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INTERNATIONAL

# The Minsk Times

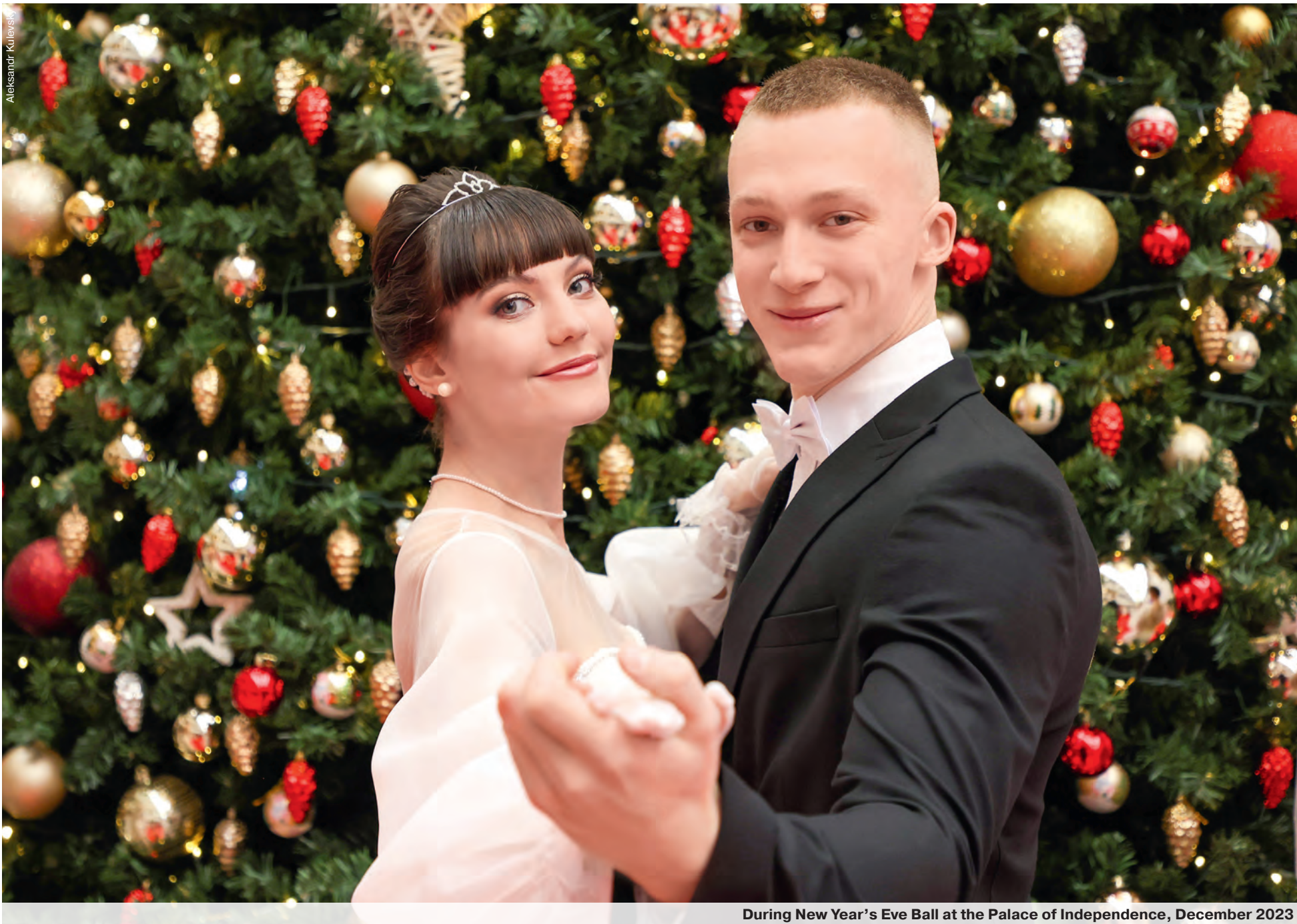
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During New Year's Eve Ball at the Palace of Independence, December 2023

## Strong in our traditions

New Year and Christmas traditions of Belarus best emphasise the priorities of the state's social policy. The essence of *Our Children* campaign, carried out under the patronage of the President, is that on these bright days the feeling of a real holiday comes to every young Belarusian. Both successful, gifted girls and boys, as well as those who, by the will of fate, find themselves in a difficult life situation, deserve this. The New Year's Eve Ball at the Palace of Independence is one of the most beautiful traditions in Belarus. This is also a symbol that emphasises the deep interest of our society in creating conditions for the development of the younger generation. On these same days,

we extend our hand to elderly people as part of the republican charity event *With All My Heart*, initiated by the President. Thus, we clearly declare that the generations behind whom the construction of a successful future will always find support, and those to whom we owe a worthy present will always be surrounded by care. → 4



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# Showcase for the best brands from Minsk and Belarusian regions

On the eve of the New Year, the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, visited the First National Trading House shopping centre

This is a unique trading platform where the best products from every region of the country are presented. 133 branded stores of domestic manufacturers, cafes and restaurants, and household facilities are located on three floors. On the ground floor there are stores of organisations in the city of Minsk, on the first floor — Vitebsk, Minsk and Mogilev Regions, on the second — Brest, Grodno and Gomel Regions.

The Head of State himself suggested making a large-scale showcase for Belarusian brands: in July 2022, during a visit to the Stolitsa shopping centre, the President was instructed to set up a Belarusian shopping centre on the site of the long-term construction project at the intersection of Nezavisimosti Avenue and Kirill Turovsky Street. Previously, this facility was called Minsk's Magnit, and its construction was launched back in 2009, but the work was never completed.

"Belarusian, Belarusian and again Belarusian. No one from foreigners will reproach us. They have left, that's OK. We will sell ours. We need to build our policy so that the priority is given to Belarus-made goods," Aleksandr Lukashenko spoke then about the main semantic content of the creation of a shopping centre.

And on the last Friday of 2023, Aleksandr Lukashenko personally came to evaluate the finished object and the result,

*"I was concerned that our regions would be represented here. So that they don't cry that they are not allowed into Minsk, it is impossible to sell the goods... Sell them. But I would like this to be the beginning. We need to carry out such construction not only in Belarus, but also in Russia. In St. Petersburg, why not build such a building and deliver goods. In Moscow, Smolensk, Bryansk, Pskov... Very close. And people respond well to Belarusian."*



Upon arrival at the shopping centre, the President was greeted not only by officials and journalists, but also by Father Frost and the Snow Maiden — after all, it was a pre-New Year's event.

Nevertheless, the Head of State put everyone in a working mood by hearing a report on the construction of a facility that had been on the list of long-term construction projects for years. Initially, a shopping and entertainment centre was supposed to be built on this site, more than 10 years ago, which was carried out by an Iranian company.

"It was actually an abandoned facility. It was ordered to build both a shopping centre and rental housing for the military [on the floors above the shopping centre]. Everything was done as planned," the Belarusian leader said.

The construction of the facility was completed in a short time, and Aleksandr Lukashenko drew attention to some shortcomings in the interior. He instructed to approach this issue in a businesslike manner, without spending 'mad amounts of money'.

The Head of State called on Belarusian producers to work more actively in the domestic market, "If you want to conquer your market and not give it

to anyone, then, naturally, you need to have your own stores in Belarus. We will return to this later. We have already talked about this using the example of our light industry."

As the Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee Vladimir Kukharev reported, an underground pedestrian crossing was built next to the shopping centre: "We were the first in the country to build without an open method (we did not excavate the avenue). We did it using the tunnel method. Metrostroy made this tunnel. Now we have already developed technologies. We can continue to build without stopping traffic," he said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko positively assessed this approach, instructing that underground passages be done this way throughout the country in the future.

The President got acquainted with the branded stores and catering facilities of leading Belarusian manufacturers, "This is a unifying idea. We must go this way."

The first store the Head of State visited was the Pinskdev furniture showroom. By the way, the company has almost one and a half hundred stores throughout the republic and about 100 more in Russia. There,

Pinskdev built its own distribution network. Aleksandr Lukashenko sets this format of work as an example for other manufacturers.

Speaking about the production of furniture, the Head of State emphasised: fabrics and accessories must be Belarusian.

"I'm interested in having our own. Fabrics, leather, wood — these are ours. We can do this. If we can, why not produce?" he said.

The President visited a bed linen store from the Blakit company, a Belarusian porcelain store, a jewellery salon of the famous Gomel enterprise Kristall, and a food store in the Gomel Region. Here the Head of State tasted the products of regional enterprises.

At the Neman glass factory store, Aleksandr Lukashenko was informed about the work of the enterprise. According to management, there are now a lot of orders, and products are not delayed in the warehouse.

"If your production is as you say, then thank you for saving the plant," the President said.

At the same time, he recalled that at one time the plant had to be saved in order to maintain production and competence. Gomel's Kristall was once in a similar situation.

The Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee reported to the Head of State about the presence on the premises of the trading house of a multifunctional centre for carrying out administrative procedures, including a 'one window' service, a settlement and reference centre of the administration of the Pervomaisky District of Minsk, a branch of the Minsk City Agency for State Registration and Land Cadastre, department on citizenship and migration of the main department of internal affairs of the Minsk City Executive Committee.



**The Chairman of the Supreme State Council, the President of the Republic of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, signed a decree approving the Union State budget for 2024 — as reported by the Union State Standing Committee with reference to State Secretary of the Union State Dmitry Mezentsev.**

The State Secretary of Belarus-Russia Union State also noted that the budget was agreed upon by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"It's significant that we'll start the new year with a fundamental financial document, which means that financing of the Union State programmes for the next year will begin on time. The Standing Committee will ensure the execution of the Union State budget in full and considers this an absolute priority for itself," Dmitry Mezentsev commented on the document.

