

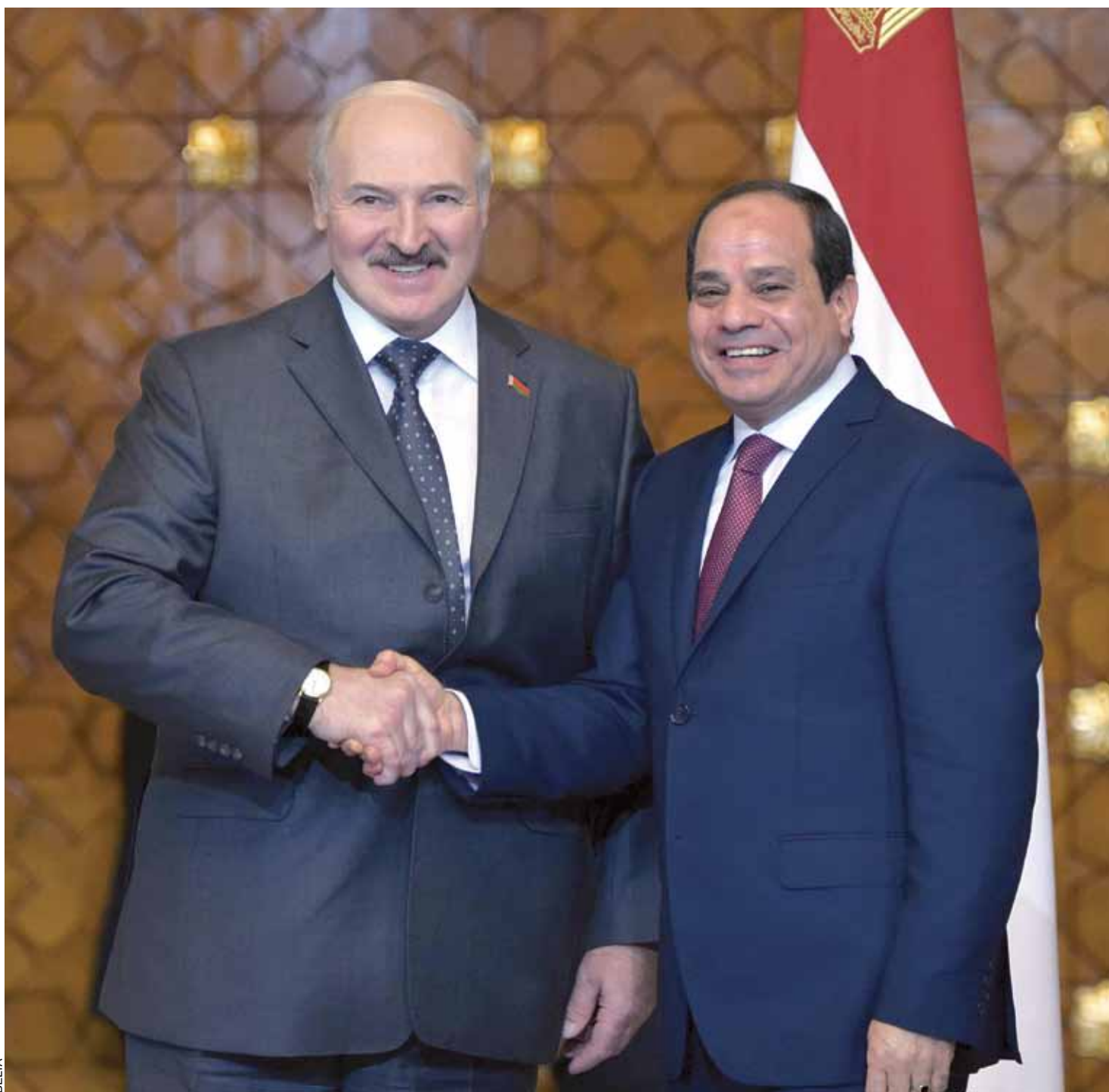


Two presidents determine driving force of Belarusian-Egyptian beneficial relations

Belarus and Egypt have agreed to advance each other's foreign trade interests in their respective economic unions. This is noted in a joint declaration by the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, and the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil el-Sisi, signed by the leaders of the two states after their negotiations in Cairo. The President of Belarus is in Egypt on an official visit.

Considering the drive towards stronger Belarusian-Egyptian relations, the two sides have decided to reinforce mutually beneficial co-operation. In particular, according to BelTA, they have agreed to work together on signing the agreement on free trade between the Eurasian Economic Union and its member states as one party and Egypt as the other party. "The two parties will mutually support each other in advancing their foreign trade interests in the economic associations, of which the two countries are members," reads the declaration.

The heads of state have come to an agreement that economic collaboration is the driving force of Belarusian-Egyptian relations. They are ready to step up trade in competitive products, provided market rules are observed. They are also ready to mutually simplify bilateral trade terms in a bid to increase the trade volume in a balanced manner. Moreover, Egypt approves of



Belarus' intention to attain observer status in the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation.

Belarus and Egypt will work out a roadmap document to advance bilateral interaction. The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, made this statement for the mass media after negotiations with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. "We've agreed that members of the Belarus-Egypt Intergovernmental Commission will gather in Minsk soon to work out an action plan, a roadmap for the future. After that, a report will be presented to the President of Egypt and he will decide whether to visit Belarus to get a close and personal look at Belarus' capabilities in the areas of interest together with specialists," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The Head of State stressed that there are no closed topics between Belarus and Egypt. "We're completely open. We have experience and potential. We have multiplied it and have built it up and are always ready to share with our friends," asserted the President.

Addressing Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Mr. Lukashenko praised honourable qualities of the Egyptian President and called on the Egyptian nation to support his policies. "To reach the goal, you can count on Belarus. We're ready to shoulder your burdens. If we strike a deal, we'll never fail you. It's a distinguishing trait of our country's behaviour on the international scene," said Mr. Lukashenko. "We'll put together the roadmap and action plan and will definitely im-

Alexander Lukashenko and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

plement them." During expanded-participation talks the heads of state discussed ways to step up co-operation in trade, defence, production of agricultural machines, civil engineering, infrastructure development, science, logistics, wastewater treatment and rational use of natural resources.

In total, as a result of the meeting, 10 documents were signed to advance liaisons in culture, agriculture, military and technical affairs, legal affairs, environmental protection and other areas.

By Vladimir Velikhov



During the awards ceremony

On values, traditions and ideals

Humanity, compassion and kindness is the foundation of Belarusians' national character, notes the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, at the awards ceremony of the 'For Spiritual Revival' Award, special prizes to figures of culture and arts and the Belarusian Sports Olympus Award

By Vasily Kharitonov

The President underlined that this is what Belarus is like today: kind, friendly, loving, independent and living in harmony with its neighbours. "What it will look like in 50 years' time depends largely on those who are present in this hall today, on everyone who is called a creator. After all, art speaks the language of the mind and the language of the heart," he stressed.

Mr. Lukashenko noted that today's recipients deserve the warmest praise. These are the teams of the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University, the Republican Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus. The awards are bestowed upon teachers and artists, writers and journalists, doctors and the clergy and to the winners of the special prize — Belarusian Sports Olympus. The latter is given to best athletes, coaches and sports journal-

ists. "Sport embodies the will and pride of the nation. We believe that Belarus' sports victories are ahead!" asserted the President.

The Head of State noted that the prize-winners are people who have been nominated by their labour collectives. "The best people, the best groups for the award have been nominated by labour collectives. Perhaps in some cases the best person has been overlooked. We'll see you next year," the Belarusian leader underlined. "We would like you to express yourselves. Do not hesitate to show your work. Do not hesitate to say what you have created with your mind and your hands. But the fact remains: today we honour those who have created something, who have done a great service to the Homeland."

Mr. Lukashenko remarked that the value of art is hundredfold higher if it serves a noble mission, if it serves kindness and benevolence, if it serves

the native land. "The achievements of the people awarded today are exactly of that kind. This is their merit and strength!" he said.

The tradition to award distinguished people during the New Year and Christmas celebrations has become a landmark event in the spir-

Do not hesitate to show your work. Do not hesitate to say what you have created with your mind and your hands. But the fact remains: today we honour those who have created something, who have done a great service to the Homeland.

itual life of Belarus. "Every year in January we meet with extraordinary people healing our souls, protecting our memory, serving the ideals of mercy, kindness and beauty," Alexander Lukashenko said. "History gave a unique chance to our creative people.

This is a chance to make a contribution to the development of the Belarusian nation. Together with you, the present generations of people fulfilled the centuries-old dream of our ancestors to create the first independent Belarusian state in history. Today our common goal is to protect the freedom and independence of the country for the future generations. Today our common task is to preserve the country and transfer it free and independent to those who will come after us," notes the Belarusian leader.

