakes

western region of the country and spending New Year's Eve at a festive banquet in a city restaurant or on a country estate? The programme includes a sightseeing tour of Grodno, during which visitors will see the main sights of the city: the Old and New castles, the Jesuit (Farny) Roman Catholic Church, the Pharmacy Museum, the Bernardine Roman Catholic Church, the synagogue, the Fire Tower and the 12th century St. Boris and Gleb Church. On the first day of 2021, holidaymakers will be able to visit the Korobchitsy agro-tourist complex — a unique place where the traditions of folk Belarusian architecture are reproduced. During a stagecoach ride through the enclosure, they can see wild animals: roe deer, elk, red spotted deer and, in the poultry yard, peacocks, pheasants, turkeys, rare-breed chickens and squirrels. The tour programme

also includes a visit to Lida and the local castle.

Brest and the Belovezhskaya Pushcha

Those wishing for unforgettable impressions of the New Year weekend can go to Brest and its surrounding area. Depending on how they prefer to travel, it's possible to reach the city on the Bug River either using personal transport (independently planning the route and deciding on places to stop, a New Year's party and sightseeing) or as part of an organised group. One such tour plans a two-day stay — including a visit to one of the main memorial complexes dedicated to the Great Patriotic War: the Brest Fortress. In the afternoon, a sightseeing tour of Brest is included — enabling holidaymakers to walk along the city's picturesque pedestrian street and take photos with original street sculptures.



Grodno

At sunset, be sure not to miss the daily ceremony of the lighting of the old lamps by a lamplighter dressed in the uniform from Piotr the Great's times. It's believed that taking photos with this man will bring happiness.

On the second day, a trip to Belovezhskaya Pushcha and the home of the major New Year wizard — Father Frost — is planned. It will be interesting to young guests and their parents as well.

Braslav Lakes

Those who want to combine nature trips and excursions during the holidays will probably like another three-day bus tour: to the Vitebsk Region. It includes a visit to neo-Gothic churches in the urban village of Vidzy and the agro-town of Opsa, as well as sightseeing tours of the Braslav Lakes National Park and the city of Braslav. On the pre-holiday evening, everyone can visit the banya. Guests can also enjoy other types of entertainment: billiards and table tennis, a walk in the winter forest or karaoke.

On the next day, a picnic lunch in the open air and holiday street festivities are planned. Young guests will be treated with sweets and offered their favourite Christmas movies, fairy tales and cartoons to watch.

On the final day of the tour, guests will climb the Mayak Mountain by an eco-path to enjoy the scenic views and landscapes. On the way back to Minsk, Glubokoe will be visited. Here, travellers will get acquainted with local attractions and be offered the delicacy produced in the city: condensed milk.

Sanatoria

Belarusian health resorts also offer interesting New Year programmes and such weekend offers have many ad-

vantages. Firstly, holiday celebrations are planned by others and guests simply need to dress up and get ready for the evening in good spirits. Secondly, three days in a sanatorium can help reboot and gain physical and mental strength: breathe the fresh air, walk in the woods or by the lake, relax at the spa. This will help you to start the new year relaxed and refreshed.

Only old-timers on the list

Main results of Belarus' football year: the best from BATE

A career starts at 31: this fact is well-known to Maksim Skavysh. At the official conclusion of the *Star Ball – 2020* event — which crowned the football season, the BATE and national team forward captured four key ‘Oscars’ becoming the best player of the year and of the championship, the best striker and best scorer. On that day, he gained overall recognition.



Maksim Skavysh is the hero of the season

By Sergei Kanashits

It's impossible to call Maksim's career simple and predictable. He joined the BATE main team in 2008 like a rocket: he was fast, sport-arrogant, always aimed at the goal. It seemed that a real striker was growing up which our football lacked. However, his career then followed the wrong path: we now know of his strange resignation, a vague season in Belshina, lost years in Baltika FC, an unsuccessful attempt to gain a foothold in the Israeli League, the arrival, walk off and return to Zhodino Torpedo BelAZ. At some points there was the impression that Maksim was a ‘downed pilot’ — forced to eject, failing even to take off. However, two years ago, he returned to BATE and began to slowly reboot — to reveal himself fully rebuilt to the football world this season.

Skavysh's recognition as the best in four categories can hardly be called accidental and undeserved: in the 2020 season, he performed with skill and power.

However, there's a strange trend that, in the Belarusian championship, players start revealing their best ca-

pabilities when they are over 30. This has happened to the hero of the 2018 and 2019 seasons — Igor Stasevich; the same situation is observed with Skavysh. Question arise: where is a new strong generation, why are the best footballers old-timers?