According to him, the contribution of Belarus and Russia to the Union State budget has been increased by 38 percent for the first time, ensuring an expansion in the number of the Union State programmes, projects and activities.

"It's important that next year not only will their number expand in the areas of high technology, defence and security, but the number of events in the cultural, humanitarian, educational and civil-patriotic spheres has increased by almost a third. We see this as a response to people's requests, in support of the parties' position on expanding the scale of economic integration, strengthening interregional and inter-parliamentary co-operation," the State Secretary of the Union State emphasised.

**During his visit to the First National Trading House shopping centre, the President of Belarus left an autograph with chocolate in the Kommunarka brand store, the Pul Pervogo Telegram channel reported.**

Aleksandr Lukashenko signed a sweet 'painting', depicting the Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace, the Brest Fortress, the Mir and Nesvizh castles, and the Buinichi Field. The Telegram channel underlined that it was the first time the President of Belarus left an autograph with chocolate.

In addition, the Head of State was shown a heart made of meat products, sausage and ham, from Vitebsk's Ganna enterprise — The Dream Valentine — noted the Telegram channel.

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by





# New Year’s address of Belarus’ President Aleksandr Lukashenko to Belarusian people

Dear compatriots! Dear guests of Belarus!

In a few moments, we will step into the new year: 2024. However, we are already drawing it in our minds, and it is the shape of our future.

By saying goodbye to the Year of Peace and Creation, we wish that the coming one would be the same peaceful for all of us, for Belarus, that it would be peaceful for our neighbours, and for all people. Of course, we want everything the best to multiply.

**There is no peace without creation, and there is no creation without peace.**

We want to see loving couples become families tomorrow, we want to congratulate parents on the birth of their babies, to rejoice together with our friends and relatives who are happy to have grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

It is important for us to be healthy, to see how children go to kindergartens and schools with happiness, and how former students become real professionals.

It is important to know that our elderly and those in need of special attitude are surrounded by care and attention.

Therefore, I am grateful to all those who give themselves completely to the most difficult work — working with people, justifying the trust of millions of their compatriots every day.

**This is our path: the path of creation, the road of a lifetime, along which we walk day after day.**

We want our apartments and houses to be cozy and warm in the coming year, we want to have delicious and



healthy products on our tables, and to always enjoy a view of well-landscaped and peaceful streets, playgrounds and green parks.

We want to see how our cities are developing, and how life in the hinterland is becoming more comfortable and modern.

Thank you, workers — all those who literally pluck crops from the captivity of bad weather every year, feed us, provide clothing, produce goods that enjoy demand on world markets, develop science and technology, design and construct.

**Over the past year, attempts were made to bring us to our knees, to strangle us economically, but we have not just stood our ground: we have been developing comprehensively and moving towards our goal!**

Actually, we can do even more, being aware that we live behind the reliable backs of all those who faithfully serve the

Motherland and who love it.

This is because there is no stronger incentive for development than confidence in the future and in the people’s security.

People in uniform, thank you for the peace!

Dear compatriots!

**The year 2024 is coming. This will be the Year of Quality – the quality that has long become a lifestyle of Belarusians and their national feature, and it will become a symbol of all endeavours soon.**

The good tradition of awarding a badge of honour to the best manufacturers of goods and services will be revived, and its first holders will join the history of independent Belarus.

In the political field of our country, the ancient Slavic tradition of people’s rule will return to life in a new status. The Belarusian People’s Congress will begin its work for the first time as a constitutional body.

In this way, we will create the foundation of the Belarusian national statehood. On the single voting day, our Parliament and the councils’ deputies will be elected.

**2024 is the year of the 80th anniversary of Belarus’ liberation from the Nazi invaders, and there is no date more important for us.** To celebrate the anniversary at the proper level, so that the memory of the heroes of that time lives forever, is a matter of honour and a guarantee of peace in the future.

These and many other events will soon rapidly break into the history of our coun-

**In the first days of 2024, Aleksandr Lukashenko’s New Year’s greeting took third place in the ‘Trending’ section on YouTube. In the comments, Belarusians and residents of dozens of countries left wishes for health to the President of Belarus, and for peace and prosperity to the country.**

try. We will continue to create, preserving and enriching the cultural heritage with our creativity and talent, defending national interests, protecting ancestral traditions and values. We will do everything to make our country even more beautiful, more comfortable and stronger.

This is our home, and — for everyone — it begins with their own doorstep and beloved family, becoming an indestructible fortress for all of us, for our single nation.

Dear Belarusians!  
On New Year’s Eve, I, first of all, wish you to celebrate the coming year 2024 with a sincere and festive vividness.

I wish good New Year’s mood to all those who are working while the country is celebrating.

I wish strength and good health to our war and labour veterans in the coming year, and I also wish happy childhood to all kids, and bright youth to young people.

Let now and forever the soft glow of the windows, where relatives have gathered at the set tables and where friends have met, envelops the Belarusian holy land.

May all our wildest dreams and desires come true in the name of peace and life.

**Be happy!  
Happy New Year!**

## PROTOCOL

### The law on the republican budget of Belarus for 2024 was signed

Law of the Republic of Belarus dated December 27th, 2023 No. 328-Z *On the Republican Budget for 2024* was included in the National Register on December 29th. This indicates that the document was signed by the President of the country.

Previously, the document was considered in the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly. On December 13th, senators approved the corresponding bill, after which it was sent to the Head of State for signature.

At the meeting of the 11th session of the Council of the Republic of the seventh convocation, the document was presented by Finance Minister Yuri Seliverstov. The budget was formed based on the parameters of economic development for the next year, which were approved by Decree of the Head of State No. 307 of October 2nd, 2023, as well as the implementation of tax policy measures.

**As previously reported, republican budget revenues in 2024 are planned at Br39.9 billion, the consolidated budget — Br67.5 billion, which is 2.8 percent and 6.3 percent more, respectively, than the revenue estimate for 2023.**

“The main share of budget revenues comes from VAT, income tax, income from foreign economic activity, income tax and excise taxes,” Finance Minister said, speaking on December 13th in the Council of the Republic.

In 2024, expenditures of the republican budget are planned in the amount of Br44.7 billion, the consolidated budget — Br72.7 billion, or 113.9 percent and 112.1 percent, respectively, of the 2023 estimate.

**The priority areas of budget policy in 2024 remain the social sphere, increasing the well-being of citizens by increasing wages, and supporting the national economy in the current conditions.**

In particular, the republican budget expenditures for 2024 provide funds for the payment of family capital — Br383 million, financing of housing construction with state support — Br1.7 billion.

Let us recall that on October 2nd, the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko signed Decree No. 307, which approved the most important forecast parameters for the country’s development for 2024. **The main goal of next year’s economic policy will be to ensure the stability of the economy and increase the well-being of the population.**

### State awards in Belarus: what will change?

Aleksandr Lukashenko signed the Law amending the *Law On State Awards of the Republic of Belarus*.  
**The document, in particular, implements the powers of the Belarusian People’s Congress in terms of awarding the President of Belarus with state awards, as well as initiating awards to other persons.**

In order to increase the significance of the award of the Order of the Mother, additional conditions for the award of this award are established. Thus, the Order of the Mother can be awarded to women who have citizenship of the Republic of Belarus, who gave birth and (or) properly raised five or more children — citizens of the Republic of Belarus, who have high moral qualities and responsibility in raising and maintaining children, caring for their health, development, training, preparation for socially useful work, instilling in them culture and respect for the laws, historical and national traditions of Belarus.

**In order to increase the authority of the activities of media representatives, the Law establishes a new state award — the honorary title Honoured Media Worker of the Republic of Belarus.**

Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by





# Young generation is a symbol of Belarus' future

In line with the established good tradition, the Independence Palace opened its doors to guests of the youth ball held on the eve of the New Year holidays

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, took part in the solemn event and addressed young people with warm words and heartfelt wishes.

State Secretary of the Security Council Aleksandr Volfovich, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Petrishenko, Deputy Head of the Belarus President Administration Igor Lutsky, Culture Minister Anatoly Markevich and Education Minister Andrei Ivanets, Minsk Mayor Vladimir Kukharev, Chairman of the Central Election Commission and Head of the Public Advisory Council on Education Igor Karpenko were among the attendees at the Grand Ceremonial Hall of the Palace of Independence.

Taking part in the ball were more than 330 young men and women from various parts of Belarus. These were gifted students of universities, vocational schools, cadet schools and the Minsk Suvorov Military School who have shown academic excellence, scholarly distinction and demonstrated creativity and discovery at art competitions, youth and community projects and sports.



The tradition to hold a New Year's Eve Ball was revived in Belarus in 2018. The Palace of Independence has become its permanent venue. All those present were warmly greeted by Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.



"This is the only day of the year when our Palace of Independence looks so different. Just a few hours ago, important political, economic and security matters were discussed in the offices and halls of this building. Now the atmosphere of music and dance has taken up the reins. The atmosphere of youth. It is important that all this happens once a year and only for you," the Head of State remarked.