The President stressed that while it's not easy to acquire independence, it's even much more difficult to defend it. "The strength of spirit, solidarity and unity are the basic concepts, the foundation without which we cannot exist. A thousand years ago, Omar Khayyam used to say: 'The down-hearted die ahead of time'. This is very correct! Only a strong person knows what to

do and where to go. A person without a strong core is destined to lose. Our people have never lacked the strength of spirit! Belarusians survived bloody wars, managed to hold out in the most difficult post-war period, restored the country from ruins, and now are doing their best to protect the sovereignty of the native country at the crossroads of cultures and historical fates," said the President. At the same time, Mr. Lukashenko remarked that certain people are still trying to say that Belarusians are people without roots. "Such thinking is not accidental. Many people do not like independent Belarus living by its wits and labour. The mission of the true creator is to withstand any lies and hypocrisy. It is especially important when we talk about the Fatherland, the native country. This is the field of the spiritual battle for Belarus, for our values, ideals, and traditions. And to win this battle, to win it in the souls of people is the genuine noble mission of those whom we honour today."

Artistry truly reveals power of friendship

In 2016, ten special awards of the President of Belarus to figures of culture and arts were distributed. Among their holders are the *Golas Radzimy* journalism team — including Departmental Head Ivan Zhdanovich and special correspondent Yekaterina Medvedskaya. The award recognises their co-operation with our countrymen abroad and professional coverage of intercultural dialogue in Belarus.

By Vladimir Mikhailov

Ivan Zhdanovich and Yekaterina Medvedskaya are always in touch with community activists — discussing new ideas and supporting creative initiatives aimed at expanding Belarusian culture and spiritual heritage abroad. The journalists also actively contribute to the formation of new communities and the establishment of contacts between artistic groups abroad with partners in Belarus.

Most importantly, the valuable experience of the cultural life of Belarusians living abroad is ever expanding, becoming an integral component

of our national culture — owing to the *Golas Radzimy* articles. According to different estimates, over 3m Belarusians live outside the country and in their new homes, these people keep the traditions of their ancestors, rituals, language and songs. In particular, the articles of Ivan Zhdanovich and Yekaterina Medvedskaya are devoted to the life, artistic activities, cultural and educational projects of Belarusians in Moldova, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The richness of the Belarusian culture is confirmed by folk rituals, holidays and festivals. While covering them, the newspaper is not only concen-



Ivan Zhdanovich and Yekaterina Medvedskaya

trating on the events: texts by Ivan and Yekaterina disclose the deep spiritual meaning of folk traditions and the peculiarities of the Belarusian world-

view which are clearly demonstrated in festivals and rituals.

Some articles by these authors — in the 'Planet of People', 'Community' and

'Together' columns — are dedicated to interethnic and interfaith harmony in the country. Belarus is home for people of many different nationalities. The newspaper explains how the country manages to preserve peace and harmony in its society. For example, it regularly covers the Festival of National Cultures in Grodno and the preparation for it. In addition, it covers the *Multi-national Belarus* international project which envisages visits by artistic groups and heads of different ethnic communities to Belarusians abroad — sharing experience, giving concerts, preparing meetings and participating in festivals and other joint cultural events.

Ivan and Yekaterina describe how Belarusian communities in different countries act as integrators and peacekeepers during their events. There are many examples of such 'friendship between people' on the *Golas Radzimy* pages. Special attention is paid to publications on Belarusians'

spiritual, literary and artistic legacy. Materials are prepared for celebrations of Belarusian classical authors, in addition to articles investigating the ties of Belarusians writers with representatives of other cultures. The *Literary Journeys* cycle is prepared jointly with the State Museum of Belarusian Literature History. Ivan Zhdanovich and Yekaterina Medvedskaya have many plans for the future. The former's activity has been repeatedly acknowledged by diplomas of the Ministry of Information, the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs. He's been awarded the Belarusian Union of Journalists' *Golden Pen* in the 'Essay' category. In turn, Yekaterina has been awarded the diploma of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs and a letter of gratitude from the Republican Centre of National Cultures. No doubt, these journalists will have many more artistic successes in the future.

Bank that is protective of its reputation

By Vladimir Khromov

Sberbank ready to shift to new stage of its development on Belarusian banking market

Sberbank is ready to make the transition to a new stage in its development on the Belarusian banking services market, notes Sberbank President and Chairman of the Board, German Gref, after his meeting with President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko.

“For the last two years

we’ve been busy primarily accumulating reserves out of net profit. However, after taking care of all the items on today’s agenda we can move to a new stage in our development in the Republic of Belarus,” said Mr. Gref.

Sberbank’s development in Belarus will be focused on bolstering the effectiveness of the bank’s work, assimilating digital technologies, and offering more convenient services to clients in Belarus. “With the Head of State we discussed

several projects relating to Sberbank’s plans to create a digital ecosystem and provide services to enterprises, primarily small businesses. The President of Belarus took a close interest in this issue,” explained Mr. Gref, adding that Sberbank is the largest investor in the Belarusian economy.

“Today we discussed and found practical solutions to all problems connected with the complex projects in difficulty which were sponsored by Sberbank. We’ve agreed on

our participation in additional funding of these complex projects which will be implemented within the next two years on the market and which need support from the Belarusian authorities. We received comprehensive assistance from the President of Belarus and have undertaken commitments on their additional funding,” announced Mr. Gref, adding that real estate sites (with their onward sale) will be given more than \$100m of investments.

“We’ll complete the whole

scheme of restructuring of our debt in the first quarter of this year and the bank will start implementing the programme of its modernisation and enhancement of its own efficiency,” Mr. Gref explained.

The Head of Sberbank also spoke about their readiness to move to a new stage of development on the Belarusian market of banking services. It refers to projects dealing with the creation of a digital ecosystem and provision of modern services to clients.



German Gref

“In summary, the results of the meeting are positive. Together with the President of Belarus, we discussed each project in detail. Now, having his political support we have no obstacles in the way,” said Mr. Gref.



Foreign tourists at Minsk National Airport

View of the world through the prism of security

By Alexey Fedosov

Representative of Belarus announces considerable increase of risk of nuclear conflict between countries at UN conference

The deterioration of international engagement in recent decades has significantly increased the danger of global nuclear war between the major world powers, noted the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN, Andrei Dapkiunas, speaking at an open debate of the UN Security Council — *Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace*.

In his speech, the Belarusian diplomat noted that the gradual erosion of the rule and principles-based environment of international engagement has increased the danger of global nuclear war — either intentionally, or due to error or tragic coincidence.

Under these conditions, the absence of common primary responsibility for the prevention of global war and the establishment of a collective system for maintaining peace between the major global powers, all attempts to resolve smaller-scale conflicts would be futile. According to Mr. Dapkiunas, these efforts mean micro-management of a system that is not adjusted at the macro-level.

The Belarusian diplomat raised the issue of special responsibility of the most significant military powers to act to create and protect the collective security system. Regarding the role of the UN Security Council in this process, Mr. Dapkiunas suggested that the true measure of success of work of the Council was not the number of meetings held and resolutions adopted, but the ability of each member of the Council to contribute to the creation of the sense of greater moral urgency for dialogue and mutual empathy among the larger powers.

The Head of the Belarusian Mission to the UN expressed the view that the Security Council is of little use to the world as a political theatre. However, the world desperately needs a Security Council defined not so much by the turning wheels of its political machinery as by sincere interaction of human beings who make the most commendable effort of building dialogue for better mutual understanding.

New regime to obviously arouse much interest

Belarus introduces five-day visa-free regime for residents of 80 countries

By Vitold Yemelyanov

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, signed Decree # 8 ‘On Establishing Visa-Free Entry and Departure of Foreign Citizens’ on January 9th. The document introduces visa-free entry through the border checkpoint at Minsk National Airport and visa-free stay in Belarus for up to 5 days for the citizens of 80 states.

These are 39 countries of Europe, including the entire European Union, Brazil, Indonesia, the USA, Japan and other countries. These are favourable countries in terms of migration and Belarus’ strategic partners which have introduced visa-free regimes for Belarusian citizens on a unilateral basis. New regulations also apply to the non-citizens of Latvia and stateless persons of Estonia.

The document primarily aims to raise the number of business trips, tourism and private visits of people

with regular passports and will not apply to foreigners on official trips with diplomatic, service, special and similar passports.

A valid passport or other document permitting foreign travels, money (equivalent to at least two basic amounts for each day of stay in the foreign currency or Belarusian Roubles), medical insurance to the value

of at least 10,000 Euros operational in Belarus will be needed for visa-free entry.

