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The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve saw an increase in the number of visitors by about 40 percent

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INTERNATIONAL

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Kristina Zenkova, midwife in the Maternity Department of the Tolochin Central District Hospital

Patients' health is the main issue

Despite the fact that the Healthcare Ministry has reported a drop in the rate of increase in the incidence of COVID-19, some hospitals and institutions are still being repurposed to fight the virus. The Maternity Department of the Central District Hospital in Tolochin has recently become a red zone. Its employees are working in a special mode. Previously, they helped to give birth to a new life, now they preserve the life and health of those who have not been spared by coronavirus. Together with her colleagues on the front line is 27-year-old midwife Kristina Zenkova.



We will be able to protect ourselves

Unprecedented pressure is being put on Belarus. Sanctions, fakes and other inappropriate attacks from the collective West and the self-exiled opposition who settled there. All methods of hybrid warfare are in action. Moreover, the region is being blatantly militarised. The European Union does not hesitate to 'sabre-rattle' their weapons, pulling equipment and the military to the border, trying to provoke conflict. The President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Aleksandr Lukashenko, clearly outlined the strategy for further actions of the Belarusian side at a meeting on military security in the strategic control centre of the Defence Ministry, "If someone wants to talk to us as with peaceful people, please, go ahead and do it from today. We are ready to talk. But if people come to us with a sword or a gun, we have plenty to fight back with."



Aleksandr Kushner

Exercise of troops 'Zapad-2021'

By Dmitry Umpirovich,
Yevgeny Kononovich

'Link in a common chain'

The Head of State drew attention to the fact that the situation in our country cannot be considered separately and regardless of what events are unfolding in the Black Sea basin and what is happening in Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states. He underlined we are a link in this chain.

Aleksandr Lukashenko lists and analyses the facts, "The number of flights of scout aircraft above Kaliningrad Region has increased. Military events are being held in neighbouring countries, and we already see it. If, as the Russian Defence Minister has stated, dozens of aircraft are flying around the borders of Russia and have bomb-dropping exercises (it was stated that they rehearsed a nuclear strike against Russia), if lateral communication lines are being built on adjacent territo-

ries (the military are well aware of it), if large-scale exercises with the transportation of troops closer to our borders are being held, then it means that they must have certain intentions."

"Results of the evaluation indicate that the measures western countries are taking to militarise the region will lead to a substantial change in the balance of forces. The offensive potential of the armed forces of the NATO member states is being built up near our borders," Defence Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin reported to the Commander-in-Chief. "In Poland, the 18th mechanised division and territorial defence brigades are being formed. Some of them are in the immediate vicinity of our state border."

Of particular concern are the purchases of Abrams tanks, Pa-



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'Nerushimoye Bratstvo-2021' [Indestructible Brotherhood] exercise of the CSTO member states

triot air defence missile systems, Himars multiple launch rocket systems and F-35 combat aircraft equipped with cruise missiles."

Whose path the EU blocks

Returning to what is happening on the external contour of the country, Aleksandr Lukashenko paid attention to the strategic plans of the United States and its Polish satellites, particularly, on the movement of the leadership of our neighbours and personally their prime minister, "You see that these Polish scoundrels have already started visiting other countries. Did you notice where Morawiecki went — to the UK.

I am sure that they want to destroy the European Union within a year or two, on America's initiative. The Americans don't need partners who can be on a par with them."

The Belarusian leader drew curious parallels. As soon as the EU introduced its own currency, problems began in the Euro-Atlantic bloc. And all because the Euro is a serious competitor to the Dollar.

"Therefore, I am sure that it was not by chance that the UK left the European Union, because it did not benefit from it," Aleksandr Lukashenko continued. "And now the stake is made on Poland. Some are already beginning to say it openly that if the EU stops subsidies, then Poland does not need the EU. Therefore, everything is being done to destroy the European Union."

The Head of State is not inclined to dramatise the situation but warns the military: we must have an adequate response to any gesture from the West that poses a threat to the security of Belarus. The President also recalled that he had previously in-

structed in no case to succumb to provocations and not to provoke conflicts and clashes.

According to Viktor Khrenin, it is planned to improve the unified regional air defence system of Belarus and Russia in the near future. A set of measures has been drawn up for the medium term to cover the southern area. Viktor Khrenin explained that next year, Belarus and Russia are not planning to conduct large-scale exercises like 'Zapad' [West] or 'Shchit Soyuzu' [Union Shield]. However, on the other hand, they intend to conduct joint manoeuvres to cover the southern borders of Belarus.

"Do you think the actions of our neighbours are fear or impudence?" journalists asked the Minister.

"This shows the helplessness and powerlessness of them and their leadership. Instead of dealing with this situation using political instruments, they are deploying a substantial number of troops. As our President has said more than once, they are simply trying to divert the attention of their population away from mounting domestic problems. And they should deal with them, and not rattle their weapons at the border."



There is already a lot of information in the Polish media about the movement of military equipment to the borders with Belarus



Maria Zakharova

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova released data on the income of the Belarusian opposition

Millions free of charge

By Mikhail Panyukov

Have some honour

"We call on western countries to reconsider their approaches and cancel their illegal restrictive measures that they have introduced against Belarusian aviation," Maria Zakharova said at a briefing.

After this dry and diplomatic phrase, the Foreign Ministry representative added emotionally, "It is necessary to have at least some honour."

According to Ms. Zakharova, those who imposed sanctions against Belarus 'still fail to find convincing arguments to justify their policy towards Minsk'.

It should be reminded that punishments fell upon Belarusian aviation after the forced landing of the Ryanair aircraft. The dispatcher of Minsk airport received a message about a bomb by e-mail, after which the crew themselves decided to land in the capital of Belarus. There is still no official verdict of the International Civil Aviation Organisation regarding this situation although they promised to present it in November. However, the sanctions are here and have been going on for six months already.