*"When I see very beautiful, happy young people, I think with gratitude about your parents, teachers, professors," the President said. "Because they raised and educated you. They taught you to set the right goals and achieve them. And remember: revere your parents and teachers. Everything you have is due to them. Tomorrow you will begin your own journey but this journey will start from the place where your parents put you. Keep this in mind. You must respect those who helped you become who you are today. There are no random people here, you are the best representatives of our youth," the President said addressing the ball participants. "You have worked hard in the past year, achieved outstanding results in the academic field, sports, and taken an active part in the volunteer movement, which is very important," Aleksandr Lukashenko added.*

"Tomorrow you will perhaps step into big politics. And you will be responsible for everything that will be happening in our state. And if this Palace of Independence is a symbol of our statehood, then you are a symbol of our future. This means that you will shape the future. Those who are not ready for this yet, who have not comprehended it yet, please, get ready. Whether you like it or not, the future is in your hands," the Belarusian leader emphasised.

The Head of state congratulated the participants of the ball on the coming year and said a few words about the outgoing year:

"For some it was calm, for others it was stormy, and for some it was just like another year. You have a few more days left to make this year unforgettable. Step into the new year with dignity, so that it will be something to remember, something unimaginable."

People's Artist of Belarus Vladimir Gromov is the one who runs the ball. He welcomes guests and introduces the dance masters.

Traditionally, the ball kicked off with a polonaise of debutants, i.e. young, unmarried persons. Young ladies hold a bouquet of fresh flowers. The program continued with one of the most popular dances, which is also called the king of dances and the dance of kings — the waltz. After several dances, the couples regrouped for the polka. This fiery dance is compared to a fun game and is a mandatory element of any ball.

The young people demonstrated their dancing skills at a quadrille and a complex, but brilliant and energetic mazurka. The evening continued with a fascinating galop and chaconne based on elements of a gavotte and a minuet. The classical part of the ball ended, as befits centuries-old ballroom traditions, with the midnight quadrille that was performed by all the dancers.

After that the guests continued with modern rock and roll, mambo, boogie-woogie, lambada, twist and other dances.

## There are no somebody else's children in Belarus!

The President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko participated in a charity event as part of the *Our Children* campaign at the Palace of the Republic. The Head of State first of all presented gifts to Father Frost and the Snow Maiden, and after that he warmly communicated with the young guests of the event.

The President noted that at this time children experience joyful days, expecting gifts and New Year's magic. Aleksandr Lukashenko especially noted the merits of the guys and praised them.

"First of all, you are great! Here are the guys who deserve to be present at this wonderful holiday. There are 3 thousand of you here, along with teachers and parents. You are future outstanding personalities, the future of our country, our Belarus. Thank you for taking your studies seriously from these young years. I really hope that in addition to studying, you play sports. I advise you to play sports to be not only a beautiful person, but healthy," the Head of State emphasised.

Aleksandr Lukashenko thanked teachers, educators, parents, "Thank you so much for our Belarusian children. You educate them, teach them. You truly have a gift."

The President also especially thanked those who organise the events of the *Our Children* charity campaign, "It originated a long time ago. This is a great holiday. The

holiday is primarily for our children. Thank you to all of you who support this tradition, surrounding the children of Belarus with attention and care. Moreover, we are doing everything to make children who are fleeing war feel at home here. And there are many of them.

*We see what is happening in different parts of our planet. And we are doing everything to ensure that those children who today do not have the opportunity to gather in a beautiful hall and talk with their president come to us and feel at home. There should be no children fleeing war. We must catch these children on time, bring them home, warm them up and make their childhood happier... I have said many times and will repeat that there are no somebody else's children in Belarus. They are all ours, they are family. Belarus has been and will be open to everyone who has lost peace in their countries. We have provided and will continue to provide assistance to such children. For children from whom the war is trying to steal this childhood."*

Aleksandr Lukashenko added: Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, Palestinian, Latvian children, as well as kids from other countries, gathered at the Palace of the Republic, "I know that the children who have gathered here have different destinies and different lives. I know that



some people have problems and seem to have them... I just want to advise you as a person who also had a difficult childhood: everything is in your hands. If you want, you will be strong, real Belarusians. Someone, as it is fashionable now, will go into IT, someone will become a real plant grower — they will love their land. Someone will become a teacher, someone will become a great scientist, and so on. It's in your hands. You just need to show more patience and perseverance."

Excellent students and winners of various Olympiads and creative competitions, students who earned this right through their social work, orphans, from large families, disabled children, children from families of military personnel and law enforcement officers whose fathers died in the line of duty, were invited to the New Year's celebration at the Palace of the Republic, as well as children from Donbass, children from Latvia and the Primorsky Territory who are recovering in Belarus. Children who were recently evacuated to Belarus from Palestine were also invited to the holiday.

Among the young guests who gathered that day at the Palace of the Republic for the fabulous performance *New Year's Time Machine* was 12-year-old Nakhet. A girl from Palestine, who has refugee status, shared her impressions of what she saw with reporters and admitted that it was her first time at the Christmas tree. There is undisguised delight in the eyes, a smile on the face, "There were robots there, and it was very funny... I like it here, Belarus!" Nakhet admitted that, just like Belarusian children, she wrote a letter to Father Frost. And as a gift she wished, "A flower, to be with my parents, goodness and peace!"



Based on materials of sb.by and belta.by







**The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,**

*"I've talked a lot about this lately and set goals. You can put it in a concentrated way: give me the economy, I will do everything else without you. For three decades now, the foundation of our state policy has been a socially oriented economy. This policy is successful and the people support it. According to all indicators characterising social equality, Belarus is one of the most prosperous countries. We created a state without oligarchs, we did not allow the concentration of capital and property in same hands, all national wealth belongs to the people. Therefore, it is the economy, which provides social security for citizens, that is the main target of the West."*

**In the Address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly, March 31st, 2023**



# Matrix of important tasks

## Wage growth, lower inflation and the launch of megaprojects: how the Belarusian economy performed in 2023

**Despite all the attempts of the collective West to bring Belarus to its knees and destroy the economy, the country developed dynamically and came to the end of the year with good results. The assessments of some experts from international organisations that sanctions restrictions will lead to significant losses in GDP in 2023 did not come true. The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, set specific tasks for the vertical of power: enterprises should operate stably, and the population should not feel the impact of sanctions. All efforts and resources were mobilised for this purpose.**

**By Vladislav Sychevich**

### Work for results

After successfully solving the problem of adapting the economy to new foreign economic conditions, the Government had a goal — to reach a sustainable development trajectory set by the five-year plan.

*To solve this problem, a target plan was prepared, mobilising all available resources and production capabilities of enterprises to achieve the goal of economic growth by 3.8 percent, set by the Head of State.*

The Belarusian model of socio-economic development has once again confirmed its consistency and stability, contrary to the forecasts of sceptical experts from international financial organisations, who at the beginning of the year predicted very modest results for us.

*In terms of the pace of economic development, Belarus this year has not only outstripped its closest neighbours, but also generally demonstrates results above the world average — according to the IMF, global economic growth in 2023 will be 3 percent. This clearly confirms the fact that the economic blockade imposed by the collective West has been overcome. The economy has fully adapted to operate successfully in the new conditions.*

What is important is that there remains high demand for Belarusian products in foreign markets. Export values remain at an 11-year high.

*The efficient operation of the economy ensured an increase in real incomes of the population by 6.1 percent, wages by 10.7 percent, and old-age pensions by 12.1 percent.*

### Year of discoveries

In conditions of geopolitical turbulence, the key task for Belarusian exporters is new geography, new routes, new quality. Particular attention to the African continent. Aleksandr Lukashenko visited Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea and Kenya

in 2023, and on the sidelines of the climate summit in Dubai held negotiations with the leaders of a number of other states. Our country has established diplomatic relations with 51 of the 54 states of the African continent.

*In 2024, it is planned to increase exports to this region by at least 2.5 times. The reference points have already been identified: Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Equatorial Guinea.*

*It is important that Belarus comes as a friend, without a negative background. We have never had any clashes based on colonialism. That is, we are absolutely open players for African states who have never done anything bad to them. Therefore, there is great trust in us. And even Belarusian tractors are well known in Africa.*

### Positive charge of the economy

On November 3rd, during a working trip to the Ostrovets District of the Grodno Region, President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko visited the Belarusian NPP, where the second power unit was finally put into operation. Our country has joined the club of powers that use atoms for peaceful purposes.

*Thus, a serious step has been taken in strengthening the energy security and energy independence of our state. Thanks to this strategic megaproject, Belarus has completely abandoned the import of electrical energy and, importantly, reduced its dependence on imported natural gas.*

BelNPP has already made it possible to replace 5.8 billion cubic meters of natural gas. Currently, the plant operates in two units and produces more than 55 million kWh of electricity daily. In total, the plant generated about 22 billion kWh.

An environmental effect was also achieved: due to the operation of the Belarusian NPP, greenhouse gas emissions were significantly reduced.

### Industrial driver

*Despite the unprecedented sanctions of the collective West, our enterprises did not stop and continued to work. Moreover, during this period they increased production volumes.*

The country has achieved particular success in the production of passenger cars. For example, if in 2022 BELGEE produced and sold 25 thousand cars, then by the end of 2023 the production of 66 thousand cars was ensured.

In 2023, the first batch of BelGee X50 cars rolled off the plant's assembly line — a car produced under the plant's own brand. This is the next level of interaction with Geely.

*And in March 2023, during a visit to China, the President of Belarus held a meeting with the leadership of the First Chinese Automobile Corporation FAW Group. It is a serious player in the Chinese automobile industry.*

In September last year, the UNISON company in the village of Obchak, Minsk District, launched the production of cars of the premium Hongqi brand, owned by the FAW Group concern.

### Strategic decisions

Last year, President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko instructed the Government and the National Academy of Sciences to work on creating a so-called brain core in the country, capable of evaluating and supervising large-scale projects.