Meanwhile, citizens of Vietnam, Haiti, Gambia, Honduras, India, China, Lebanon, Namibia, and Samoa should also have a valid multi-visa to the EU states or the Schengen Area with a mark confirming entry to their region, plane tickets with a confirma-

tion of departure from Minsk National Airport within 5 days after the date of the entry.

The visa-free regime does not apply to people arriving in Belarus by plane from Russia and planning to go to Russian airports (these are internal flights with no border control).

The decree will enter into force a month after its official publication.

Answers to all questions

By Alexey Fedosov

Foreign diplomats have considered an order for visa-free entrance to Belarus for citizens of their countries

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted representatives of the diplomatic missions of the EU member states, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Norway and the Vatican. They met with Igor Fisenko, Head of the Central Consular Office, Andrei Bushilo, Head of the

European Co-operation Department and Alexei Samosuev, Head of Eurasian Integration Department of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, foreign diplomats were informed in detail about the Decree ‘On Establishing Visa-Free Entry and Departure of Foreign Citizens’. It was emphasised that, during the adoption of a corresponding decision, Belarus considered its presidency in the



Central European Initiative and the conduct of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in the country in July 2017.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that Belarus is interested in stepping up co-operation in political, trade-economic and other areas with these countries.

Insurance to support those unemployed

Citizens of Belarus to receive safety net following dismissal

By Vasily Malashenkov

For all those paying insurance contributions, in cases of enterprise bankruptcy or staffing reduction, there will be eligibility to receive redundancy pay, alongside other social allowances

Belarus' First Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Protection, Andrey Lobovich, spoke a year ago about plans to introduce such a scheme. Now, the Ministry for Labour and Social Protection has confirmed that, in 2017, several draft documents will be prepared to determine how the system will be financed, as well as such factors as minimum insurance record and necessary periods of payment of benefits.

"Some countries offer insurance against unemployment as a form of social protection for the economically active population, due to the risk of losing employment," notes the Deputy Vice Speaker of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, Marianna Shchetkina. Some experts suggest emulating western experience, whereby employees contribute to insurance costs.

"World practice shows that individual insurance is the best solution," notes Maria Akulova, an expert with the BERO Centre for Economic Research. "The state should join enterprises in making contributions into the Social Protection Fund, while employees also regularly pay a certain sum, creating their own safety net. When insurance is called upon, the first five months of allowances are paid from state resources, with



increase, employers and employees will cover payments. It's difficult

to say how much a person will be given on losing their job. It's likely to depend on their insurance record and other factors. Maybe, the amount of payments will be connected with the minimum living budget or the minimum wage. The sum may depend on lost salary, and payments in cases of dismissal will be short term. World practice shows that the amount of insurance payment reduces as time passes. The country is paying a state allowance to those who have lost their job and are registered with an employment centre. Usually, this is no more than \$23 monthly. Moreover, authorities promise all-round support to those who are unemployed, including offering subsidies to allow people to launch their own business. This year, 1,300 people used such start-up capital (varying from \$1,000 to \$2,000).



Maria Akulova

World practice shows that individual insurance is the best solution. The state should join enterprises in making contributions into the Social Protection Fund, while employees also regularly pay a certain sum, creating their own safety net.

financially, while offering 'tax breaks', to enhance the role of the private sector. Ms. Akulova would like to see a system of re-training for the unemployed, to help them meet the needs of the market.

Tamara Krasovskaya, the Chair of the House of Representatives' Standing Committee for Labour and Social Issues, explains, "It's impossible to say for sure how unemployment insurance will be arranged. Probably, the state will initially take on the insurance burden. Then, gradually, if salaries

the rest later drawn from an employee's own accumulated funds."

Ms. Akulova notes the focus should be placed on promoting individual entrepreneurship and self-employment instead of subsidising non-efficient assets. She advocates for supporting small businesses fi-

'Eureka, eureka!'

By Veniamin Mikheev

Student of the Sukhoi Gomel State Technical University, Alexander Matveenkov, has invented a device called 'Find me', intended for quick recovery of lost things. His project was recognised as one of six winners of the regional stage of the Republican 100 Ideas for Belarus Contest.

The exhibition and presentation of awards to young innovators took place in the business centre of the free economic zone Gomel-Raton. Nearly 30 of the best projects from the youth of the region, chosen following the results of several regional rounds of the competition in 2016, were introduced. Developments in medicine, agriculture, ecology, IT technologies and social sphere were recognised.

Alexander Matveenkov showcased the device which helps to find lost objects. It comprises an original

beacon sticker which is fastened to those things which are often lost — wallets, keys, remote control unit etc. Thanks to Bluetooth built into the gadget, it is possible to find lost things very quickly using a mobile phone within an average radius of 100 metres.

Among the winners is also the project *WebQuest: Tourist Belarus*, which was introduced by a pupil of Rogachev school #2, Alina Pashkina. The schoolgirl thought of placing QR-codes on all historical objects, which would provide fast access to information about them. The student of the Gomel State Medical University, Andrey Savostin, received a winner's diploma for the idea of effective modification of the oncological service of Belarus. Among the finalists is also the project of a worker at the Mozyr experimental forestry enterprise, Yevgeny Navarich — describing the influence of organomineral substrata



Alexander Matveenkov — one of the contest's winners

on the growth and development of oak seedlings, and techniques to aid in the struggle against pests in agriculture developed by schoolgirl Ilona Komlik from Petrikov. The jury gave a special 'Courageous and Creative' award to IT-developments — a mobile application and educational website by a pupil from Zhlobin, Renat Takhautdinov.

The exhibition introduced exciting new projects in the sphere of public health services, education, ar-

chitecture, information and industrial technology and food manufacturing. Among them, for example, is the manufacture of edible glasses, single-use moisture-proof linen with thermal effects for medical institutions, a method of applied PRP-therapy for the treatment changes in the skin due to aging.

All six regional project winners will take part in the final of the competition which will be held in January and February in Minsk.

Depositors keen to be counted

By Vladimir Antonov

Do Belarusians like bankers? Of course, the answer given during a kitchen discussion might differ from that formulated when answering objectively. We may feel sceptical but we surely have no reason to actively distrust financiers. Only 11 percent of Belarusians have savings accounts with banks, but that doesn't mean that the remaining citizens are afraid to save.

According to recent research by the National Academy of Sciences' Sociology Institute, Belarusians are active users of financial services.

Three quarters of citizens of full legal age have bank accounts, while young and elderly people (with low levels of income and education and living primarily in rural areas) usually don't. Those without tend not to have enough funds to make an account worthwhile (as mentioned by one third of respondents) while a fifth say that they have access to the accounts of family members. Only one in ten declare their distrust of banks. Less than 3 percent of Belarusians have a sceptical attitude towards banks' reliability, showing that, despite everything, banks services are appreciated.

Belarusians' interest in taking out loans has significantly dropped over the past four years, with only 24 percent of those polled borrowing money from banks. Almost half of respondents are deterred by high interest rates. One third of Belarusians admit to borrowing money but 95 percent prefer taking it from relatives or friends.

Technologies change form

By Alexey Fedosov

Biometric passports and national ID cards to launch in late 2018

Alexei Begun, the Head of the Citizenship and Migration Department of the Interior Ministry of Belarus, notes, "We're planning to launch biometric passports for travelling abroad and an ID card."

According to the plan for the development of biometric technologies for 2014-2018, Belarus is initiating measures to infuse national documents with biometric technologies: passports for travel abroad and national ID cards. Plans have also been made to introduce these into Belarus' integrated service-payment system.

ID cards are plastic cards with biometric information stored on the chip. They are successfully used in many countries, being compact and durable, and almost impossible to counterfeit. Meanwhile, biometric passports make travel across state borders faster and more convenient.

Recharging the batteries

First electric buses appear in Minsk

By Vladimir Yakovlev

Minsk has received a great New Year present: the first Belarusian electric buses are now serving the city streets. A bi-axial E420 Vitovt Electro and even more spacious double E433 Vitovt Electro Max (seating 153) have made their trial run. Both are produced by Minsk's Belkommunmash, jointly with Minsktrans specialists (who operate electric buses). Journalists were



the first passengers, with the 'test team' led by Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko. Impressions from the trip were that the buses are comfortable and cosy, moving quietly and as quickly as trolley buses.

Importantly, they aren't tied to wires, so can easily manoeuvre in heavy urban traffic. Passengers can connect laptops or phones to power outlets near each seat, and drivers can monitor the cabin via CCTV cameras.