Horn of plenty

However, the issues of financing the Belarusian opposition are

solved quickly. Maria Zakharova gave specific examples. For example, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, promised to allocate 53m Euros to the 'people of Belarus' to 'support the peaceful transition of power in the country'. Germany, through the mouth of Heiko Maas, promises 21m Euros for the development of 'civil society' while Poland has budgeted 13m Euros to support the 'alternative embassy of Belarus in Warsaw'. And that's not counting 11m Euros that regularly feed the opposition media.

A 'trifle' in the form of £3.5m will be allocated by London while Canada has become generous by 500,000 and promises two more

million. The Czech Republic promises a little over a million, the Netherlands — one million, and the Baltic states literally 'feed' Tikhonovskaya, paying for her office. A Lithuanian deputy recently wrote with indignation that a fugitive costs the budget of his not rich country 400,000 Euros per year. And, of course, the US Congress allocates three to four million annually. All this is open data, there are much more tacit funding channels.

As Maria Zakharova ironically noted, maybe this is money for the people too, but it is unlikely that it will go to those Belarusians who work in factories every day.

"They will get sanctions," she noted.

The President of Belarus gave an interview to Dmitry Kiselyov, General Director of Rossiya Segodnya international news agency. This interview, as the well-known Russian journalist later emphasised in his conversation with his Belarusian colleagues, has one important subtext. It allows a deeper understanding not only of the logic of the actions of Aleksandr Lukashenko himself, but also of the Belarusian people when they support the President.

Among the topics raised were bilateral relations between Belarus and the Russian Federation, integration within the framework of the Union State and constitutional reform. They could not help touching on perhaps one of the most discussed issues in our countries and worldwide: the refugee crisis and the approaches of the European Union to our country. As always, Aleksandr Lukashenko was sincere and frank, **“They throw a noose around my neck, tighten it and say: protect us. I honestly told them at the very beginning: guys, you decided to aggravate relations. You accuse us of this plane and so on and so forth. Although not a single fact is on the table. You started strangling Belarus.”**

By Dmitry Umpirovich,
Yevgeny Kononovich

‘Human discovery’

As you know, the demand for an interview with the President of Belarus is huge. More than four dozen publications from all over the world wish to talk with the Belarusian Head of State. Dmitry Kiselyov’s conversation with Aleksandr Lukashenko lasted two and a half hours. On its completion, the Russian journalist noted that the conversation was intense, but with very good feeling, absolutely sincere, after which there is a feeling of well-done common work.

Dmitry Kiselyov gave the following characterisation to the Belarusian leader as his interlocutor. For him he is a ‘human discovery’,

“The decisiveness with which Lukashenko is ready to defend the state he created was a revelation for me. In fact, he is the founder of the state of Belarus, there is no other founder and it is impossible to imagine otherwise.”

The uncompromising attitude with which he is ready to defend national interests, with which he is devoted to relations with Russia, with Putin. The depth with which he understands both Europe and the world of human civilisation in general.”

Response plans

The interview was full of significant questions of the day. One of the topics, for example, concerned the strengthening of NATO’s positions on the western borders of the Union State. In particular, a couple of weeks ago at the *NATO Talk 2021* conference in Berlin, the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, said that if Germany refuses to deploy US nuclear weapons on its territory, then it will be transported to the east, in particular, to Poland. What does the President of Belarus think about this?

“Then I will suggest that Putin should return nuclear weapons to Belarus,” replied Aleksandr Lukashenko calmly.

“What kind of nuclear weapons?” the journalist tried to clarify.

“We will agree on what kind,” the Belarusian leader remarked calmly and confidently, adding that, **“The nuclear weapons that will be most effective in such an engagement. I said that we are ready for it on Belarus’ territory. As a thoughtful landlord I haven’t destroyed anything [of the USSR infrastructure for nuclear weapons], all the depots remain in place.”**

The President said that, against the backdrop of NATO exercises in neighbouring countries, he is forced to have response plans, “They have launched these manoeuvres in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. What should I do as Commander-in-Chief? I should not succumb to provocations, but I need to anticipate what will happen to avoid a repeat of 1941 events. Stalin told everyone then not to succumb to provocations. Signals were coming from the Kremlin, while the war had actually begun here.

Therefore, I need to have plans, subdivisions and units of the Belarusian army that will respond to any attempt to create a conflict here — on the border of the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine.



Sincerely and decisively



“Why did I become an enemy for the West? Not because I am a dictator and the rest but because all the sites, except one, where Topol [road-mobile ground-based strategic missile systems] used to be placed, have been preserved and are still ready for use. You know how the West reacts to nuclear weapons and other things,” said the President.

Unfortunately, they, Ukrainians, have run ahead of even NATO troops — as ever. They closed the airspace for Belarusian planes earlier than the European Union and Americans; it is exactly the same here, too.”

Refugees. Consequence and aftereffects

Representatives of the ‘democratic European Union’ believe (sincerely or over-confidently) that it is Belarus that should deal with the repatriation of refugees. This opinion was voiced to Aleksandr Lukashenko during his telephone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel,

“I say: you know, Angela, let’s not speak with such harsh words: grab from here and take out by force.

I told her straight away and at the end of the conversation I repeated twice more: I will try to solve this problem before the New Year, because we do not need it. People are out in Minsk, Grodno and elsewhere. You know how the population reacts. We will ask these people,

who are legally with us on a tourist visa in a hotel and so on, to go back, because there will be no humanitarian corridor. And I have already returned more than a thousand of them to Iraq.”

“Have you returned them at your own expense?” Dmitry Kiselyov asked.

The Head of State replied that the evacuation flights were paid for by Iraq. However, our country also incurred expenses, already spending \$12.5m on the maintenance of refugees (according to data from a week ago).

“Now it will be twice as much,” asserted Aleksandr Lukashenko.

“That is, all the care, food, heating, treatment...” asked Dmitry Kiselyov.

“Absolutely,” confirmed the President. “WHO members — the World Health Organisation — sent some socks, pads, diapers and things like that.”

Crimea: de facto and de jure

The interview also touched upon the status of Crimea. When asked by Dmitry Kiselyov, Aleksandr Lukashenko said,

“Crimea is de facto Russian. After the referendum Crimea became Russian de jure, too.”