*The Belarusian leader emphasised the importance of strategic projects. According to him, this is the future not only of any system, but of any country as a whole. Strategic projects, if we talk about Belarus, are the future of our country. Without a future, not a single person, not a single system, not a single state can exist.*

In November, the Head of State signed Decree No. 357 'On the Council for Strategic Projects'. The structure was created to improve the planning, development and implementation of strategic projects, and

the implementation of the results of scientific activities into production. Ensuring the activities of the Council is entrusted to the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

### Bets are placed

*In 2023, the refinancing rate changed six times. And what is important, it decreased.*

The Board of the National Bank made this decision taking into account the steady slowdown in inflation in our country, which has a positive effect on the expectations of economic agents. Today the refinancing rate is 9.5 percent.

*"The rate reduction will give impetus to economic development. We see that deposits in Belarusian roubles are becoming more and more attractive, and loans are becoming cheaper. All this indicates a stable state of affairs in the economy. Without an economic component, the development of any state is impossible,"* notes Doctor of Economic Sciences Valery Baynev.

By the way, according to the forecast of the National Bank, the refinancing rate in Belarus is projected at 9—9.5 percent per annum in 2024.

### BELARUSIAN ECONOMY IN 2023 (DATA FOR 11 MONTHS):

- In January–November, the GDP growth rate was 103.8 percent.
- The volume of GDP in current prices for 11 months of 2023 amounted to 198.1 billion roubles.
- The volume of industrial production for 11 months of 2023 increased by 7.9 percent.
- Retail trade turnover in January—November 2023 amounted to 68.7 billion roubles.
- Passenger turnover in Belarus in January—November increased by 8.4 percent.
- The refinancing rate (reduced 6 times) is 9.5 percent.
- Annual inflation, as of December 1st, was 5.4 percent.







Artist Vladimir Urodnich conducts tours of the exhibition

# It all starts from the Motherland

## The Studio of War Artists under the Defence Ministry turns 20

**How to raise a patriot of your country? Masters of the brush have the answer: through art. The Studio of War Artists under the Defence Ministry of the Republic of Belarus celebrated its 20th anniversary with the *We Serve the Fatherland* exhibition in the Central House of Officers: a compact and bright exhibition united the past and present, the works of masters who are no longer with us, and those who are still in service today, actively working and creating new artworks.**

By Irina Ovsepyan

The Belarusian studio under the Defence Ministry was once created in the image and likeness of the Grekov Studio of War Artists, which since 1934 united battle painters of the USSR and then Russia. Today Belarus is an independent sovereign state, which has become the successor and custodian of the best heroic traditions of the Soviet Union and the memory of the Great Victory, therefore the appearance of the Studio of War Artists in 2003 was significant, logical and necessary: at its origins were, among other things, front-line soldiers — the people artists Mikhail Savitsky and Leonid Shchemelov, the generation of war children — such outstanding masters as Vladimir Gordeyenko and Leonid Dudarenko, people's artist Georgy Poplavsky, Nikolai Opiok, Vladimir Urodnich, Georgy Loiko, people's sculptor of Belarus Ivan Misko. By the way, 'the Grekovites' conveyed their warmest congratulations to their Belarusian colleagues and an offer to hold a joint exhibition: the patriotic artists of the two countries certainly have something to say to each other.

The first visitors to the exhibition were students of the Belarusian State Pedagogical University, cadets of the military faculty of the Belarusian State University and students of the Minsk Suvorov Military School. The masters themselves gave them a tour, telling them about their own works. Many of them are dedicated to today's everyday life of our army and were written from life during exercises. Others are written from the memories of wartime childhood and are documentary almost to the smallest detail, says the head of the Studio of War Artists, Honoured Artist, laureate of the Presidential Prize For Spiritual Revival, honorary academi-

cian of the Russian Academy of Arts Nikolai Opiok, "Let's remember 2003 — we launched the Memory exhibition at the House of Officers. Today, having gone through a 20-year journey, holding hundreds of exhibitions, trips, meetings, we returned here with the exhibition *We Serve the Fatherland*. We work from the soul, from the heart, from what we know and remember. We want to continue what the artists of Belarus did, defending their native land with a rifle in their hands. They created their first paintings, remembering their military roads. We are their followers who learned war as children. Our work on paintings is more difficult; we approach these events more philosophically, because 80 years have passed since the beginning of the war. Documented: in December 1941, we — my mother and five children — lived in a bathhouse, and the fascists who kicked us out were operating in our house. I still remember those Germans and policemen in white-red-white bands by name and appearance..."

***Many of the participants in the War Artists Studio were orphaned in early childhood, their parents did not return from the war: Vladimir Urodnich's father fought in the partisans, the father of the recently deceased Vladimir Gordeyenko was one of those who, on the night of June 22nd, 1941, were the first to meet Hitler's invaders neck to neck at the border... That's why every work is like a manifesto: we will never forget!***

"For these artists, addressing a military theme is an opportunity to talk about peace. Because when we talk about the army today, we, of course, talk about peace. I hope that young authors will come to the studio and also raise these topics. The studio of military artists is, of course,



Head of the Studio of War Artists Nikolai Opiok

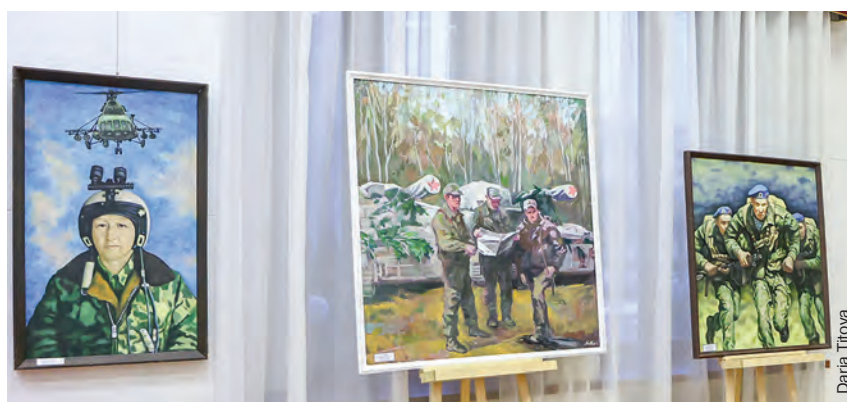
a phenomenon in the culture and history of Belarus, its participants are great and high professionals, they speak in the language of painting about the most important things that exist around us, about our history and modernity. If you walk through the exhibition, you will feel this message: everything that we love, everything that we must preserve not only for ourselves, but also for our descendants, everything that is our greatest value. Of course, the greatest value is our land, our Belarus, the world around us," First Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Artists Natalya Sharangovich emphasises.

***It is the creators who, through their works, protect the people from moral degeneration under the pressure of alien 'values'. High culture and art are also a deterrent against attempts to talk to us from a position of strength, Vladimir Makarov, professor of the department of ideological work and social sciences of the Military Academy of the Republic of Belarus reminds,***

"20 years is not much by historical standards, but the most important thing is that the Studio of War Artists took place in sovereign and independent Belarus.

Every picture here is priceless. For example, *The Shield of the Fatherland* triptych by Nikolai Opiok has already entered the history of our country. *The Special Forces* painting by Vladimir Gordeyenko is very much loved by our paratroopers and special forces. They love it because this work can safely be called 'The Last Battle': the artist has studied all aspects of the theory, practice and tactics of special operations forces, the composition is built in all directions in such a way that it is clear that these people are prepared, if necessary, to exchange their lives for a bigger damage to the enemy. The thesis 'in times of war the Muses are silent' is incorrect: during the Great Patriotic War, not only the talent of our commanders and the heroism of the Soviet people, but also high art were placed on the altar of Victory.

***Tradition is the direction in which the Studio of War Artists works. This is loyalty to high meanings, this is loyalty to our Fatherland. The only thing we can wish for our artists is to remain at the forefront of this struggle and continue to live for the benefit of Belarus."***



Daria Titova

### DIRECT SPEECH

**First Deputy Head of the Main Directorate — Head of the Department of Moral and Psychological Support of the Main Directorate of Ideological Work of the Defence Ministry, Colonel Oleg Kopyl,**

*"20 years of the War Artists Studio — is it a lot or a little? It's probably not for us and not today to give such an assessment. What has been done, how much soul has been put into the works — this is still not a mathematical problem. The work that artists have done over the years will be appreciated by descendants. As the philosopher said: 'Art should not descend to the level of society. Art should lift society up'. The studio makes a huge contribution to the patriotic and spiritual education of both the young, rising generation that will replace us, and our entire society."*



# Focus on the subconscious

Social networks will try to penetrate even deeper into the minds of users in the coming year

Anyone who once predicted the imminent death of social media was short-sighted. After social networks adapt to new political and legislative realities, experts predict another breakthrough in content development. Thanks to progress in the field of artificial intelligence technologies, as well as the business course towards an individual approach to each user. However, first things first.