The new buses can travel 12-15km before needing to recharge. Meanwhile, energy replenishment



In Vitovt cabin

takes just 5-7 minutes: enough time for the driver to take a rest break, drink a cup of tea or complete some recordkeeping. Relatively inexpensive charging equipment will be installed at stations along bus routes.

The first yellow electric buses (the colour chosen by Minsk via online voting) launch in March and April. Belkommunmash is planning a hybrid bus in 2017, with a conventional internal combustion engine

working jointly with batteries to drastically reduce fuel consumption and lower harmful emissions. Such vehicles will be quieter, and more fuel efficient.

Belarus plans domestic production of the buses, especially regarding batteries, to help buses be produced less expensively. This will allow them to be competitive against conventional buses and trolley buses, and should boost Belarus' export potential. The degree of production localisation is already high, and the Belarusian innovations are set to sell well across the Eurasian Economic Union.

Dream named Sun



Bragin has every chance of becoming a capital of solar energy

By Vera Arteaga

The park I visited, to the west of Soboli village (in the Bragin District), wasn't green but blue, filled with solar panels. Their photovoltaic modules are traditionally sky-blue in colour. Soboli solar park is the biggest in Belarus and within post-Soviet territory, covering over forty hectares. Some view it as an eyesore. Others believe it's a sign of the future.

My enthusiasm for making a detailed study of the entire territory of the Solar-II photovoltaic station rapidly subsides: it's a challenge to walk the 3.5km perimeter in frost. "Our colleagues responsible for monitoring take a snowmobile," admits the chief engineer of Solar Invest Ltd., Sergey Sviridov. "Let's walk as far as you can, so you can see the project's great scale."

We fail to see a single employee in the 'forest' of panels. There's no need for constant human presence, as the solar park can operate autonomously. Buildings are there simply as technical premises, monitoring via computer. "It's possible to register faults remotely: from Bragin or even Minsk. If necessary, a specialist can be sent immediately. However, we're yet to experience a problem," explains Mr. Sviridov. Interestingly, Gomel solar

energy travels as far as Minsk. Its Solar-II panels hourly generate 18.5 MW of direct current, which is immediately transformed into alternate current, with the help of 615 inverters — to join the national network, powering cities. The station launched in July 2016, and has already provided an impressive volume of energy. The panels should last up to 35 years, with minimal wear and tear.

On cloudy and rainy days, the 'energy harvest' can drop by up to 80 percent, supplying just 20 percent to the network, but this is rare. Snowfall can also hamper solar charging, with workers then hired to brush away the layer of powder, explains Mr. Sviridov. The Bragin District enjoys the most sunshine countrywide. "We were pleasantly surprised to learn that Bragin enjoys more sunshine than other cities in the Gomel Region," says the Deputy Chairman of the Bragin District Executive Committee, Piotr Romanyuk. "Gomel has 23 minutes less daily sunshine than Bragin, while Khoiniki (situated just 25km from Bragin) has 10 minutes less."

Naturally, the project required serious investment (the solar park was built using foreign funds), and makes good use of land registered as contaminated (being withdrawn from agricultural use). "Soboli was resettled but, in 1987, was re-evacuated; mostly, elderly people returned, al-

though the village thrived in the past. The investment project has made it possible to put the land to good use," Mr. Romanyuk asserts.

There's no doubt that Solar-II has breathed new life into these lands and its location bothers no one (unlike similar facilities abroad). In fact, it draws people, who view it as a spectacle. Wind turbines are seen as commonplace, while solar facilities remain a novelty in Belarus. Interestingly, Bragin could become the capital of solar energy, as another solar plant (of 4.5MW capacity) operates nearby. Mr. Romanyuk comments, "Applications have been received to build other solar power plants in our region, including a 13MW station, covering thirteen hectares."

Bragin's district heads would love to secure free solar energy for the area. After all, Solar-II could generate more energy, taking into account local needs. However, this is in theory. In practice, the idea is hampered by quotas set for the station. There are no quotas set for enterprises regarding domestic energy needs. Meanwhile, in this case, we refer to the whole district rather than a separate enterprise. Actually, we never know whether the rules will be reconsidered and residents of Belarus' southern region (mostly affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe) would enjoy the saving sun.

Confectioners know well, that tastes differ

By Olga Pasiyak

Belarusians have a sweet tooth, buying 250,000 tonnes of chocolate, sweets, biscuits and other confectionery annually

Around 70,000 tonnes of sweets are imported into Belarus from abroad, while half of all domestically produced confectionery is provided by Belgospishcheprom Concern enterprises: Kommunarka, Spartak, Krasny Pishchevik, Krasny Mozyryanin, Slodych, Confa, Ivkon and the First Chocolate Company.

New Year festivities are the star hour for confectioners, notes the Head of Co-ordination and Development of Confectionery, Olga Starostina, adding that Belgospishcheprom organisations alone produced about two million sweets, of various sizes, in 2016.

Every year, Belgospishcheprom enterprises introduce over a hundred new products. In 2016, Belarusians were offered new varieties of chocolate, marshmallow, kazinaki and low-sugar confectionery, with such fillings as orange with cognac, and banana nougat with strawberry jam.

Belarusian chocolates and sweets are part of festive occasions



Confectionery produce

worldwide, being especially popular in Russia, the USA, Ukraine and Mongolia.

Belarus continues to battle certain technical regulations which make Belarusian chocolates more expensive than those in Russia and Ukraine, due to using more cocoa butter (with less than 5 percent substitutes, making ours higher 'quality' than those of our neighbours). The Chinese view Belarusian confectionery as being too sweet, so our developers are working to produce a modified recipe to suit the Chinese market. In 2016 alone, Belgospishcheprom dispatched \$500,000 of sweets and chocolate to China.

Centre of good hope

Republican N.N. Alexandrov Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology and Medical Radiology opens two new wards

By Olga Savitskaya

The national health service has received a much anticipated present for the New Year: two medical wards have been launched at the Republican N.N. Alexandrov Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology and Medical Radiology: a new building for the consultative out-patient department and a revamped urology ward.

Construction began two years ago, following a Presidential order, and the wards are now receiving their first patients. \$19,850,000 has been spent on the facilities targeting cancer: a worthy focus since, within five years, cancer may top the list of causes of death. Early detection is vital to receive effective treatment. The newly launched wards will surely help in achieving this task, notes the Chairman of Minsk Regional Executive Committee, Semen Shapiro. He calls them among the best not only within post-Soviet territory but beyond.

The launch has been eagerly awaited. Previously, the clinic operated across various rooms and departments, failing to cope with an increasing number of patients countrywide. Designed for 250 visits per day, it often served four times that number, limiting oncologists' abilities to be effective. Meanwhile, disease figures have been rising in the past 25 years.



New consultative polyclinic building

ARTUR PRUPAS

The Director of the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Oncology and Medical Radiology, Oleg Sukonko, comments, "The cancer-related death rate is falling annually, thanks to early detection and surgical treatment in the first and second stages. We already conduct up to a hundred operations daily; after the launch of the high-tech building, our patients will receive necessary assistance even sooner."

Most money has been injected into the purchase of medical equipment, including Belarus-made. As a result, the clinic boasts an X-ray

department with modern computers, scanners and other expensive equipment. Importantly, from now on, some procedures, such as chemotherapy, are being offered without patients needing to stay in hospital. In the past, this difficult procedure took place in a room with twelve seats. Now, patients are placed in ten comfortable rooms (accommodating two or three each). Doctors have three operating tables and modern recovery rooms, where they can keep track during the post-operative period. "All conditions for patients and medical staff have

been created," comments Vasily Zharko, who was the Health Minister and is now the Deputy Prime Minister.

The oncological urology department has been completely revamped as well. Over the last ten years, the number of such patients has doubled, while cancers of the prostate and kidney occupy first and fifth place in terms of the fastest 'growing' diseases. The revamped buildings, which hadn't been restored since the 1960s, looks truly different now, enjoying top level equipment.

ARTUR PRUPAS

Endoscopic Department doctor, Anatoly Zelenkevich

Following the burgomaster

By Dmitry Umpirovich

Ornithologists almost sure that a previously unseen bird species to Belarus — the yellow-legged gull — has been registered

The Belarusian Ornitho-Faunistic Commission (BOFC) is yet to confirm the announcement of the Polish Bird Ringing Centre, which has analysed camera evidence from Belarusian ornithologists.

According to Irina Samusenko, who heads the ornithology laboratory at the Scientific and Practical Centre for Bio-resources of the National Academy of Sciences, the yellow-legged gull was photographed back on August 13th, at Severny domestic waste landfill site.