The Belarusian leader also spoke about his intention to visit the peninsula, which he agreed with Vladimir Putin during his visit to Sochi and a joint boat

trip on the Black Sea. At the same time, Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that he has ‘every right’ to visit Crimea under whoever’s protectorate, management or ownership.

“It is my Crimea, too,” said the Head of State, noting that his first trip to the seaside was a trip to Crimea back when he had only one son.

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, Vladimir Putin suggested they should go to the Crimea some time, “This is what was said. When we were on a boat with him in the Black Sea, the conversation touched on this matter. I said he could show me Crimea. He said no problem. Only, I said, on an aircraft and not by this boat, because, it turns out, you’d have to sail for a whole day to get there.”

The President noted that he would like to start such a trip by visiting Sevastopol, where the Russian Air Force base is located. At the same time, according to Aleksandr Lukashenko, the very fact of his arrival in Crimea will already mean the recognition of the peninsula as part of Russia,

“If the President [of Belarus] and the President of Russia come there, listen, what other recognition do you need? It is not a secret for me or for Putin. Moreover, it is an issue that does not exist. There is no issue about that between me and Putin.”

ACCENT

In an interview, Aleksandr Lukashenko also did not rule out the possibility of placing Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus. The Head of State was asked about the recent statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe. “Then I will suggest that Putin should return nuclear weapons to Belarus,” replied the President.

Salary, work, and prices: priorities for the next year

What will the 2022 budget be like, what will happen to salaries and the Belarusian Rouble, how will we respond to the sanctions and what advice did Aleksandr Lukashenko give to foreign diplomats. Priorities for the next year were discussed at the Palace of Independence.



Issues around the forecast for socio-economic development, budget and monetary policy for 2022 were tackled at a meeting with the President. Aleksandr Lukashenko outlined the main task, “Whatever the sanctions, no matter how much they put pressure on us, no matter what they try to do to us, we must take such measures so that people do not feel these sanctions. At least so that these sanctions and measures from the outside do not determine the lives of people.”

By Yevgeny Kononovich, Polina Konoga

Stable course

The Government was preparing for a new round of sanctions ahead of time, and even created an anti-crisis headquarters. The Head of State stressed that the Government should deal with these issues in principle, without red tape, clearly and in a military manner. Apparently, the team of Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko is succeeding in this. In any case, the country managed to maintain economic growth and prevent the transfer of most problems into the everyday lives of people, noted Aleksandr Lukashenko. He named a number of the most important indicators characterising the preliminary results of the economy over ten months.

- **Gross domestic product increased by about 2.5 percent.**
- **Industrial production increased by over 7 percent, in practically all of its subsectors.**
- **More than 60 percent of Belarusian industrial goods are exported. At the same time, according to the UN, Belarus ranks 46th among 152 countries in the global ranking of countries according to the industrial competitiveness index.**
- **Exports of goods and services increased by about 33 percent. The country received an additional \$8.5bn. A record positive foreign trade balance was formed: more than \$2.7bn.**

According to the President, the average salary in October came close to Br1,500. Every fourth worker in the country receives a salary in excess of this level, whereas a year ago their share was only 16 percent.

However, the positive indicators should not make the Government complacent. Yes, they are the result of the hard work of the state apparatus and the entire nation but there is also a coincidence of circumstances. Aleksandr Lukashenko believes,

“We were lucky in some respects.

I have already said that today we have benefited from our decision not to shut down the economy and continue working during the pandemic last year. The whole world followed the Belarusian response strategy in 2021. Nobody will say this because Belarus is not America. If the Americans had done it, then they would have trumpeted to the whole world: ‘Oh, Trump and Biden have done well for choosing the right path’. We will not be

praised for this. On the contrary, they will be turning up the pressure on us.”

Export and investment

One of the priorities that the Government is proposing for the next year is export. This is reasonable, and the President believes,

“As long as there is an opportunity to sell and gain a foothold in the world markets, we need to act.

We will intensively increase foreign exchange earnings and we will get a strong Belarusian Rouble. The population will stop being cautious and offer their money in deposits or bonds. In this way, we will gradually build up the base for long-term investment.”



This task has been set not only for the Government, but also for the banking bloc, especially considering that the inflow of investments is still sagging. Although the Head of State reminded that the previous cycle and related large projects are practically completed. These include a nuclear power plant, the Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation, the mining and processing plant in Petrikov and cellulose and paper complexes, with projects in oil refining also being completed.

A separate issue is the situation with public debt and plans to repay it. The President stressed,

“Belarus has always been and will be an irreproachable payer for its obligations. Despite all the difficulties, we must not lose this reputation.”

On the language of ultimatums

Political issues were also discussed at the meeting. Belarus has found itself in the centre of the global confrontation

that is now unfolding between the West and Russia, the President reminds once again. He draws attention to the fact that one should not think that there are no contacts; there are channels through which parties talk. At the same time, the collective West moved from requests to firm demands and ultimatums. Aleksandr Lukashenko gave a very recent example,

“They demand that Belarus become like Ukraine. I quote: ‘a democratic, promising, developed state like Ukraine’. We told them straight away that we will never become Ukraine, because we are Belarusians, we have our own vision of our future.”

He expressed his firm conviction that the idea of Belarus turning into another

Ukraine is supported neither by the country’s top government officials who are in attendance at the meeting, nor by the general public who want a normal life for themselves and their children.

Referring to the ultimatum, the President addressed the Prime Minister, Roman Golovchenko, “You are a former diplomat, you are tolerating all this, you are not suggesting anything. Those who brought this ultimatum should leave our country no matter what state they represent. Why are we ‘playing nicely’ with them? They seek to do harm to us.”

At the same time, the Head of State added that it has become noticeable that ‘some embassies are packing their suitcases, saying that the president will order them to be kicked out the next day’. Aleksandr Lukashenko tried to calm the alarmists,

“We will not seize their luggage and what is inside. We will not kick anyone out. We will do this in a civilised manner, in accordance with international law. Therefore, those who are packing their suitcases, listen to me: calm down and put your suitcases back. If we declare you persona non grata, you will have time to pack your luggage and leave. Anyway, it is up to you to decide when to do this.”