Stasevich himself has again received an award: the *Star Ball* jury named him the best midfielder of the championship. Aleksandr Gutor — who won gold medals as part of Shakhtyor — became the best goalkeeper, while Maksim Bordachev from Torpedo BelAZ was recognised as the best defender. As for training managers, the coach of CSKA Moscow — Viktor Goncharenko — has been once again named the best coach of the year, while Yuri Puntus (who was first to help Zhodino Torpedo BelAZ win bronze) has been acknowledged as the best coach of Belarus' championship.

Interestingly, all the main nominees are from BATE, once led by Anatoly Kapsky, who died two years ago. He is not with his footballers but his work is still alive. We should never forget this: so far, Belarusian football continues developing on the foundations laid by this great master.



First Vice President of the NOC Belarus — Viktor Lukashenko, FIS Freestyle Moguls and Aerials Race Director — Andrea Rinaldi (Switzerland), Secretary General of the NOC Belarus — Polina Golovina, and Secretary General of the Belarusian Ski Union — Aleksandr Grebenev

Answering all questions

FIS representative and NOC heads discuss preparation for 2021 world and European cups



The First Vice President of the NOC Belarus, Viktor Lukashenko, has met with Andrea Rinaldi — the FIS Freestyle Moguls and Aerials Race Director — at the headquarters of Belarus' National Olympic Committee.

The FIS official came to Minsk to inspect preparations for the world and European aerials cup in 2021. This is his first international visit in the role of the FIS Freestyle Moguls and Aerials Race Director.

Andrea Rinaldi noted that Belarus plays an important role in the International Ski Federation, “Since 1998, Belarusian athletes have constantly graced the Olympic podium. At the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeong-Chang, Anna Guskova captured gold and we really want your team to keep performing at such a high level. I have met many times with representatives of the Belarusian aerials team; they are known for their professionalism. I would like to continue exchanging best practice with our Belarusian colleagues. I would also like to thank the NOC Belarus and the Belarus Ski Union that are doing such a lot to promote the sport. The recent FIS Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup in Ruka (Finland) was broadcast in 14 countries.

I sincerely hope that the NOC will support the upcoming FIS Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup in Raubichi in February 2021, which will be held ahead of the World Cup in Calgary. I don't see any problems for the aerials teams that will come to Raubichi in February.”

Viktor Lukashenko thanked the FIS official for the visit and added that the Belarusian side is looking forward to fruitful co-operation with the International Ski Federation. “I would like you to visit as many sports facilities as possible. We are open and honest with all our partners and friends who come to visit our country. We hope you become a friend of Belarus and get answers to all your questions,” he noted.

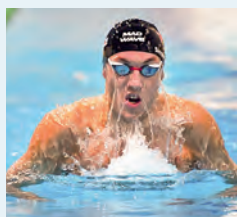
Viktor Lukashenko pledged support on the part of the NOC Belarus for the Aerials World Cup, saying, “I am confident that the competitions will be organised to a high standard. Aerials is a popular sport in our country, first of all, thanks to the achievements of Belarusian athletes.”

Raubichi is scheduled to host the FIS Freestyle Ski Aerials World Cup on February 13th, 2021.

Based on materials of belta.by

ARENA

● Ilya Shimanovich set a new world record in men's short course 100m breaststroke



At the Belarusian Short Course Championships, which became a qualifier for the 2021 European and World Short Course Championships, Ilya Shimanovich, a two-time silver medalist of the World Short Course Championships, covered the distance in 55.34 seconds. The previous record was set by Adam Petey from the UK in November 2020 at 55.41 seconds.

The Minsker also distinguished himself at 50m breaststroke, setting a national record of 25.39 seconds. He also conquered the country's record for the 200m breaststroke, which is now 2 minutes 02.77 sec.

● New world records in the kettlebell lifting marathon

Belarusian strongman Vyacheslav

Khoroneko achieved a new unique result. During the Christmas Cup tournament, which is a part of the *For Sports Belarus* programme, Vyacheslav Khoroneko lifted a 24kg kettlebell with one hand 177 times in 150 seconds, setting a new world record.

Another Belarusian athlete Sergei Zaslavsky achieved the same success and was able to perform 35 push-ups in 30 seconds on the parallel bars with a weight of 26kg.

Records will be registered in due course.

● Belarusian sambo wrestlers won seven medals at the Kharlampiev Memorial World Sambo Cup in Moscow

In the women's sports section, the Belarusians took 3rd place in the team rankings, behind the squads from Russia and Romania. Silver medals have been earned by Anastasia Skvortsova (68kg) and Karina



Shut (80kg), while bronze medals were claimed by Anfisa Kopaeva

(48kg) and Anastasia Grishchenko (over 80kg). In a similar section for men, Maksim Likhovets won silver, and Timofey Yemelyanov (90kg) snatched bronze.

Vladislav Mikheichik (62kg) won the bronze medal in combat sambo starts.

Kharlampiev Memorial World Sambo Cup 2020 gathered representatives from fifteen countries in Moscow.