Large gulls are difficult to identify, since Belarus lacks a gull specialist. However, the bird was recognised by a Polish ornithologist, who compared the sighting with one he had made previously, at a gull breeding colony on the Vistula River, near Warsaw (where a modest number of yellow-legged gulls tend to gather). The bird was flying, enabling it to be examined in all details.

The list of birds registered as passing through or having residence in Belarus now stands at 330, recently enlarged by the glaucous gull.

Border guards are ready for influx of guests

By Olga Korneeva

State Border Committee ready for the increase of tourists in Minsk National Airport due to the introduction of a five-day visa-free regime, notes Oleg Lyashuk, the Head of the State Border Committee's Border Control Office

"We're ready for any increase of foreign citizens at Minsk National Airport border checkpoint because of the introduction of the decree," he noted. "We're also ready to ensure additional staff if necessary."

Mr. Lyashuk also noted that annually, the number of foreigners arriving in Belarus via Minsk National Airport increases by 10-15 percent.

On January 9th, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, signed Decree #8 "On the Introduction of Visa-Free Entry and Departure for Foreign Citizens". The document introduces visa-free entry through the border checkpoint at Minsk National Airport and visa-free stay in Belarus for up to 5 days for citizens of 80 states. These are 39 countries of Europe, including the entire European Union, Brazil, Indonesia, the USA, Japan and other countries.

Waiters get down to learning languages

In the two months since the establishment of a visa-free regime for foreigners visiting the area of Grodno and the Avgustovsky Canal, it has become clear that the local services lack enough knowledge of foreign languages. Even those who studied English in schools or universities would rather talk about London than explain the history, features and composition of the dishes offered on the menu. Therefore, the Grodno City Executive Committee has put forward an initiative to create language courses specially for waiters and administrators of the local cafes and restaurants.

By Katerina Charovskaya

In order to carry out these two-month English language courses with an emphasis on tourism and gastronomic vocabulary, teachers of the Grodno State Technological College had to go through serious retraining. The Director of the College, Leonid Belei, is certain that his professionals are ready for the influx of public catering workers wishing to improve their English, "We specialise in training waiters, the programme includes polite phrases, the names of dishes and discussion of the details of the din-

ner amongst other things."

10 employees from the 'Limozh' company have signed up for the forthcoming courses. Its Director Svetlana Golovneva explained the relevance of such an education, "We are determined to offer a qualitative service for our clients and have a very demanding attitude to the staff. For example, in the cake-café Raskosha, which is in the city centre, all the waiters have a higher education and good knowledge of English. We see that their knowledge is in demand. In our other cafes, there are workers who have learnt other foreign languages or



Understanding easy to find in a cafe

wish to improve their knowledge of English, it's mostly these people who signed up for the courses."

I go to the nearest café to find out what the locals think of the readiness of Grodno cafes to welcome tourists. Waiter Pavel assures me that he has no problems with the English language, but native speak-

ers of English rarely come here. More often Lithuanians and Poles, "The main thing is to know that if a Pole orders golobki, perogi and sandach, it does not mean golubi, pirogi and sandvich (pigeons, cakes and sandwiches) but cabbage rolls, dumplings and fish," he says with a smile.

Snow-white freedom-loving geese in cramped conditions

Polesie village of Buikovichi, in Grodno Region's Zhitkovichi District, is far from being quiet, as its welcoming goose cackle is heard for many kilometres

By Dmitry Umpirovich

"These birds are noisy," smiles farmer Tatiana Kulyak on meeting us by her house, on the outskirts of the village. She keeps thirty-five geese and over a hundred ducks. "They bother nobody here. The situation was different when we kept them in the city," she adds.

The locals believe that every good household should keep geese, perhaps because geese have always lived on the Pripyat marshes. In days gone by, domestic geese would over-summer in that area — returning home in time for the Christmas table.

These days, space in Buikovichi is limited, and must be fenced from the village road, farmyards and crops. A grass pasture is set aside for the geese, as is a small 'kopanka' pond, which has plenty of hiding places for the birds, from hungry hawks, vultures and foxes.

Tatiana tells us, "Importantly, geese can find food for themselves in 90 percent of cases, even discovering grass under the snow. In the past, they were known as birds for the poor. In winter, we buy grain (250-300 grams per day per bird) and introduce oats, wheat and bran into their diet, as well as domestically-grown pumpkin. We also grind pine branches, as they're rich in vitamins. Young birds are given some feed. Fodder is the main expense, with the birds content to live in simple wooden sheds. Apart from this, they only need dry bedding. No electricity or gas heating is required."

Tatiana's business calculations indicate that it's impossible to make money purely from selling geese as 'Christmas and New Year meat'. Locally, goose meat is eaten as part of the regular diet, even more commonly than chicken or pork. It's the main ingredient in all soups, includ-



Geese from Kulyak family household

Importantly, geese can find food for themselves in 90 percent of cases, even discovering grass under the snow. In the past, they were known as birds for the poor.

ing buckwheat and brawn (using the feet and heads), and in roast meals.

Ms. Kulyak continues, "Some say that we aren't true farmers, as we cannot 'own' our flock. In the past, we kept up to 500 geese, but those were hectic times. To sell our birds, we visited markets and fairs, and advertised. It was busy through until the Old New Year. These days, we tend to keep around 50-70 birds, supplying regular customers. We're situated 'on the edge' of the country, so it's not easy to travel to our village."

Keeping geese is very economical, as there's very little waste. Besides eating the meat, you can use the fat to treat burns and for other folk medicines. Their feathers are



Tatiana Kulyak

also useful, for filling pillows and duvets. Tatiana explains, "Down — especially on the eve of the winter season — is of perfect quality, re-



Nikolay Kulyak

sembling lambswool. In my youth, children were sent to the river to collect feathers (plucking geese is tedious work)."

She adds that, these days, down fetches no more than a Dollar per kilo. However, the income is useful in summer. A week-old gosling costs about seven Roubles: the same as four ducklings. She tells us, "We've already saturated neighbouring areas

with young birds: I've seen them in the Stolin District, near Mikashevichi, in the Petrikov District and even in Lelchitsy. Thanks to us, beautiful, snow-white Lind geese live on Belarusians farms. Previously, only gray waterfowl geese were common."

Local salaries are just \$270, on average, so keeping geese is a profitable sideline. There's no competition, apart from a little in Russia. Ms. Kulyak praises Tamara, from Velyatichi poultry farm, who taught inexperienced Tatiana from scratch. She's convinced that goose breeding in Polesie is on the rise.

The director of Saturn — a local town-planning enterprise, Mikhail Saskevich, asserts, "I have a dream: to retire and keep geese for my own family: around thirty birds provide enough meat for the winter. It takes three months to feed a pig but only three months for a goose."

Nothing ordinary here

By Inna Sergeeva

A lot can be done to pass exams successfully; some people are even prepared to learn Chinese in a night. The situation is even more tricky when a diploma is to be defended. Future biologist Vasily Yevsikov has a creative approach.

Vasily Yevsikov, a student of the Grodno State University, has written a thesis on the subject of rare flora.

The Grodno State Agricultural University student has devoted his diploma paper to the flora of the African tropics. To prepare for the work

he even climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. It took him almost three days to reach the camp: his journey began with a long flight, then continued with a hike through the jungle in a tropical downpour. His conquering of the highest peak in the world started in severe African heat and was completed at 20 degrees below zero. Mountaineers from Russia and Ukraine joined our countryman, who found his new friends on the Internet.

"I would have definitely failed without training," Vasily says. "I ran for ten kilometres 3-4 times a week, also attending the gym to train my back to be able to carry heavy loads.

The lack of oxygen turned out to be the greatest challenge for me: if the oxygen in the air falls by 30 percent, each body cell functions 30 percent less effectively. When a person feels the lack of air, they start suffering from altitude sickness — feeling dizzy and demonstrating lower performance and endurance. We were saved by sweet drinks and chocolate."

Eventually, the long-awaited moment happened! Vasily placed the flag of his alma mater at an altitude of almost six thousand feet, admitting that he didn't feel any emotion on the finish line. "We thought we would scream and jump for joy. We



Vasily on Kilimanjaro Mount

were expected to feel like heroes but we were completely exhausted by the time we reached the peak. We were most concerned with how we'd find the strength to descend and return to camp. While staying in mountains, I understood what a really mattered in life: friendship, mutual assistance,

solidarity and responsibility must be the basis," he said.

Vasily will use all his observations and discoveries in his scientific work. He has a new dream now: to climb seven peaks on six continents. Mount Kosciuszko in Australia will become his first summit on this route.