RESPONSE STEPS

In response to illegal external sanctions pressure aimed at undermining the sovereignty of Belarus and deteriorating the well-being of Belarusian citizens, in order to protect national interests, the Government of the Republic of Belarus decided to ban the import into the country of a number of goods originating from states applying illegal anti-Belarusian sanctions. This was told to sb.by by the Press Service of the Foreign Ministry.

The corresponding resolution will be signed in the shortest possible time. The necessary measures will be taken to fill the domestic market with similar goods from friendly countries.

In response to the illegitimate restrictions on the Belarusian aviation industry, which are based on unfair competition, our country will take similar steps in relation to air carriers from the countries of the European Union and Great Britain. The lists of persons whose entry into the territory of the Republic of Belarus and the Union State is undesirable from countries that systematically discriminate against Belarusian officials, journalists and representatives of public organisations have been expanded.

As one of the most significant measures to counter external pressure from the collective West and strengthen its economic security, the Republic of Belarus will continue to implement the Union State programmes and strengthen economic integration with the Russian Federation, while building strong trade-economic ties with partners in the EAEU and with countries of the far arc.

A number of other non-public steps will be also implemented. At the same time, Belarus is ready to settle any existing disagreements through a mutually respectful dialogue, taking into account the interests of the parties.

Opportunities of the Great Stone Industrial Park presented in Moscow for diplomats from 30 countries

The Great Stone Industrial Park: Best Opportunities for Investment and Co-operation in the EAEU business forum took place in Moscow on the site of the Business and Cultural Complex of the Belarusian Embassy in Russia. The event brought together ambassadors and senior diplomats from nearly 30 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as European states.

By Olga Korneeva

Opening the forum, the Minister Counsellor of the Belarusian Embassy in Russia, Pavel Lyogky, noted that this is not the first time an event of this kind has been held at the diplomatic mission. In 2019 and 2020, the Great Stone had already presented in Moscow its large-scale potential in terms of development of investment co-operation with foreign regions.

The diplomat stressed that Belarus has built a whole system of support and preferences for investors. The Great Stone occupies a huge area of 112.5sq. km — in fact, a city within a city. It is located 25km from Minsk in close proximity to the international airport, railways and highway. “The Great Stone Park has a special regime for a comfortable business environment,” he said.

According to the Minister Counsellor, any company, regardless of the country of origin of their capital, can launch operations in the industrial park. “Being fully aware of the fierce competition for investors on the world market,



the government has created a favourable investment climate for resident companies. This preferential treatment was formalised by national regulations and special international agreements and obligations and provides for unprecedented benefits. The preferential regime of the park is valid until 2062,” he noted.

In June 2021, the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, signed Decree No. 215 to improve the investment climate in the Great Stone Park. The document provides for additional preferences for large projects with investment of \$50m or more: an increased grace period for income tax, relaxed customs procedures and reduced price for land plots (by 25 percent) when they are acquired into private ownership.

“This refers to an unprecedented preferential regime for business,” said Pavel Lyogky.

“We know that some countries are wary of investing in Belarus due to the small size of the Belarusian market, as the population of Belarus is 9.3 million. However, the following geopolitical realities should be taken into account. As you know, on November 4th, the presidents of Belarus and Russia signed documents that will become a practical framework for advancing integration in the Union State. These are 28 Union State programmes in various sectors of the economy that aim to gradually remove all existing barriers to access markets and ensure equal rights for business entities of our countries. Thus, closer Belarus-Russia integration guarantees access not only to the Belarusian market but also to the vast Russian market. I will add that goods produced in Belarus will also have free access to the market of the Eurasian Economic Union, with 183 million consumers.”

Head of the Administration of the Great Stone Park, Aleksandr Yaroshenko, told the media that competition for investment should never stop, even amid the current difficult conditions. “We have to be attractive for investors who come to Belarus and who come to the Great Stone Park. A total of 83 resident companies from 15 countries have already joined this project, and we are doing our best to create the most favourable conditions for business,” he said.

Aleksandr Yaroshenko believes that doing business in the park is very profitable for investors. “Firstly, we have great infrastructure, and an investor can come and immediately start implementing projects. We provide industrial complexes where small and medium-sized businesses can install their equipment and launch their production right away. Tax and other preferential policies are among the best in Eurasia, the entire post-Soviet space and the Eastern European region,” explained the Head of the Industrial Park’s Administration.

“Of course, we should keep in mind that the support of this project by the leaders of the two countries — President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko and Chinese President Xi Jinping — is worth a lot. Moreover, this year, the fourth decree of the Belarusian Head of State was adopted to further develop our project, adding new legislative initiatives that enable us, among other things, to provide more comfortable conditions for business in healthcare, which is very important amid the ongoing pandemic,” said Aleksandr Yaroshenko.

The forum presented the potential of the Great Stone Park in the implementation of industrial, innovative, and sci-tech projects in Belarus. The speakers told the representatives of the diplomatic corps in Moscow about the possibilities of interaction with the park, the investment potential of Belarus and the prospects of implementing joint projects with Belarusian companies.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aleksandr Lukashenko signs directive on the development of bilateral relations with China



The document is aimed at further deepening the strategic partnership between Belarus and China in a wide range of areas in 2021-2025 and is a logical continuation of the directive of the same name for 2015-2021.

Strengthening co-operation in the political sphere, preserving and enhancing the values of friendship and mutual support, building up trade-economic, financial and investment interaction and implementing the *Belt and Road* initiative are identified as priority tasks for the near future. The important issues also include the expansion of interregional ties, the development of collaboration in the military and military-technical areas, in the field of the digital economy and information and communication technologies.

Russian space station to be built using Belarusian equipment

Russia plans to use the optical equipment of the Belarusian company Peleng when creating a Russian orbital service station, said Dmitry Rogozin, General Director of the Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities.



The Head of Roscosmos also hopes for the earliest possible creation of a Russian-Belarusian spacecraft, which also uses the Peleng equipment. It was previously reported that the proposal for the preliminary design of the new station has been sent to the government.