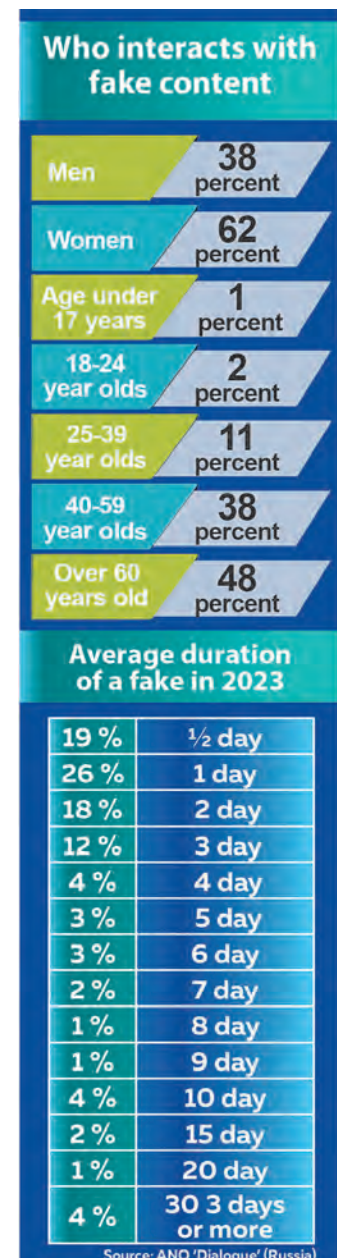
By Aleksandr Nesterov

## On the wave of stable demand

Social networks continue to strengthen their leadership positions in the field of continuous content generation. By adapting to the needs and interests of the audience, they are mostly highly profitable.

*Even the long-suffering network X (formerly Twitter) of billionaire Elon Musk, which was recently boycotted by many advertisers, seems to have earned about \$2.5 billion from advertising contracts by the end of 2023. Three times less than the level of 2021, but still.*

The largest social network in Russia and the CIS countries, VKontakte, showed an increase of 22 percent based on the results of 9 months of 2023. The main source of revenue is online advertising. Over the 10 years of its existence, Telegram has acquired more than 800 million active users. Its founder Pavel Durov recently announced that a paid subscription to the extended version of Telegram Premium is the fastest growing messaging app in history. And according to the latest data from application analytics provider data.ai, TikTok, which is ex-



tremely popular among young Belarusians, has become the first non-gaming mobile application with a turnover of \$10 billion.

*With the economics of social networks, everything is more or less clear. But there are traditionally questions about the content. Because these platforms often gain popularity from noise and hype.*

We won't look far for examples. Recently the same TikTok summed up the year by publishing a list of the most popular clips posted on this platform. The primitive rules. The first place in the ranking of global trending content was taken by a video with a border collie Kate herding sheep. In second position is a recipe for sausages with cheese in bread. On the third — TikTok to the hit track 'Capybara'.

As for fakes on social networks, they are each other's eternal companions. Interesting information for the post-Soviet space: the All-Russian interdepartmental competence center in the field of Internet communications 'Dialogue' claims that the largest number of fakes are now recorded in the Telegram messenger.

*"The share of fake publications on the messenger platform increased by 90.6 percent compared to 2022," the Dialog message, prepared for the Dialogue on Fake Forum held in Moscow in November says.*

One thing is good: according to the same source, the average life expectancy of fakes in 2023 decreased by about 22 hours and amounted to 4 days (details in the infographic). The leading mechanism for creating fakes remains 'deliberate disinformation'. There is also a gradual increase in the number of such messages created using artificial intelligence (AI) content synthesis tools.

*By the way, those who are tired of social networks are more likely to trust misinformation than everyone else.*

Scientists from Nan-yang Technological University (Singapore) and the University of California at Davis (USA) recently came to this conclusion after conducting a large-scale study. So

## 10 social media development trends in 2024

1. The short text format will become the most popular.
2. Social networks are the best search engine for generation Z.
3. Preference is given to non-public methods of communication.
4. Reposts will be more important than likes, comments and subscribers.
5. Telegram will begin to claim the title of super platform.
6. Posts will turn into photo dumps.
7. TikTok will remain the birthplace of video trends.
8. SMMers will moderate their ardor.
9. Artificial intelligence will become marketers' best friend.
10. YouTube feature Shorts will flood the Internet with short videos.

there is no way to ignore social media in the near future: if you don't monitor the content, then the latter will do whatever it wants with your consciousness. And this cannot be allowed.

## Shorter and simpler

One of the obvious trends is the emphasis on short videos. Google's bet on promoting YouTube Shorts has fully justified itself: back in June, the format's monthly audience crossed the mark of 2 billion users. This allowed the company to catch up and overtake its main competitor — TikTok.

*Social networks will also be forced to find a balance between the authenticity of information and a product created using artificial intelligence. It will be more difficult for users: AI is now on the rise, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the product of the brain activity of real people from that generated by machines.*

According to some reports, the use of AI for image editing may more than double.

## We have to fight for the truth

The problem of cyber aggression in the digital environment is more relevant today than ever, and social networks do not remain aloof from it. The range of their at-

tacks on the brains of users is wide — from imposing communication to intimidation and bullying.

*In Belarus, the fight against aggression and fakes from social networks is an important state task, the implementation of which we have been working closely on for several years. One of the important components is the clear and coordinated activities of traditional media, primarily state ones.*

By the way, the need for such measures was discussed by the participants of the V World Media Summit held in Guangzhou (South China) in December. The event, organized by the Chinese news agency Xinhua, was attended by representatives of 197 media from 101 countries, including Belarus. At the summit, a joint statement was adopted by the participants on the fight against disinformation and co-operation in the field of new technologies.

The topic was continued in the middle of the month,



**The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko,**

*"The rapid development of communications and communications, electronic media and social networks has radically changed the lives of people on our planet. Opportunities for the economy and social sphere, simply communication, have expanded, but at the same time the world and the person himself have become more vulnerable. It is no coincidence that the phrase 'information war' has become firmly entrenched in our vocabulary. Media workers and specialists who ensure the operation of communication systems are, in fact, at the forefront of the information front, where there is an uncompromising battle for the minds and souls of people. There is no way we can lose to those who intend to abolish our history and culture, and at the same time the state itself and the Belarusian people."*

**From congratulations to workers in the field of information and communications on professional holidays — Press Day and Radio, Television and Communications Workers' Day, May 5th, 2022.**

*"Our opponents are pursuing an aggressive information policy to win the hearts and minds of young people who, scrolling through their social media feeds, cannot always separate truth from untruth. This situation is especially dangerous now, when speed prevails over quality, over fact-checking [preliminary verification of information]..."*



already at the republican level, by Information Minister Vladimir Pertsov. Speaking at the X Forum of Young Journalists "Journalism Today: Territory of Responsibility", he recalled that the work of traditional media and ideologists is actively hampered by media-like bloggers, social network activists, as well as specially created and imitating media structures:

Young people only realise after the fact that they fell for fakes planted by their favorite pseudo-blogger or another influencer to whom young people are subscribed in the messenger or social networks. Our task is to prevent this from happening.

The ongoing struggle for truthful information, including on social networks, is another trend for 2024.





# Top 12 jobs that AI can't replace in 2024

Whether you are a cybernaut or not, the chances are that you have heard the ‘jobs AI can’t replace’ debate. According to IBM, about 85 million jobs globally are grappling with the risk of becoming obsolete at the hands of automation by 2025. AI is making such headlines by serving a new invention every now and then, which — on a larger ground — could do most of the human work.

Analytics Vidhya — an Indian-based leading company specialising in data science and machine learning courses — has prepared a list of top 12 jobs AI can’t replace.

**Therapists and counsellors**

The counselling and therapy field has jobs that can’t be replaced by AI, and for good reasons. Roles that involve providing mental health support, counselling, and therapy require empathy, active listening, and understanding of human emotions.

**Social work and community outreach roles**

Social work involves deep empathy, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to navigate complex social dynamics, which AI struggles to replicate.

**Musicians**

Music and other sorts of performing arts transcend boundaries and converse with the depths of our psyches. While AI can compose melodies and generate music based on algorithms, it struggles to replicate the emotional depth and artistic interpreta-

tion brought forth by human musicians.

**AI and jobs that require critical thinking**

AI has the prowess to process and analyse large volumes of data. It can also suggest ideas and give something to seek inspiration from. However, it still requires human expertise to interpret the results accurately.

**Research scientists and engineers**

Scientists experiment, analysing data and drawing conclusions based on their knowledge and experience. While AI can help them with data processing and analysis, the creativity, intuition, and scientific judgment that are necessary for ground-breaking discoveries are uniquely human.

**Performing arts**

A job in the performing arts is something AI can never replace. The expressions, agility, and precise movements portrayed by professional dancers and theatre artists cannot be re-enacted by AI.



**Judges**

While AI excels at repetitive legal tasks, human empathy and ethical considerations make complete replacement unlikely. A hybrid approach with AI assisting judges in specific areas like data analysis is more likely.

**Leadership and management roles**

Managers and leaders in any organisation assess market trends, competitive landscapes, and long-term business strategies. Their decisions involve weighing multiple factors, considering risks, and making choices that align with the organisation’s goals and values.

**Human resources and talent acquisition positions**

Human resources are one of the jobs that AI can’t replace. HR professionals handle various aspects of employee management, including recruitment, training, conflict resolution, and employee well-being.

**Customer service and support positions**

Customer service representatives and support staff handle inquiries, complaints, and problem-solving for customers. Even when AI handles customer issues at a base level or responds with pre-trained solutions, human interaction is required to address specific issues and overlook AI responses.

**Surgeons and healthcare professionals**

The impact of AI in healthcare is proliferating for good. However, as much as it helps assist in diagnosing certain conditions, medical professionals make complex decisions that involve empathy, patient interaction, and ethical considerations.

**Athletes**

Just like healthcare, the craze of AI in sports is booming. But athletics is one of the jobs AI can’t replace. Sports that demand physical agility, co-ordination, and precise movements, such as gymnastics, figure skating, or martial arts, require a level of skill and athleticism that goes beyond what AI can currently achieve.