Davos: toxic politics take the shine off a stronger economy

Political leaders, CEOs and top bankers make their annual trek up the Swiss Alps to the World Economic Forum

The four-day affair of panel discussions, lunches and cocktail parties touch on subjects as diverse as terrorism, artificial intelligence and wellness. The global economy is in better shape than it has been in years. Stock markets are booming, oil prices are on the rise again and the risk of a rapid economic slowdown in China has eased.

However, the mood in the picturesque Swiss mountain town is anything but celebratory. There is acute anxiety about the increasingly toxic political climate. In the wake of Donald Trump's election in the US, polls are looming in the Netherlands, France, Germany and possibly Italy this year.

Insiders say the main question

will be whether leaders can agree on the root causes of public anger — and begin to articulate a response.

A WEF report on global risks, released before Davos, highlighted 'diminishing public trust in institutions'. It noted that rebuilding faith in the political process and leaders would be a 'difficult task'. WEF founder Klaus Schwab says

it's about listening and understanding. "First, it's important to listen to the populists, and actually we have several sessions where we deal with these issues."

"We have also representatives of populist parties here with us. We have to take it seriously. But again, it's not only to be responsive, you have to be responsible."

Yahoo to change name after Internet business sale to Verizon

Yahoo is to change its name to Altaba after it sells its main Internet business to the telecoms firm Verizon Communications

The sale will leave it as a holding company with stakes in Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba and Yahoo Japan — 15 percent of Alibaba and 35.5 percent of Yahoo Japan. Chief Executive Marissa Mayer will also leave the board, which is being slimmed down. The former Google executive is expected to remain with Yahoo once it becomes part of Verizon. However the deal is by no means certain to go ahead in its current form. Verizon is reviewing it after Yahoo disclosed two major hacks of its users data.



Model of future museum

Star Wars film maker chooses la for art museum

After holding the art world in suspense Star Wars film maker George Lucas has finally chosen Los Angeles to build his \$1bn (900,000 Euros) Museum of Narrative Art

Lucas who is funding the project himself will use it to house some his personal collection of fine and popular art, as well as some Star Wars memorabilia. The complex is expected to create around one thousand jobs.

Pakistan's PM reaches out to minorities during Hindu temple visit

The restoration of an ancient Hindu temple complex in Punjab has been inaugurated by Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

The 900-year-old site is one of the holiest in South Asia for Hindus and the visit is being seen as a symbolic gesture by the Premier to appeal the Muslim country's minority communities. At the ceremony, attended by senior Christian, Sikh and Hindu leaders, Sharif chastised hardline Muslim scholars who use 'strange interpretations' of Islam to preach hate against other religions.

Political analysts say Sharif's visit to the Katas Raj temples was part of an effort to reach out to minority groups ahead of a general election scheduled for 2018, and which would also appeal to more liberal, urban voters in Pakistan. Non-Muslims make up only about three percent of the 190 million population, but they are clustered and their votes could swing some seats in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh.

Norway first country to switch off FM radio

Norway has become the first country in the world to begin switching off its FM radio network

For the moment the scheme applies only to northern Nordland, but the whole country will be digital by the end of the year.

The government says DAB radio will save money, allow more broadcasters, and sound better, but that is only if people can hear it.

"New products will be introduced onto the market over the next few months, they will have tactile buttons and a text-to-speech function. This means that what's on the display will be read out loud," said the Norwegian Media Authority's Line Langnes.

Critics say that while FM programmes in mountainous Norway need many transmitters and is costly, reception at the launch was poor, and especially elderly people, particularly dependent on the radio, with first-generation DAB sets will have to upgrade to DAB+ devices. Two point three million car owners will have no DAB in their vehicles, either. Many fishermen are also said to be ill-equipped for the changeover.

One newspaper opinion poll revealed two-thirds of the population think the government is moving too fast.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Interesting time with the rich content of the past

The Christmas holidays have mainly led the content of exhibitions at the country's museums, with the National Art Museum and National Historical Museum still hosting exhibitions dedicated to the Christian holiday of Christmas

By Veniamin Mikheev

The exhibition at the National Art Museum is hosting icons from the 17th-19th century as well as traditional Belarusian costumes from the 19th-early 20th century with masks of tipteeers (Christmas mummers). The works by famous contemporary masters of straw weaving deserves special attention; reflecting the aesthetics and traditions of the Belarusian nation while also tracing the development of working methods of crafts going back to ancient times

The tradition of celebrating Christmas originated in late 3rd-early 4th century when Christians began to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ together with his baptism on the same day — January 6th (in line with the Julian calendar). In the mid-4th century, the holiday of Christmas completely separated from the Baptism of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church began to celebrate it on December 25th (in line with the Gregorian calendar).

According to folk traditions, on the night before Christmas, two powers are at work in the world: good and evil. One power called on people to celebrate the birth of Christ around a Christmas table while another one gathered evil spirits, witches and devils for a Sabbath.



Historical interior of a peasants' house

In the evening 'Kolyada' — young men disguise wearing fur coats turned inside out and with masks of animals on their faces — were walking through villages. They knocked on houses, sang songs and praised the hosts of the house. Snowfall was considered to be a good sign on Christmas eve, promising prosperity, harvest and welfare to each house. There was a folk saying that if the weather on Christmas eve was snowy then there will be a good harvest of bread. If there was frost then the family will live the whole year in friendship, love and harmony. Thus, the traditions of Christmas are complemented with folk traditions, adding to the holiday with fairytale and magic.



Art of straw weaving

Meanwhile, the National Historical Museum pays more attention to the peasant way of life which was festively transformed at Christmas. The museum displays real and authentic items which were peculiar to rural life in past centuries. Visitors



Well-dressed young ladies



Items by folk craftsmen

can see how the Belarusian house was decorated at Christmas and how it was made cosy even though the opportunities and income of the hosts was very limited. Traditionally, needlework played a great role — bright and delicate embroidery on rushniks and pillow slips. Furthermore, peasant dishes which

were usually cooked for Christmas are also on display.

The Christmas exhibition is traditionally rich both in the museums of the Belarusian capital and in the regions. Despite the frosty winter weather there are many visitors who have found time for an interesting meeting with the rich historical past.

Venice expecting interesting projects

By Yuliana Leonovich

Culture Ministry announces competition for a curator for the concept of a national pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale

Natalia Sharangovich, Commissioner of the National Pavilion and Director of the Contemporary Arts Centre, is looking for candidates who have no bounds to their im-

agination; the most important quality is to have a new creative idea for the project that will fulfil the motto of the forthcoming art forum, Viva arte viva. "The motto of the upcoming forum is multi-faceted and open to many interpretations. We expect entries will use multimedia technology which is fashionable, modern, easy to realise and is always welcomed by an inter-

national jury. The deadline for applications in January 31st," explains Ms. Sharangovich.

Famous Belarusian art historians, painters and designers will be assessing the creative projects. The winner will be given an opportunity to implement their project in Venice, at one of the most well-known forums of art due to take place in Italy from May 13th to November 26th.

Everything ready for the holiday

By Olga Korneeva

Year of Belarusian Culture on Sardinia celebrated with concerts, exhibitions and films

Events dedicated to Belarusian culture are being held on Sardinia throughout 2017, including literary meetings with Belarusian writers, concerts by the Ragneda folk music ensemble,

photo exhibitions and an exhibition of national crafts. A Belarusian choir is taking part in an international festival of spiritual music, *Collegium Karalitatum*, and a Belarusian folk group is due to attend the international folklore festival of Sardinia. Various films by Belarusian directors are also being screened.

With assistance from the

University of Culture Art Gallery, a Belarusian museum expert is to donate a set of bagpipes to the Museum of Sardinian Musical Instruments, while Italian masters are donating several ancient Sardinian wind instruments to Belarus.

As is traditional, a range of events will be held in Minsk, dedicated to the culture of this Italian region.

Alexey Rybnikov: 'I'm again keen on cinema'

It's been forty years since emerging composer Alexey Rybnikov came to Minsk, creating fairy tale cinema alongside director Leonid Nechaev. In the 1970s, they made *The Golden Key or the Adventures of Buratino* and then *About Little Red Riding Hood*. Decades later, the People's Artist of Belarus, who recently celebrated his 70th birthday and the 50th anniversary of his creativity, returned for a major event.

By Alisa Vladimirova

A full house gathered for the two-hour concert, comprising familiar hits and new songs, flying as if in one breath. The evening closed with the whole audience singing along to *I Will Never Forget You* and *Hallelujah to Love, Hallelujah* (among his best loved songs, enjoyed by many generations). The audience clearly wanted to see him as much as to hear his voice, singing such hits as *Yunona and Avos*, while accompanying himself on the piano.

He chatted to us eagerly after the concert.