General Designer of RSC Energia, flight director of the Russian segment of the ISS, pilot, cosmonaut and twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Solovyov, said earlier in an interview with RIA Novosti that preliminary designs could begin in 2022. The construction of the new station may be launched in 2027.

Belarus hosting IAEA’s post-mission to evaluate the nuclear safety infrastructure

“The IRRS (IAEA’s Integrated Regulatory Review Service) post-mission will continue Belarus’ consistent steps to invite international evaluation missions and peer reviews whose results are used for further improvement of nuclear and radiation safety regulatory infrastructure — created in our country — as well as its separate components on the basis of IAEA



recommendations and best international practices,” noted the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Department of the Belarusian Emergencies Ministry (Gosatomnadzor).

The IRRS post-mission is headed by a representative of the Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (ENSI), Georg Schwarz. A team of experts comprises of 13 people representing competent organisations of Greece, Pakistan, Russia, the USA, Finland and Switzerland, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Belarus’ national team claim silver in women’s relay at the BMW IBU World Cup in Östersund

Iryna Leshchanka, Dzinara Alimbekava, Elena Kruchinkina and Hanna Sola ran and shot as part of the Belarusian national squad. Leshchanka finished the first stage in eighth place. Alimbekava brought our team into first place and passed the baton to the second while Kruchinkina and Sola kept us in second position. Having never entered the penalty loop and showing excellent speed on the track, the Belarusian four deservedly won silver — just 57.9 seconds behind the winners.

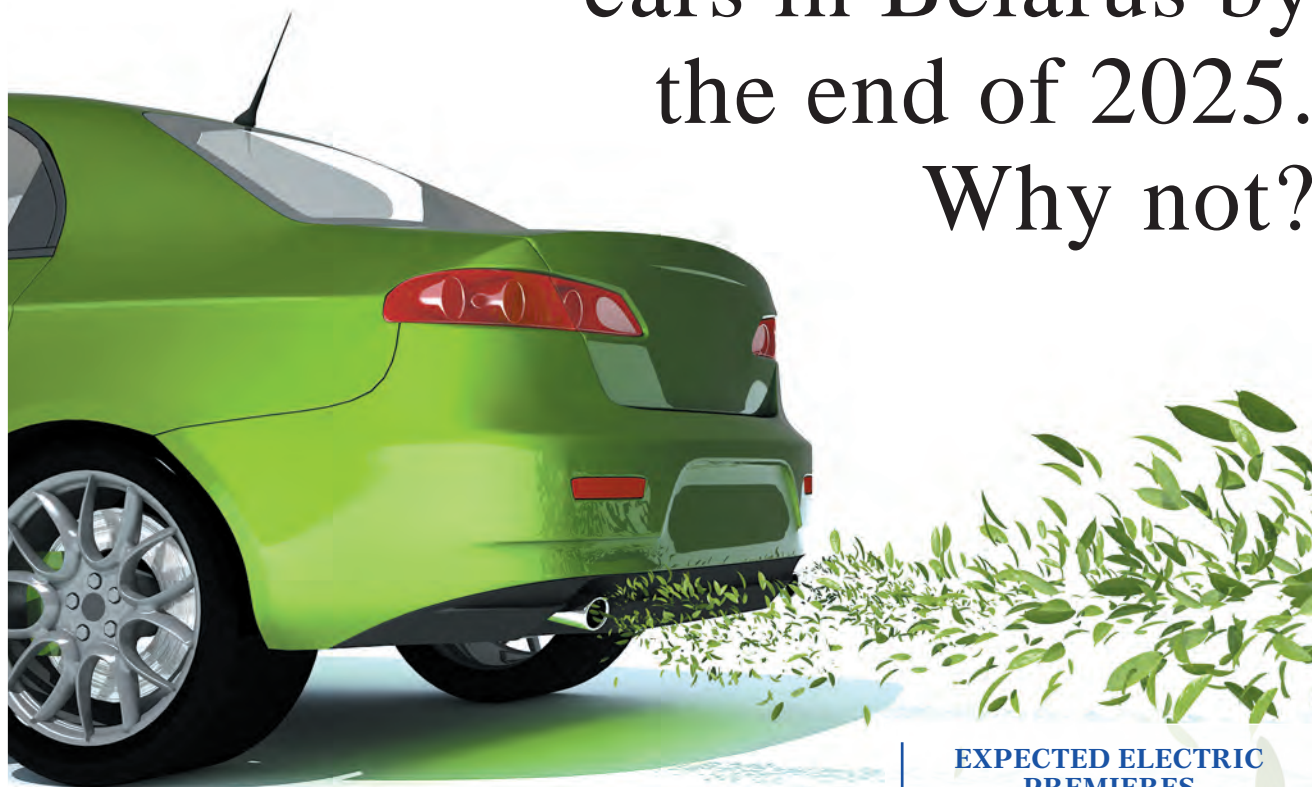


The winners were Anais Bescond, Anais Chevalier-Bouchet, Julia Simon and Justine Braisaz-Bouchet from France while bronze was taken by the Swedes Linn Persson, Mona Brorsson, Elvira Oeberg, and Hanna Oeberg.

The first award for the Belarusian team was brought by Hanna Sola, who finished third in the earlier sprint race.

Green street for electric vehicles

One hundred thousand electric cars in Belarus by the end of 2025. Why not?



By Aleksandr Nesterov

People get used to good things quickly

Out of 6,150 electric vehicles that were purchased over the past three years, 5,700 were purchased after the implementation of Decree No. 92. The amount of energy consumed by electric vehicles has increased six times. There are more than 480 charging stations in the country and, by the end of this year, their number will increase to 600. True, the share of electric vehicles in the total structure of the country's car market hasn't yet reached one percent. That is why the Government has proposed a number of measures to further stimulate the purchase of this transport.

The Government believes that the proposed measures will allow us to increase the electric transport park in the country to 100,000 units of equipment by 2025. And this is no less than three percent of the vehicle fleet in the country.