## Poland’s government puts state media into liquidation

**Poland’s Culture Minister has decided to liquidate the country’s state television, radio and news agency, protecting employees from a political dispute, French *Le Monde* reports**

Poland’s new Culture Minister announced the liquidation of all public media, which have been seen as a mouthpiece of the previous populist-nationalist government, ahead of a restructuring.

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz said the move would ‘guarantee the working and restructuring’ of the public television and radio stations and national press agency PAP while avoiding staff layoffs, according to a statement published on X, formerly Twitter.

“The liquidation status can be withdrawn at any time by the owner, the state,” he wrote.

The latest action is likely to aggravate the standoff between the government and President Andrzej Duda, an ally of the

previous administration who has criticised the government’s reforms and vetoed subsidies to state media.

PM Donald Tusk’s pro-EU government took power last December after eight years of rule by the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party.

It justified recent sacking of the management of public media as a bid to restore ‘impartiality’, after they were regularly accused of biased reporting, transmitting government propaganda and launching verbal attacks on the opposition under the PiS.

The move to sack the management prompted a sit-in by PiS lawmakers in the offices of the state broadcaster who say the reforms are an attack on media freedom.

## 2,300-year-old mosaic unearthed in Rome

A five-year dig into the side of Rome’s Palatine Hill yielded treasure when archaeologists discovered a deluxe banquet room dating from around the first or second century BC, featuring a sizable, intact and brightly coloured wall mosaic

Estimated to be around 2,300 years old, the work is part of a larger aristocratic mansion, located near the Roman Forum, that has been under excavation since 2018.

Almost five metres long and featuring depictions of vines, lotus leaves, tridents, trumpets, helmets and mythological marine creatures, the mosaic scene was painstakingly created using mother of pearl, shells, corals, shards of precious glass and flecks of marble. The piece is framed by polychrome crystals, spongy travertine, and exotic, ancient Egyptian blue tiles.

What makes this discovery ‘unmatched’, said archaeologist Alfonsina Russo, head of the Colosseum Archaeological Park in charge of the site, is not

only the incredible conservation of the mosaic, but its decoration which also features celebratory scenes of naval and land battles likely funded — and won — by an extremely wealthy aristocratic patron who commemorated the victories on their walls.

The intricacy of the mosaic’s depictions of victory have surprised the team working on the project. They show a coastal walled town with lookout towers and loggias — which Russo said could be an ideal or a real-life location — sitting atop a cliff designed with pieces of travertine rock. Scenes of sailing ships with raised sails also feature, alongside depictions of mythical sea monsters swallowing enemy fleets.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



# Sealed gate

## How Yemen’s Houthis disrupted global maritime trade

The conflict in the Middle East continues to expand and have a growing impact on global politics and economics. By mid-December, the situation in the Red Sea had significantly worsened, where the Yemeni group Ansarallah, also known as the Houthis, was waging a large-scale campaign against civilian ships traveling along the southern logistics route from Asia and Australia to Europe.

By Stanislav Fedoruk

### Red Sea corsairs

The movement announced its support for Hamas's actions during the October 7th raid on Israel just five days after the attack, and began to carry out its threats on October 19th. At the first stage, the Yemenis tried to hit targets in the Israeli port of Eilat with missiles and kamikaze UAVs, but the Jewish state's air defence systems successfully repulsed these attacks.

The second stage of Houthi military activity started on November 19 with a spectacular operation to seize a car carrier. Galaxy Leader, owned by Israeli businessman Abraham Ungar.

Galaxy Leader so far remains the only ship that the Houthis managed to board. The remaining civilian vessels attacked in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait area were fired upon by anti-ship cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and drones. Relative to the total number of ships passing through the ‘Gate of Sorrow’ (as the name of the strait is translated from Arabic), the number of damaged container ships and tankers is quite small, but the threat of loss of cargo and death of crews is forcing international companies to change logistics routes leading through the Red Sea.

*The 32-kilometre bottleneck between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea on the African coast passes through 17,000 ships every year, accounting for 10 percent of global trade, 30 percent of container traffic and 5 percent of oil transport.*

### Logistics collapse

*The intensification of attacks by the Houthis, who in recent weeks alone have shot down a dozen ships that refused to change their route at their request, has caused a crisis in shipping.*

The largest ship-owning companies are massively refusing to use the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

The route from Singapore to Rotterdam via the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is about 8,840 nautical miles (15,550 kilometres). If the bottleneck is completely closed, carriers will have to finally switch to using the second branch of the southern route, going around Africa. It is almost 40 percent longer than the currently operating sea route (11,720 nautical miles, or 21,700 kilometers) and increases the delivery time of goods by 9–14 days. With Maersk alone accounting for 14.8 percent of global trade, an economic crisis in Israel and Europe could erupt soon if Houthi attacks continue unabated.

Intermediate losses to the global economy due to the actual closure of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait have not yet been calculated, but even from fragmentary regional data it is clear that the Houthis were

able to create a very problematic situation using a minimum of military resources.

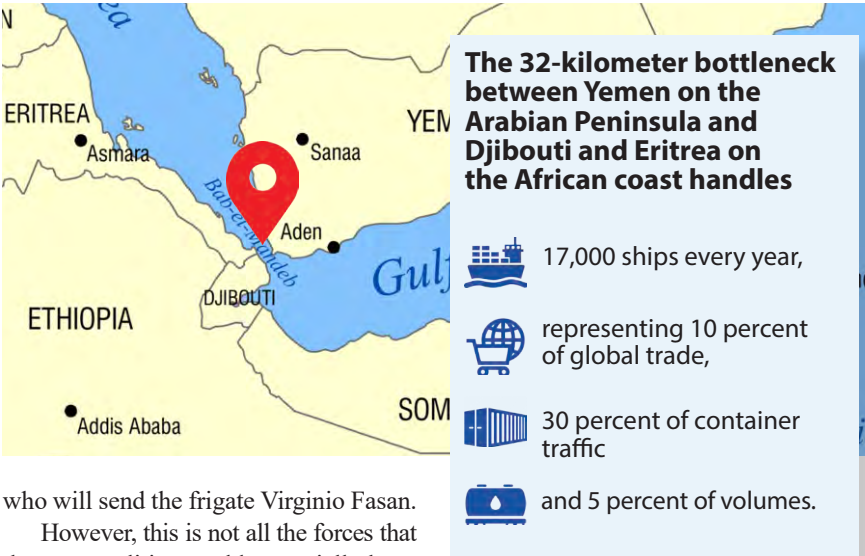
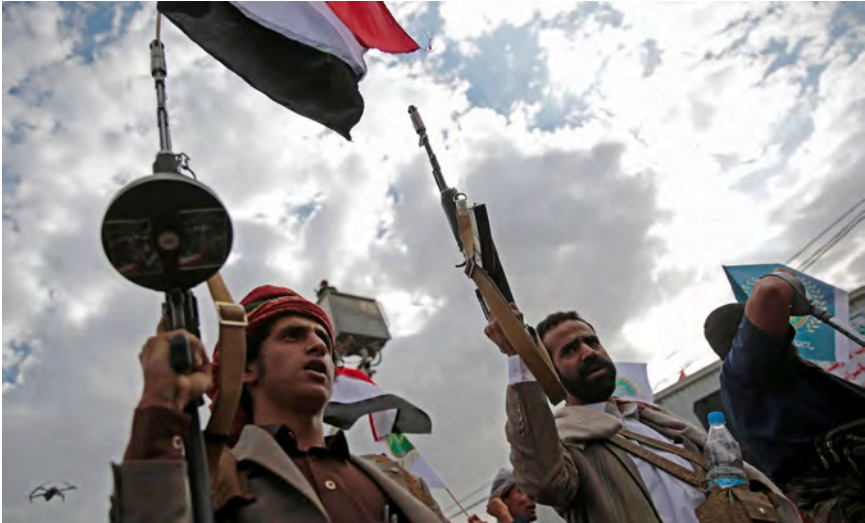
### New crusade

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, while visiting the Middle East, announced the launch of a new multinational operation to ensure safe navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, code-named Prosperity. Guardian (‘Guardian of Prosperity’). The anti-Houthi coalition, according to the head of the Pentagon, included many countries, including the UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain. It is significant that by a civilised society, Americans again mean only about 50 states.

*There is no point in expecting an immediate crushing of the Houthis and the unblocking of the ‘Gates of Sorrow’. The coalition so far looks impressive only on paper; in fact, it lacks everything: motivation, personnel, warships.*

Canada will send to participate in Prosperity Guardian of three staff officers. Dutch Minister of Defence Kaisa Ollongren also said that her country would only provide a group of naval staff officers.

The group of warships in close proximity to the coast of Yemen includes the American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Dwight Eisenhower, cruiser Philippine Sea, destroyers Carney, Laboon and Mason, and French frigate Languedoc, combined into Task Force Combined Maritime Forces-153. So far, only the Italians have promised to join her,



who will send the frigate Virginio Fasan.

However, this is not all the forces that the new coalition could potentially have at its disposal. There is, for example, still another strike group in the region, led by the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford. To the north of the site of the proposed operation there are two universal landing ships under the Stars and Stripes, and to the south there is the British destroyer Diamond. In total, according to experts, the waters of the Mediterranean and Red Seas and the Gulf of Aden are plying 43 ships of the fleets of Israel and Western countries.

*In addition to the Houthis, Somali pirates have become more active in the region and decided to fish in troubled waters. However, so far they have not had success: the only captured ship was quickly recaptured by American Marines.*

Interestingly, Bahrain is the only Arab country in the coalition so far. Neither Saudi Arabia, nor the UAE, nor Egypt are taking part.