● Dinara Alimbekova of Belarus ranked fifth in the overall rankings of the Biathlon World Cup after four stages

Before the start of the fourth Cup stage in Austrian Hochfilzen she was second, but after it had ended she didn't manage to stay in the top three. In Austria, Dinara Alimbekova performed unsuccessfully: in the 7.5km sprint race she only took 31st place, in the pursuit she finished in 11th,

and she was in the 20th place in the final standings in the mass event.

The leader of the Belarusian women's team now boasts 326 points. The general classification is topped by the Norwegian biathlete, Marte Olsbu Røiseland, who has 415 points, while Sweden's Hanna Oeberg is placed second with 378 points, and the third placed is occupied by another Norwegian athlete, Tiril Eckhoff (346 points), followed by the Swedish biathlete, Elvira Oeberg, who has 334 points.

Three more representatives of Belarus earned points at the four starting Cup stages: Yelena Kruchinkina, 100 (27th in the overall standings), Irina Krivko, 97 (29th) and Anna Sola, 65 (37th). In the Nations Cup standings, the women's national team of Belarus took 7th place, with 2,252 points.

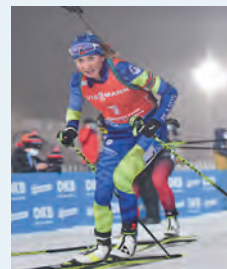




Photo of the week

During the regional New Year ball for students and youth in Vitebsk

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



On December 25th, 1980, Roman Petrushenko was born (Gomel Region's Kalinkovichi) — a Belarusian athlete (rowing) and a master of sport of the international class (2001). He claimed bronze at the Olympic Games (2004) in K2 500m and silver at the 2002 World Championship in K4 500m. He was also a bronze medalist of the European Championships (2001) in K4 500m and 1,000m. Furthermore, he has won the World Cup stages in K4 (2001 twice, 2002 — three times) and the 2002 Duisburg Regatta in K2 1,000m.

On December 25th, 1900, the City Public Library (now the A.S. Pushkin Minsk Regional Library) was opened on Zakharievskaya Street in Minsk in memory of A.S. Pushkin. This is the first city public library in Minsk. Before the Great Patriotic War, it boasted rare editions of Pushkin's works, alongside memoirs and diaries of the poet's contemporaries and documents. All this was destroyed or taken to Germany. After the war, work was actively carried out to restore its archive. Currently, the library is not only the largest repository of books



in the region, but also an informational, educational, cultural and social centre.



On December 25th, 1990, the 1st (founding) Congress of the Belarusian Society of Inventors and Rationalisers (BSIR) was held in Minsk. It is a public creative organisation that unites — on a democratic and voluntary basis — inventors, philosophers, amateur authors and other citizens participating in technical creativity and promoting its development. The society currently unites about 80,000 members.

December 25th celebrates the Catholic holiday of Christmas. It's one of the most important Christian holidays and a public holiday in over 100 countries around the world, established in remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. On December 25th, Christmas is celebrated not only by the Catholic, but also by the Orthodox churches of Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, as well as Lutherans and other Protestant denominations. Orthodox Christians adhering to the traditional Julian calendar celebrate this event on January 7th.



On December 28th, 1895, German experimental physicist Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen announced his discovery of radiation, later named after him (X-rays), and created the first X-ray tubes. For this discovery, the scientist was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1901, becoming the first Nobel laureate in physics.

December 28th is International Cinema Day. On December 28th, 1895, the first public demonstration of the 'living moving photography' — cinematography' invented by the Lumiere brothers took place in Paris in the Grand Cafe on Boulevard des Capucines. They presented to the public the world's first short film, entitled *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*. Since then, cinema has come a long way in development and has undergone large-scale changes: from silent to sound films, from black-and-white to colour, from film to digital. Different countries of the world have established their own days of national cinematography. The Day of Belarusian Cinema is celebrated on December 17th.



December 29th — International Cello Day — is an unofficial holiday for cellists and music lovers. The birthday of the outstanding Catalan cellist, conductor, composer and musical public figure, Pablo Casals (1876-1973), was chosen as the date for this musical holiday. He is considered one of the finest cellists of all time and the first populariser of the cello as a solo instrument. The cello has wide expressive possibilities and rich performance techniques, therefore it is often used as a solo instrument whilst at the same time being an obligatory member of the symphony orchestra and string quartet. The most famous works include Bach's six suites for solo cello, Tchaikovsky's *Variations on the Roco Theme*, Saint-Saëns's *Swan*, as well as cello concertos by Vivaldi, Boccherini, Haydn, Dvořák.



On December 30th, 2000, a memorial sign '2000 Years of Christianity' was established to reward the successful revival and preservation of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Belarusian people, for active participation in the preparation and holding of anniversary events dedicated to the meeting of the third millennium and the celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Christianity.