Behind the lines of a comprehensive programme

The same goals are pursued by the comprehensive programme for the development of electric transport for 2021–2025, adopted in April by the Council of Ministers. The document includes a set of measures for the entire 'life cycle': from scientific support, organisation of production, purchase and operation to disposal and recycling of this equipment. The creation of prototypes of new models of equipment with the further organisation of its production is also envisaged. Much remains to be done to develop the electric transport infrastructure.

There are already first results. For example, BELAZ has manufactured prototypes of battery-powered and diesel-trolley-driven mining dump trucks. By the end of the year, Belkommunmash and MAZ are planning to produce prototypes of electric trucks with a carrying capacity of 4 tonnes and 10 tonnes, respectively. From January to September of this year, taking

into account vehicle kits, more than 420 trolleybuses were produced in the country, including 359 with autonomous running, as well as 16 electric buses.

Our own passenger car

A dozen years ago, Belarusian motorists could not even imagine the serial production of passenger cars in their homeland. With the opening of the BelGee Plant in the Borisov District, dreams have come true. Following the usual passenger cars with Chinese ancestry, they decided to produce electric cars here. This summer, it was announced the completion of tests of a new Geely electric car: Geometry C. Market deliveries are scheduled for this quarter. On a single charge, the hatchback will be able to cover a distance of 550km. The manufacturer claims that the Belarusian-Chinese electric car will attract consumers with its innovative security systems and sophisticated design. One more circumstance: unlike electric cars imported to our country by individuals, Geely will receive comprehensive service support in every region and in Minsk.

Recently, Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Nazarov reported the latest news: this year BelGee is receiving fifty Geometry C vehicle sets, and next year it is planned to deliver about a thousand. There is no doubt that all the equipment produced will be sold out: the company already has about 650 applications for this electric vehicle. Everything depends on demand.

PROSPECTS

By 2030, the creation of more than 1,300 electric charging stations is envisaged in the country. It is also planned to install 25 superfast electric charging complexes in regional cities, Minsk and on main highways.



EXPECTED ELECTRIC PREMIERES

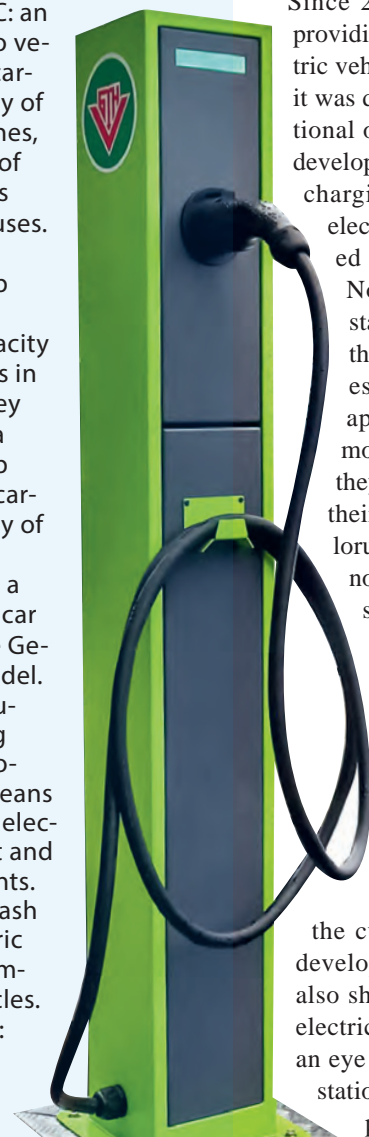
MAZ JSC: an electric cargo vehicle with a carrying capacity of up to 4 tonnes, a garbage truck, an electric bus for transporting passengers at airports.



Belkommunmash Holding Management Company JSC: an electric cargo vehicle with a carrying capacity of up to 10 tonnes, new models of electric buses and trolleybuses.

BELAZ JSC: a mining dump truck with a carrying capacity of 220 tonnes in a diesel-trolley version and a mining dump truck with a carrying capacity of 90 tonnes.

BelGee CJSC: a light electric car based on the Geometry C model. Optron Instrument-Making Plant JSC: production of means of individual electric transport and its components. Mogilevliftmash JSC: an electric motor for commercial vehicles. Izmeritel JSC: power electronics goods.



The meeting between the President and the leadership of the Council of Ministers in late October tackled additional measures aiming to stimulate the development of electric transport in the country. In March 2020, Aleksandr Lukashenko signed Decree No. 92 'On Stimulating the Use of Electric Vehicles'. As time has shown, this document was an important starting point for innovative transformations in the transport industry.

Recently, the President signed Decree No. 447 'On the Promotion of the Use of Electric Vehicles', which expands the existing preferences for electric vehicles. Such transport is exempt from VAT both when imported into the country and when purchased domestically. Of course, there is still a long way to go before the total transition of the transport sector to electricity, but global trends and our own experience testify that our country is on the right track.

FIVE-YEAR PLANS

Expected results of the 2021–2025 comprehensive programme for the development of electric transport:

- 10 units in the range of electric vehicles

- 12,000 registered light electric vehicles

- more than 930 electric charging stations of the state charging network for charging electric vehicles

- more than 2,450 electric buses and trolleybuses with autonomous running — the total projected demand for new types of passenger electric transport

- 43 percent is the share of urban passenger electric transport in the total volume of this machinery

Get started charging!

The infrastructure for electric cars in our country appeared even before these cars received rapid development.

Since 2014, Belorusneft has been providing charging services for electric vehicles free of charge. In 2020, it was determined to become the national operator for the creation and development of a network of electric charging stations. Its network of electric charging stations is united under the 'Malanka' brand.