Mr. Rybnikov, you've written more than 70 pieces, including three rock operas, but *Yunona and Avos* remains your calling card, for which you're known world-wide.

What's made this song so successful?

My first attempt in the genre of rock opera was 'The Splendour and Death of Joaquin Murieta', in 1975. Those were the days of the Soviet Union, when most artistes experienced particular pressure on their ideas. I was an exception. My experimental work premiered at the Moscow State Theatre (named after Lenin's Kom-somol), starring Alexander Abdulov and Nikolay Karachentsov, and then remained in its repertoire for the next twenty years. However, the success of 'Yunona and Avos' surpassed all expectations.

After its premiere in Moscow, in the early 1980s, the opera toured almost the whole USSR. A group of musicians, who years later became the basis for my personal theatre, took the performance to Belarus and, in the early 2000s, the rock opera was staged by the Belarusian State Musical Theatre. I watched the staging and was delighted by how your actors presented this ma-

terial, which is complex emotionally and dramatically (rather than technically).

What makes 'Yunona and Avos' catchy? Perhaps because it's a love story, the true story of the love between Russian Duke Rezanov and the daughter of the commandant of San Francisco, Concepción Argüello. It's very touching. People have always dreamt of such feelings, and such loyalty, and will ever do so. Moreover, the Orthodox chants underlying this rock opera resonate with the eternal: something that will always attract our human soul. It's both bold and subtle, as rock songs go.

You sometimes turn towards spiritual music, interpreting it across various musical genres.

I enjoy trying something new, bringing new interpretations to what's already known. As a musician of the academic school, I began with chamber instrumental music and ballets before moving onto cinema and animation. This was followed by rock, and then I returned to classical music and symphonies. Spiritual music has always attracted me.

In the early

1980s, the 'Liturgy of the Catechumens' or the 'Mass of the Catechumens' appeared: perhaps not overtly spiritual but filled with contemplations on life and the apocalypse.

I enjoy trying something new, bringing new interpretations to what's already known. As a musician of the academic school, I began with chamber instrumental music and ballets before moving onto cinema and animation.

It's based on the predictions of the greatest poets of the Renaissance and the Silver Age, as well as of our Russian writers. This was my third musical for the stage. We staged 'Liturgy' at my theatre and then took it to America, with great success. We followed this with 'Return from the Dead', based on quotations from Old Testament books. In the early 2000s, I was working a great deal in the genre of symphony. My opuses were performed in the Main Hall of my alma mater — the Moscow Conservatoire — under the guidance of our famous fellow countrymen: Bashmet, Georgiev, Sladkovsky and others. I'm keen again now on cinema and want to create some film musicals, perhaps producing them myself.

Do you have plans to shoot films independently?

I already have experience as a director and producer, for 'Sannura Spirit', based on my classical work 'The Splendour and Death of Joaquin Murieta'. It combines all cinema genres, from the western and thrillers, to mystery and romance. It's about some Mexicans who come to conquer America, seeking a better life, during the age of 'gold fever' in California. The film hasn't been screened yet but I've shown several

clips, including at my creative evening in Minsk.

It's clear that you love Minsk, despite having been here only a few times...

Minsk is home to me not only creatively but because my sister has long lived here. It had been some time since I'd visited, and I hardly recognised the city. It's well-developed, quiet and calm in the evenings. You feel that people want to hurry home; that simple values are important to them. I don't come to Minsk often but my theatre has performed here many times. Belarusians always welcome us warmly. Evidently, people have a keen appreciation and understanding of the arts.

Thank you for complimenting our country. How do you feel at the present time?

Not everything is the way I'd like it to be. Creative people can't be entirely independent; contemporary arts rely 90 percent on commercial success, which makes it very difficult to create something serious, in any genre. He who pays the piper calls the tune and shapes taste, which isn't always what works best. Previously, we could have described the public as erudite, sophisticated and well-informed, about history, culture and literature; now, people just clap their hands and stamp their feet. Audiences are not what they were. It seems that those who can direct financial support are the ones influencing culture. The state has a limited budget so we're seeing more reliance on patronage. If there hadn't been von Meck, we wouldn't have had Tchaikovsky. Meanwhile, Wagner was sponsored by members of the elite.

It's vital that patronage exists but it's important that we retain the potential to create non-commercial masterpieces, developing the talent of those who are intelligent and sensitive.



Most venerable Belarusian authors list

The legacy of Yanka Kupala is of international importance — notes Belarusian Culture Minister Boris Svetlov at the opening of events devoted to the 135th anniversary of the People's Poet of Belarus

By Vladimir Mikhailov

Yanka Kupala's life is an example of a patriotic self-sacrifice. "Both as a poet and as a social and political activist, he strived to give back to Belarusians their 'place of honour and fame among nations'. It was his highest achievement, I believe," stressed Mr. Svetlov.

He also noted that the cultural events of 2017 are a logical continua-

tion of 2016, which was declared the Year of Culture in Belarus. "In my opinion, the Year of Culture continues with certain eminent representatives of our culture. Yanka Kupala is one of the most notable. We continue efforts to revive and preserve Belarusian culture," Mr. Svetlov added.

The celebrations started with the presentation of Yanka Kupala's portrait by Russian painter Nikolay Pavlov. The Chairman of the Federal

National and Cultural Association — Belarusians of Russia — Sergey Kandybovich — donated the portrait to the museum. "It is symbolic that we learned of this portrait on the eve of the poet's anniversary. Along with other works by Nikolay Pavlov, it was put up for auction in Moscow. We decided to buy the artwork and donate it to the poet's museum," he explained.

Some original handwritten poems by Yanka Kupala (*My Fate, And*

Who's Going There?, The Prophet, and The Heritage) — awarded the status of historical-cultural values — were performed by actors of the Republican Theatre of Belarusian Drama. In addition, songs — based on Yanka Kupala's verses were sung by teachers and students of the Belarusian State Music Academy.

Yanka Kupala is an honourable Belarusian author. Streets are named



Yanka Kupala's unknown sketch

after him. There are also monuments and memorial plaques abroad devoted to Kupala.

Best result amongst all finalists

Olympic champion Anton Kushnir wins gold at FIS Freestyle Aerials World Cup in American Lake Placid

By Kirill Karin

The Belarusian scored 120.36 points in the men's final to claim victory. Gracing the podium also were Mac Bohannon of the United States (119.46 points) and Maxim Burov of Russia (107.32).

Anton Kushnir has topped the table in the World Cup rounds for the second time. He won the first stage of World Cup in Chinese Beida Lake —

which was the first in his career after his triumph at the Winter Olympics 2014 and his break to recover from injuries. Stanislav Gladchenko and Maxim Gustik were placed 7th and 9th respectively.

The champion of the Sochi Olympics topped the overall World Cup this season among ski acrobats, with 208 points. The Belarusian is followed by Qi Guangpu (180) and Maxim Gustik (129).



Anton Kushnir's golden jump

Domestic track truly helps win

By Alexey Grishin

Belarusian team member Yulia Tikhonova wins first sprint race at the Eastern Europe Cross-Country Skiing Cup, held in the Raubichi Republican Olympic Training Centre

In the final race Yulia came ahead of two Russians: Natalia Ilyina was second and Maria Davydenkova third. Earlier, Yulia took second place in the classical style 10km — covering the distance in 30 minutes, 3.7 seconds behind the highly experienced Justyna Kowalczyk. The double Olympic champion from Poland won the 10km 'classic' race in 28.22 minutes. Bronze went to Russia's Maria Davydenkova. Another Belarusian was among the top ten: Polina Seronosova; finished eighth with a time of 30 minutes 51.2 seconds.

Overall, 32 skiers from Poland, Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus participated in the 10km 'classical' race.



Yulia Tikhonova

The Eastern Europe Cross-Country Skiing Cup has been held since 2008. This year, Raubichi is hosting the fourth stage; another three will take place in February. Winners of the overall standings of the competition will have the right to automatic qualification for the national teams next season in the Cross-Country Skiing World Cup.

On the final day of the competitions Belarusian skiers claimed two more medals. In the freestyle race 10km Yulia Tikhonova of Belarus earned silver (showing the time of 25 minutes 59.0 seconds) while in the freestyle race 15km among men Yuri Astapenko of Belarus finished third with the result of 35 minutes and 33.3 seconds.

Major handball champion retires

By Alexey Grishin

One of the best world handball players and the key player of Belarusian national team — Sergey Rutenko — announces his retirement

Sergey Rutenko has announced his retirement. The fact that one of the best handball players in the world declared his decision on the eve of the first match of the national team of Belarus at the World Championship is truly symbolic. "In previous years, the presence of the captain on the field guaranteed an additional 10-12 goals for the team. To attempt to fill the position, head coach Yuri Shevtsov has recruited three young players," the Chairman of the Belarusian Handball Federation, Vladimir Konoplev, reported. The team is very different with the presence of Sergey and without him.