### Demonstration of powerlessness

At the moment, there is no clear plan of action for



REALITIES

the new coalition. Judging by the composition of the group, the maximum that it can do is organize an escort of ships, protecting them from Houthi missiles of its own air defence, or demonstratively strike with cruise missiles at places where Ansarallah members are likely to be located. In order to inflict serious losses on the group and force it to end the blockade of Bab el-Mandeb, a full-fledged ground operation is needed, which the United States is unlikely to dare now.

Houthi officials have already promised to attack ships of countries that join the American operation.

*Western strategists should be careful: Ansarallah has an impressive arsenal of anti-ship weapons, which the Houthis use masterfully.*

A furor in the expert community was recently caused by the confirmed fact that the Palatium III container ship of the Swiss company MSC was hit by a ballistic missile. Previously, no one in the world was able to hit a moving ship with this type of ammunition in a combat situation.

The growing tension in the Middle East is a direct consequence of the destructive US policy in the region. After Iran's ties with the Arab world began to improve, with the active assistance of China, the Yemeni conflict practically disappeared.

*However, the decrepit hegemon's brutal intervention and saber-rattling, coupled with Biden's bumbling handling of the Gaza war, have jeopardised the entire peace accord. As a result, one of the world's most important logistics routes was under attack, and the European economy, which has not really recovered from the last blow from its American 'partners', will suffer again.*



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By Andrei Zakharov

Ivan could have followed in the footsteps of his parents, who work at the Molodechno children's art school, and become a musician, but the boy discovered another talent in the 7th grade.

"I am the eldest child in the family, and we have five parents in total. I have a brother Georgy and sisters Anastasia, Varvara and Lyubov. My father is a button accordion teacher, and my mother is a piano teacher, so music has always occupied a special place in my upbringing. I studied the accordion at a children's art school for five years. And I even made progress, participated in competitions, tried to compose, but I always liked doing something with my own hands, tinkering. I didn't have enough handicraft lessons at school, and in the 7th grade my mother enrolled me in wood carving in the pedagogical practice sector at the Molodechno Music College named after M.K. Oginsky. I became so immersed in art that I worked seven hours a day. And the diligence bore fruit. I am sure that any creativity, no matter how gifted a person may be, is first of all hard work. In high school, college students bought some work from me. For me, a schoolboy, this was an opportunity to earn my first pocket money. The teachers, of course, paid attention: the level was different, because not all the guys go to learn the craft purposefully," he says.

After 9th grade, Ivan went to college named after M.K. Oginsky to study decorative and applied arts, and now he is a sophomore at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts. The direction remained the same: monumental and decorative art. Working with wood (icons, boxes, rings, mirror frames, pieces of furniture) occupies a central place in the life of the young master. Many works end up in private collections, and some are donated by the artist. For example, the diploma work in college — the *Trinity* icon — was transferred to the Lyadensky Annunciation Monastery. Church ministers paid attention to the work of his fellow countryman when he brought his icons to be blessed.

***Ivan is proud that he had a hand in decorating Molodechno churches.***

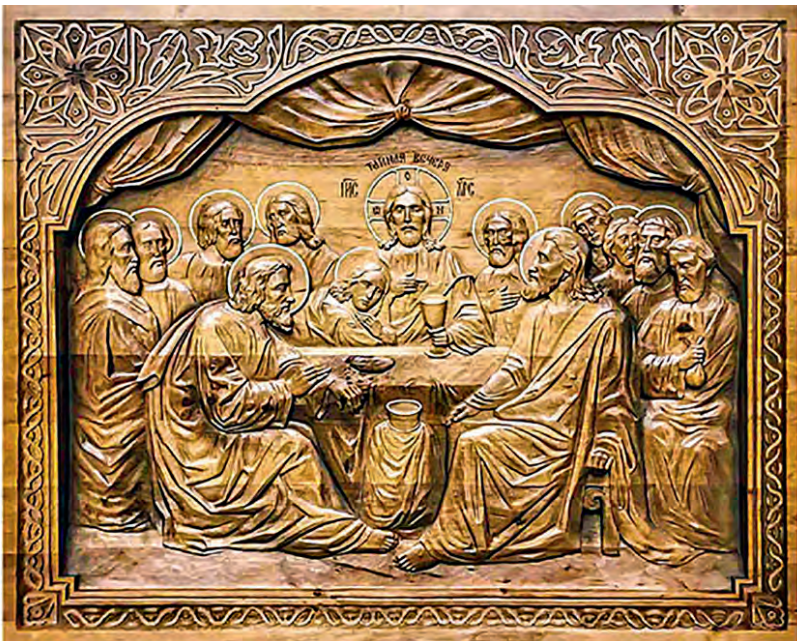
The young man made the columns with capitals for the icon case, as well as cherubs for the iconostasis in the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the request of Father Aleksandr.

Orthodox themes bring the master a special, one might say, enlightened inspiration, ***"The spiritual topic has always been close to me; I attended Sunday school as a child. And I never forgot the way to the temple, I try to attend services.*** At the same time, I am not at all alien to the secular entertainment of modern youth. I don't have much time for any parties, but I love good historical cinema, museums, and travel. The trip to St. Petersburg brought a lot of impressions; I like getting to know Belarus. My parents instilled a taste for good music. My playlist includes Mozart, Chopin, and Rachmaninov... Today, thanks to my hard work, I largely provide for myself. In addition to selling works, I teach two basic courses in the capital: geometric carving and a wooden spoon course. I prefer an active and healthy lifestyle (for example,

# ‘God is the creator, but I am the chosen one’

**The young master carver Ivan Girvel, whose talent was appreciated by fellow Molodechno residents, gained fame for his unique icons and biblical images embodied in wood. Recently, an episode of the New People series of Belarus 3 TV channel, dedicated to the wood artist, became a prize-winner at the 10th Saint Vladimir Festival of Cinema and Television Films with Spiritual and Moral Content in Sevastopol in the ‘Orthodox Projects’ category. We talked with the hero of the programme and found out that the creative range of the talented guy is not limited to filigree carvings.**

**The works of 21-year-old Ivan Girvel from Molodechno decorate the churches of his native city and arouse interest among art lovers**



riding an electric scooter); I manage to save some of my earnings for cultural recreation. I dream of visiting the homeland of the Titans of the Renaissance."

From the cathedral with Ivan we head to his studio, where an inspired artist can spend the whole night without sleep creating his next work. And the first thing your eye falls on is one of the most famous biblical scenes, *The Last Supper*, delicately executed in wood.

"I worked on it for two years intermittently so that my eyes wouldn't blur. This is probably my favourite creation so far, but in general I became interested in icons and biblical themes in my second year of college. At first these were small icons, then larger ones. As a believer, I experience special inspiration when I convey the faces of saints. As a rule, I see embodied images ready-made. Ideas apparently

come from above, so I feel more like a chosen one than a creator. Of course, technique and adherence to certain image canons are important. But in order to evoke emotions (no matter what topic you take on), you need to put your soul into it," says the artist.

Painting is also presented in the artist's studio. As Ivan admits, he prefers landscape pictures and portraits. The self-portrait attracts attention; in it our creator presented himself as a master of the Renaissance. The artist plans to put together an exhibition of portraits. He says that among his contemporaries, the work of Nikas Safronov inspires; abstractions arouse curiosity, in which images of nature and time are philosophically rethought, where the author tries to experiment with texture, creating additional volume with oil clots. For this purpose, he even came up with his own style and called it facturbism.

In the future, Ivan Girvel sees himself as a diverse artist. There are ideas for a thesis at the academy, "I would like to paint the creation of Adam and Eve, perhaps it will be a painting on the ceiling or wall. I have enough time to prepare and choose a serving option," Ivan explains.

The young artist has a lot of creative plans. He never doubted his path and is grateful to his family, parents who always supported him, fellow countrymen and his hometown, where the first exhibition took place, where he received first attention and recognition, ***"I don't know how my fate will turn out, where I will create, but the image of my native places will always serve as inspiration."***

## NOTE TO TV VIEWERS

The series of programmes *New People* is created using funds from a targeted collection for the production of national content and is aired on the *Belarus 3* TV channel weekly. The programme archive is always available on the *Belarus 3* YouTube channel.



Aleksei Vyznitskiy



All attempts by Western bigwigs to strangle and subjugate Belarusian-Russian sports are being defeated by the growing co-operation and commonwealth of our powers

**They don't even hide this anymore: excommunicating Russia and Belarus from the big international schedule is a dirty policy that has nothing to do with true Olympism and fair sports. The International Olympic Committee and the sports federations subordinate to it are doing everything to humiliate and trample, to deprive our countries and athletes of national self-identification, forcing them to dance to their tune. Times are not easy, but it is precisely in such times that the spirit is strengthened and they say that a friend in need is a friend indeed. The difficult 2023 season clearly showed that together Russia and Belarus can overcome any troubles. We present to your attention the top major sporting events of 2023, with the participation of our athletes.**



World Wrestling Championship

After a long break of almost two years, Belarusian and Russian representatives of freestyle, women's and Greco-Roman wrestling were allowed to participate in international tournaments as neutral athletes. It was a licensed championship, and therefore the level of competition turned out to be prohibitive. In free-style, out of ten weight categories, the Russians excelled in two (Abdulrashid Sadulaev was prevented from winning by an offensive injury), and once again climbed to the second and third steps of the podium. Taking into account the fact that our wrestlers did not know until the very end whether they would be able to compete in the tournament, the result is quite good. Another fact is even more impressive: in only two weights among the medallists were there no representatives of the Russian school of wrestling, whose representatives now defend the colours of many national teams of the world. The best performance of the Belarusians was two-time world champion Vanessa Kolodinskaya, who won silver, and with it a ticket to the 2024 Games in Paris. Also, our athletes, as neutral athletes, successfully performed in other international competitions: sambo, judo... And the World Boxing Championship was held as in previous years: Belarusian and Russian boxers entered the ring under their own flags and with national symbols.