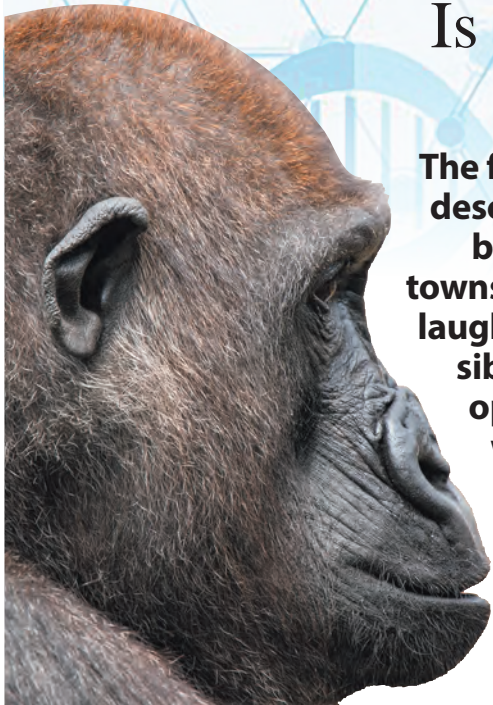
Now it includes two types of stations: regular and fast. Since this year, 6-charging complexes for electric cars have also appeared: there are more and more advanced car owners and they do not want to wait long for their turn to charge. Earlier, Belorusneft representatives also announced plans to launch a pilot super-fast complex in 2022, the capacity of which will allow charging an electric car in 10 minutes for 340 kilometres.

According to the forecast of Belorusneft, in 2022 the 'Malanka' network will serve 11,000 electric vehicles instead of the current 4,500. Moreover, by developing the network, the brand also shortens the distance between electric charging stations. So, keep an eye on the maps of the charging stations as new addresses will appear on them soon.

Laurels for Dr. Moreau

Is it possible to create hybrids of humans and animals?

The famous novel by H.G. Wells *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, describing experiments to breed mutants, was released back in 1896, causing a very stormy reaction. The townsfolk took everything seriously while the scientists laughed. Interspecies crossing was considered impossible simply by definition. However, with the development of science and knowledge about how DNA works, scepticism has diminished. As a result, not even half a year passes now without a notice in the media that someone somewhere has crossed a man with a pig and suchlike. What's truth and what's fiction and why is the topic of creating biological chimeras an extremely controversial issue from an ethical point of view?



By Olga Bebenina

Other breeds are not interested

We note right away that the appearance of such mutants in the natural environment is technically impossible, since different species do not interbreed. Firstly, because males and females simply do not attract each other in terms of reproduction. Secondly, the genetic material is so different that the chromosome set does not fit. And even if nature has misfired (as they say, everyone has the right to make a mistake), it is well insured: offspring from 'casual relationships' is fruitless. An example is mules (the result of crossing a male donkey and a female horse) and hinnies — hybrids of a male horse and a female donkey. However, the situation here is somewhat different since these animals are bred by humans specifically for economic purposes. But interbreeding within a species is a normal and natural process. This is how new breeds of pets emerge.

DNA relatives

The younger generation, who grew up on comics about Spider-Man, franchises about the adventures of the X-Men and other fantastic products, will not be surprised by mutants. Moreover, many seriously believe that modern science is not capable of such a thing. Experiments are indeed being carried out though not so radical, because a man with a spider cannot be crossed, even theoretically. In order for the bricks of DNA to somehow interact, they must be, if not identical, then at least related. For example, it's natural that for us there is no one closer to our own family of hominids: orangutans, gorillas and chimpanzees. We are 'not strangers' to the rest of the primates either. In terms of blood composition and tissue structure, rats and mice are very close to us — our favourite laboratory animals. They are used to study the effects of medications, alcohol, drugs, radiation, etc.

Thin red line

But what about the hybrids that are periodically reported in the media? Are creatures like Dren (the protagonist of the *Splice* film) secretly created and live in laboratories? To begin with, we must note that experiments on human embryos, as well as changing their genome, are either generally prohibited or strictly regulated and controlled in most countries. Viola-

The term 'chimera' came to European languages from ancient Greek mythology and denotes an anthropomorphic creature that has human and animal organs. The most widely circulated in the media are the winged creatures with the bodies of monkeys and goat horns, sitting on the upper platform at the foot of the towers of Notre Dame Cathedral. The most famous chimera of Notre Dame is named Strix (from the Greek strigx — 'night bird'). The winged demon — half-woman-half-bird, according to the legends described by Ovid in the *Calendar*, and also by Pliny the Elder in *The Natural History*, kidnaps babies and drinks their blood. At that time, people quite seriously believed in the existence of these monsters.

Scientists have been experimenting with the creation of interspecific hybrids since about the 1970s. At first it was a cross between mice and rats, but gradually the researchers moved on. In 2017, there were attempts to 'equip' the pig embryo with human stem cells. But the fact is that our cells practically won't survive in animal embryos and the probability of their rejection by the host organism is very high. Yet nature is difficult to deceive. To dispel rumours, let's say that in fact no monstrous creatures, as they are portrayed in the films, have been created (at least officially).



In science, chimeras are animals or plants whose cells contain genetically dissimilar material, in contrast to ordinary organisms, in which each cell has the same set. Such phenomena are extremely rare and occur as a result of mutations. Most of us have almost zero chance of seeing a chimera. But here's the strange thing: our distant ancestors did not at all consider this to be something out of the ordinary. Characters like the Minotaur, Gorgon, Echidna and the like are present in the mythology of many peoples. It was or was not — now you can't prove it. No skeletons, mummies, skulls, or any other evidence remained. Legends and frescoes on the walls of the temples do not count.



tion is a criminal offence. So, for carrying out an operation to edit the genome of an embryo, which resulted in the birth of two children with immunity to HIV, the famous Chinese geneticist He Jiankui received three years in prison and a huge fine. Not to mention that his excessive scientific zeal cost him his job, career, and authority. Here it must be clarified that the research work with embryos itself (within the framework of official research, of course) is not a crime, only when the red line is crossed.

This refers to the so-called 14-day rule, which was proposed in 1979 as an international standard. The bottom line is that at this moment, the embryo begins to form a nervous system and gets the opportunity to perceive the world around him to one degree or another.

As ironic as it may sound, the most similar animal to us is ... a pig. Its physiology (structure and principle of the body's workings) is most consistent with the human. It is not without reason that organs of these animals can be used for liver, kidney, spleen and heart transplantation.

Accordingly, the principles of humanity do not allow us to conduct any further manipulations. The experiment must be interrupted before this time. True, in May this year, the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISS-CR) allowed the growth of embryos in excess of the two-week limit. Such cases will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The initiative caused a negative reaction from many scientists. So far, they are in no hurry to introduce changes to the country's legislation. And it is not a given that they will introduce it.