Mr. Rutenko is trying not to lose heart. Instead of sad farewell speeches, the recent press conference of one of the most outstanding athletes of Belarus turned into a warm intimate conversation. The world handball star has decided to focus on a project not associated with the sport. "If my experience is in demand in handball, I'll be happy to share it but I plan to focus on a project which has no relation to sport. I hope to maintain good relations however, with the federation of the national team," Sergey noted.

He also spoke of the planned match between handball stars. "We are now considering the possibility of holding a match between Belarus and a world team composed of players with whom or against whom I played in the Minsk-Arena. The list has yet to be confirmed but we expect around 20 sportsmen are likely to participate. I have already discussed the basic principles with the managers and I plan to ask for support from the European Handball Federation. If everything goes well, we will see many star 'pensioners' in Minsk," he added.

Unexpected loss at the start of championships



The game between Belarus and Saudi Arabia

By Semen Bondarev

The handball national team of Belarus began the world series in France with a loss

There were happy days in the past when we didn't even consider the national team of Chile as a contender. Two years ago, we had beaten

them 34:23, and this time round the Belarusians were considered favourites.

The defeat has seriously complicated the task of reaching the 1/8 finals. In the first match of the group stage of the 2017 World Championships, Yuri Shevtsov's team was unable to cope with the Chilean speed

and lost in a 'swing' duel — 28:32.

Artem Korolek gave a great game, scoring 10 goals. Vladislav Kulesh also achieved highly with 7 goals. There were others who also played well but in general, this first attempt at this world championship was a disappointment. The Chileans simply wanted to win more.

After the shock defeat from Chile (28:32) the Belarusian team had to win over another outsider — Saudi Arabia. In a difficult struggle, when for most of the match, our squad had just 1-2 balls lead, the boys managed a win with a score of 29:26.

Winning by a smaller margin than that of the defeat by Chile however, forces Belarusians to earn more points in the match with Hungary, Croatia or Germany. While it is difficult to be optimistic after a defeat from one of the outsiders of the group, the national team of Belarus knows how to surprise its fans both in a negative and a positive sense.

With best result in team's history

By Igor Svitov

Crew headed by Alexander Vasilevsky finishes marathon in sixth place

Alexander Vasilevsky has beaten the previous record of the MAZ team. In 2015, his team was ranked 10th overall at Dakar. This year's rally turned out to be more difficult, and yet more successful than the previous marathons. The Belarusian drivers posted the 6th fastest time overall — only 8 minutes off the top five.

The last special section was rather easy and didn't



Sporting MAZ vehicle on track

influence the final result. Among Belarusians, the MAZ vehicle driven by Sergey Vyazovich showed the best time and finished third. He clocked in at 35 minutes — just 44 seconds behind the winner. The crew headed

by Alexander Vasilevsky finished ninth, spending 37 minutes on the track and finishing 2.30 minutes behind the leader. Alexey Vishnevsky's MAZ finished 17th, taking 39 minutes and finishing 5 minutes after the leader.

Russia's KAMAZ driver Eduard Nikolaev topped the overall standings of the 2017 Dakar Rally. Alexander Vasilevsky's MAZ occupied sixth position and was 2 hours 35 minutes behind the winner while Sergey Vyazovich's MAZ vehicle was ranked 13th in the overall standings.

Alexey Vishnevsky's MAZ finished the rally in 21st place, 11 hours 49 minutes behind the winner. His crew had a chance to be in the top 20 during the 11th stage when Russian Anton Shiba-lov and Dutch Pascal de Baar had difficulties on the

track; however, they eventually managed to finish earlier than the MAZ crew.

"The current Dakar rally was the most difficult and dangerous rally of recent years. It had everything: sharp elevation changes, huge dunes, abnormal heat and heavy rains that sometime turned the track into a mud bath. This is the first time that MAZ vehicles have performed so well at Dakar. Moreover, both racers and machinery showed themselves at their best," said the driver and head of auto team, Sergey Vyazovich.

Weather of the week



BELTA

Recent days have seen heavy snowfalls in Minsk

EXHIBITIONS

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM

20 Lenin Street

Until 23rd January. Exhibition of Yuri Karachun's works Until 30th January. *Celestial World on the Earth* Until 5th February. *Russian Pictorial Art of 19th-20th Century*

EXHIBITION HALL OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY MUSEUM

9A Bogdanovich Street

Until 13th March. *Noisy Feathered Rainbow*

MUSEUM OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 22nd January. Exhibition of carnivorous plants

LEONID SHCHEMELEV CITY ART GALLERY

10 Revolyutsionnaya Street

Until 29th January. *Robo Art*

MIKHAIL SAVITSKY ART GALLERY

15 Svobody Square

Until 5th February. *From Lisbon to Vladivostok through Minsk*

ARENA CITY

84 Pobediteley Avenue

Until 1st February. *IllyuzIum* interactive entertaining exhibition of illusions and 3D pictures

NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 29th January. *Belarusian Trade in History* Until 29th January. *Day of the Past — Day of the Present* Until 28th February. *Time of Miracles: Winter Holidays and Entertainments* Until 1st June 2017. *From Romanian Dinary to Belarusian Rouble*

HOUSE OF PICTURES

89/3 Pobediteley Avenue

Until 22nd January. *On Height*

OUTLET

44 Zhukov Avenue

Until 31st January. *Hidden Reality* Until 31st January. *Quintessence: To See the Unseen* show-exhibition

YAKUB KOLAS STATE LITERARY MUSEUM

5 Akademicheskaya Street

Until 30th September 2017. *In Waves of Endless Movement: Along Kolas' Automobile Paths*

HOUSE-MUSEUM OF FIRST RSDRP CONGRESS

31a Nezavisimosti Avenue

Until 31st January. Museum of Fir Tree Toys

VANKOVICH'S HOUSE

33a Internatsionalnaya Street

Until 23rd January. *Country of Miracles*

THEATRES

BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Square

19.01. *Romeo and Juliet* 21.01. *Aida* 22.01. *Seven Beauties* 24.01. *Tsar's Bride* 25.01. *Love and Death* 26.01. *The Masked Ball*

BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street

19.01. *The Swan Lake* 20.01. *Jane Eyre* 21.01. *Burattino.by; Shalom Aleichem!* 22.01. *The Nutcracker; Merry Poppins* 23.01. *Dubrovsky* 24.01. *My Wife is a Liar* 25.01. *My Fair Lady* 26.01. *A Thousand and One Nights*

YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street

19.01. *People of the Marshes* 20.01. *ART* 21 and 22.01. *The Black Lady of Nesvizh* 22.09. *Two Souls* 25.09. *Paulinka*

MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsy Street

19.01. *Pane Kokhanku* 20.01. *Tricks of Khanuma* 21.01. *Stars of the Seventh Sky; Lady for a Day* 22.01. *Taming of the Shrew* 24.01. *Pygmalion* 25.01. *Woe from Wit* 26.01. *Oedipus; Intimidated Apostle*

MINSK CONCERT HALL

5 Oktyabrskaya Street

20.01. *Players* 26.01. *Comedy*

THEATRE-STUDIO OF CINEMA ACTORS

13 Pobediteley Avenue

19.01. *The Battlefield* 20.01. *Abduction of Yelena* 21 and 22.01. *The Mechanical Man* 23.01. *Master and Margarita* 24 and 25.01. *Two Arrows* 26.01. *Who Laughs Last*

REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street

20.01. *Belarus. Didactics* 21.01. *Love to People* 22.01. *Living till Premiere* 23.01. *Yulia Mitko's artistic night* 24.01. *If There Is No Tomorrow* 25.01. *Silent Love* 26.01. *This Is All She*

BELARUSIAN REPUBLICAN YOUNG SPECTATOR'S THEATRE

26 Engels Street

20.01. *Belarusian Vaudevilles* 21 and 22.01. *Thumbelina* 24.01. *Savage Hunt of King Stakh* 25.01. *Paliana* 26.01. *Wings of My Childhood*

BELARUSIAN STATE PUPPET THEATRE

20 Engels Street

19.01. *Judas Gospel* 20.01. *Tartuffe* 21.01. *Wash-em-Clean* 22.01. *Morozko* 25.01. *Interview with Witches* 26.01. *Christmas Story*

MINSK AUTOMOBILE WORKS' HOUSE OF CULTURE

117A Partizansky Avenue

19.01. *Marriage Contract*