Tennis tour

The teams of Aryna Sabalenka and Daniil Medvedev played in the final of the World Tennis League tournament, which ended in Abu Dhabi. Both the Belarusian and the Russian are today one of the main stars of the world tennis tour: Medvedev was first in the world rankings in 2022, Sabalenka was the first racket of the world in 2023. Both spent the last season bright and unforgettable. Everyone knows that Medvedev and Sabalenka represent Russia and Belarus, but thank God that the International Tennis Federation was smart enough to distance itself from political squabbles and give any player the opportunity to show their talent and achieve self-realization on the court. Everyone should see it as a good example!

Operation Isolation failure

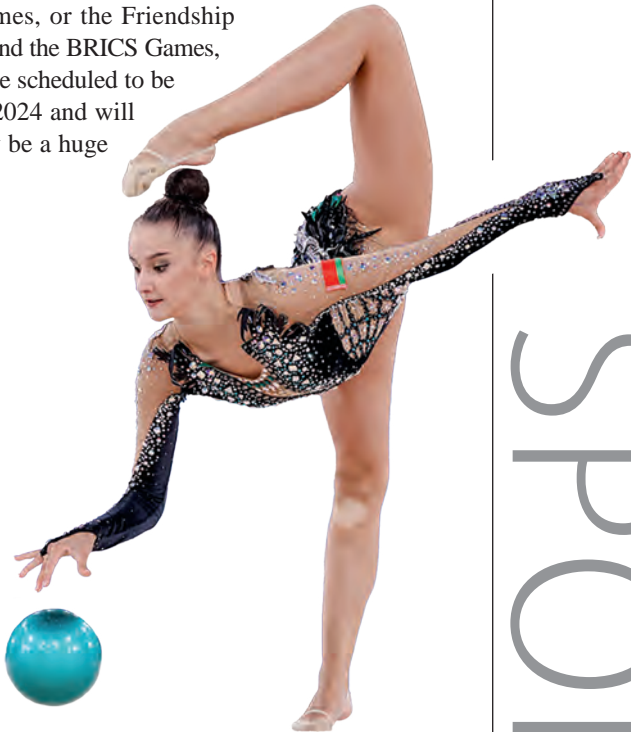


By Sergei Kanashits

2nd CIS Games

10 days and 10 cities. 22 participating countries. There are 21 arenas involved, and almost all of them are always sold out. 246 sets of awards drawn. More than 2,200 participants and 1,246 volunteers. Tens of thousands of guests and fans. An atmosphere of unity and twinning. All this is the 2nd CIS Games that took place in Belarus and had an open status. The main heroes of the competition were Belarusian and Russian athletes, who had the most representative delegations and won the lion's share of medals (236 for Belarusians, 288 for Russians). The most spectacular and representative event was the rhythmic gymnastics tournament, where the national teams of Belarus and Russia performed as the strongest teams. Belarusian beauty Alina Gornosko won silver in the all-around, as well as gold, two silvers and a bronze in individual events. Russian Lala Kramarenko won gold in the all-around and became the best in exercises with clubs and ribbon. Gymnasts from all over the world watched the competition of the best graces in the world on the Internet, admiring the class of our champions. The 2nd CIS Games showed that sport can and should be outside of politics. And that adher-

ents of this principle will always find platforms where they can compete and identify the strongest in fair and equal conditions for everyone. Be it the CIS Games, or the Friendship Games and the BRICS Games, which are scheduled to be held in 2024 and will certainly be a huge success.



Commonwealth Biathlon Cup

This start brought together all the strongest shooting skiers from Belarus and Russia and became a worthy replacement for the World Cup. Thousands of fans witnessed an uncompromising fight performed by athletes from two countries: a battle until the last meters of the distance, sometimes ending in a photo finish, a full range of emotions and bright victories! The Belarusians were among the leaders: Dzinara Smolskaya won the main trophy of the Commonwealth Cup — she won the overall standings; among men, Anton Smolski took third place, losing the championship to Eduard Latypov and Said Khalili.

Grand tour of hockey teams

Usually, May gave hockey fans other emotions and expectations: countries lived in anticipation of the World Cup, made plans and rubbed their hands with impatience to see their home team in confrontation with the best teams on the planet. However, sport has long since gone off the rails of a fair and honest confrontation and gone to hell, becoming an element of harsh pressure in the big political game. The national teams of Belarus and Russia, suspended from participation in international tournaments, nevertheless did not get bored or grieve, jointly organising a series of friendly matches called Betting League. Big Tour of the National Team. The tour swept through the cities of Russia, and ended with two fights at the Chizhovka Arena in Minsk. As a result, the Russians won six victories (4:0, 6:2, 5:1, 4:1, 2:1 in overtime and 3:2), our guys won two matches. The first at the tournament in Kazakhstan — 7:4. There, by the way, the Belarusian team defeated the hosts of the ice (6:0) and became the winner of the competition. In the first home match against the Russians, success was again on the side of Dmitry Kvartalnov's team. In the second, our guys lost disappointingly (2:3), miss-

ing the decisive goal at the end of the third period. Nevertheless, according to the general opinion of the players, coaches and fans, the series was a success and everyone enjoyed the game. And recently, the fascinating confrontation between the national teams of Russia and Belarus continued within the framework of the Channel One Cup in St. Petersburg: the hosts turned out to be stronger, but the Belarusians are firmly committed to revenge.



SPORT







Photo  
of the  
week

**New Year and Christmas are family holidays that are important to celebrate with family and friends.**  
**In the photo: a family of young specialists from the Shumilinsky forestry enterprise, Pavel and Yekaterina Tishkevich with their son Roman.**

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



**On December 31st, 1869**, the English architect, engineer and amateur archaeologist John Wood discovered the ruins of the legendary Temple of Artemis of Ephesus — one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, south of Izmir at a depth of seven metres. The magnificent temple was built by the architect Cheiocrates in 550 BC in the city of Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor (currently Selcuk, Türkiye). The best craftsmen of the Greek world took part in the creation of the sculptural decoration of the temple, and the statue of the goddess Artemis was made of gold and ivory.

**On December 31st, 1968**, the world's first supersonic passenger aircraft, the Tu-144, made a test flight. In 1971, it made an incredible impression on the organisers and guests of the International Aviation Exhibition in Paris. The aircraft performed its first operational flight in 1975 on the Moscow-Alma-Ata route, where it transported mail and parcels; later, passenger transportation began on the same route. In total, the Tu-144 made 102 flights under the Aeroflot flag, 55 of which were passenger flights.



**January 1st** is New Year — a bright and cheerful holiday in most countries is celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar, on the night of December 31st to January 1st. It is one of the oldest holidays on earth dates back to ancient times. Records have been preserved that the tradition of celebration, the patron god and the rituals of celebrating the New Year existed under Julius Caesar. Centuries-old rituals formed the basis of the modern holiday and reflect the national characteristics of each state.

**On January 1st, 1929**, the grand opening of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences took place. From the very beginning, the Academy of Sciences became a leading scientific centre influencing the economic, technological, social and cultural development of Belarus. Since 1997 — National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Over the long history of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, authoritative scientific schools have been formed, and world-famous scientists have grown up.



**January 2nd** is Science Fiction Day. The holiday appeared thanks to the names of such outstanding science fiction writers as: J.Verne, G.Wells, A.Azimov, S.Lem, R.Bradbury,



merits of science fiction writers can safely be attributed to the fact that many of the ideas presented in their works sooner or later became reality. It was going beyond what was already known that attracted and continues to attract the minds of science fiction writers and readers.

**January 3rd** is cocktail straw's birthday. The first artificial straw for cocktails was invented by American entrepreneur Marvin Stone, owner of a factory producing paper cigarette holders. Today, although straws have become a fairly common item in our lives, designers have not ignored them either — they have different sizes, shapes, colours, and decorations.



**January 4th** is World Braille Day — a holiday dedicated to the invention of the French teacher and musician Louis Braille (1809–1852), which was established by a resolution of the UN General Assembly in November 2018. The purpose of the holiday

R.Heinlein, A.Clark, A.Belyaev, I.Efremov, K.Bulychev, Strugatsky brothers, J.Orwell, F.K.Dick and many others. The

is to raise awareness of the meaning of the Braille alphabet as one of the means of communication for the full realisation of the human rights of blind and visually impaired people.

**January 4th** is Newton Day, a holiday celebrated on the birthday of Isaac Newton (1643–1727) — an internationally recognised genius, one of the greatest physicists, mathematicians and astronomers of the 17th century, whose mind and experience created the law of universal gravitation and the three laws of mechanics, which became the basis of classical physics. It is interesting that the story about an apple falling from a tree, which led Newton to think about the free fall of bodies, is considered true.



**On January 4th, 1908**, the bright star of Russian ballet Anna Pavlova performed the choreographic miniature *The Dying Swan* for the first time at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. The miniature was staged by Mikhail Fokine to the music of the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns. The poetic image presented by Pavlova and Fokine became a masterpiece and symbol of Russian ballet.