An example of genetic chimerism in humans is a person with two sets of DNA. This can happen when two fertilised eggs or embryos fuse early



in pregnancy. To date, only about 40 such cases have been officially recorded. There is also such a thing as a blood chimera — this is a person who has two blood groups at once (a very rare mutation during intrauterine development). In principle, for any of us there is a possibility that he, too, is to some extent a chimera. The fact is that, according to scientific studies, at least eight percent of non-identical twins during embryonic development absorb the cells of their brothers or sisters. As a result, only one child is formed and born. This is the most interesting type of chimerism: tetragametic.



Yes, this gives more opportunities for stem cell research, the study of intrauterine diseases and other areas. For example, the cultivation of organs suitable for human transplantation, which our immunity can perceive as normal, without rejecting them as foreign. But the formation of the central nervous system from human stem cells, in theory, could provoke the emergence of a developed consciousness in any animal — why not? And then how to see oneself: a vivisector? The laurels of Dr. Moreau attract few people.



Enough power, but higher prices

Recently, the price of electricity in Finland and the Nordic countries was the highest in over ten years. At one point, the price was up to over 400 Euros per megawatt hour.

The price is now about five times that of last winter's fringe. For an electric heater that buys swap electricity, this means an additional bill of several hundred Euros per month.

The situation on the energy market is now so exceptional that the price of electricity has already reached record highs in November though it was not a peak consumption situation or extreme weather conditions. According to experts, in this situation Finland is the deputy victim of the energy crisis in Central Europe. Much electricity there is produced with natural gas, the price of which has risen. Emission rights prices are also at record highs.

"As long as electricity flows to Finland, it works well and right now we need imports. The situation may be different when the third reactor at Olkiluoto is completed," said Fingrid Power Manager Maarit Uusitalo.



According to Fingrid's estimate, peak electricity consumption in Finland during the winter may increase to around 15,100 megawatts.

Record Eurozone inflation

Eurozone inflation soared to its highest rate on record last month on surging energy costs, likely peaking before a slow decline that will keep it uncomfortably high for much of the next year, data from Eurostat showed

Consumer price growth in the 19 countries sharing the Euro accelerated to 4.9 percent in November, by far the highest level in the 25 years since the figure has been compiled, up from 4.1 percent a month earlier and well ahead of expectations for 4.5 percent.

Energy prices were up 27 percent compared with a year earlier as oil prices soared but inflation in services and non-energy industrial goods, a drag on price growth in past years, were both above 2 percent, suggesting a rapid rise in underlying price pressures.

Although inflation is now more than twice the European Central Bank's 2 per-

cent target, it is unlikely to trigger any policy action, even if the data make for uncomfortable reading and could trigger political pressure on the ECB to rein in price growth.

The ECB has long argued that the inflation surge is temporary, caused by a range of one-off factors, and will subside over time so policy action now would be counterproductive as it would thwart economic growth just when inflation eases on their own.

While some policymakers have warned that high inflation, even if temporary, could trigger a surge in wages, ECB President Christine Lagarde and

chief economist Philip Lane have dismissed this argument, saying that wage growth remains anaemic and there is no sign that firms are permanently altering their remuneration behaviour.

Indeed, the ECB has promised continued stimulus with bond buys and record low rates throughout 2022, even as a long list of central banks around the world are already tightening policy.

The potential headache is that inflation will now take months to drop and could stay above the ECB's target until the second half of 2022.

The ECB will next meet on December 16th.



Limiting NATO deployments

The Norwegian government opposes the presence of NATO troops near the border with Russia. This was stated by the Head of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry Anniken Huitfeldt, according to the *Verdens Gang* newspaper.

Norway's Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt announced that it is in the country's best interests to protect its northernmost areas with its own armed troops rather than with NATO.

Huitfeldt said that it's critical for Norway to have a military presence near the neighbourhood. However, she believes that they can do it best themselves, with Norwegian planes and frigates, and doesn't need NATO troops. When asked by *Verdens Gang* if the government wants to keep US and UK ships and planes farther away from Russia, Huitfeldt replied that she wants to talk to both countries

about it so that Norway's interests are protected.

She stated that it is in Norway's best interests to take care of the territories on its own, with Norwegian defence. She also said that they attempting to convey to their allies that Norway is NATO's northernmost member and in the Barents Sea, the Russians are accustomed to seeing Norwegian planes and ships, according to *Verdens Gang*. She also said that they want it to be like this in the future too, that the planes flying east of Andøya, Nordland County are not American P8 surveillance aircraft, but their own.

Fragile and slow recovery

Global tourism is likely to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2023 at the earliest, the Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Zurab Pololikashvili said

"Data for the third quarter of 2021 is encouraging," UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said. "However, arrivals are still 76 percent below pre-pandemic levels and results across the different global regions remain uneven."

Despite recent improvements, the report warned that demand for travel could be further affected by 'uneven vaccination rates around the world and new COVID-19 strains which had prompted new travel restrictions in some countries'.

In light of the rising cases and the emergence of new variants, he added that 'we cannot let our guard down and need

to continue our efforts to ensure equal access to vaccinations, coordinate travel procedures, make use of digital vaccination certificates to facilitate mobility, and continue to support the sector'.

The coronavirus pandemic will likely cost the global tourism sector \$2 trillion in lost revenue in 2021, the UNWTO said, calling the sector's recovery 'fragile' and 'slow'. According to the latest forecast by the UN's tourism body, the same amount was lost in 2020, making it one of the sectors hit hardest by the health crisis. In Europe, the EU Digital Covid Certificate has helped facilitate free movement within the European Union, the report added.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Attraction of a natural pearl

An increase in the number of visitors by about 40 percent: how the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve lives in a pandemic

By Yelena Begunova

Tourism with the prefix eco-

...Even the beginning of winter in Domzheritsy — the central estate of the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve — is delightful. It's impossible to say that there are not enough colours in the forest now. The blue sky with delicate feather-clouds, bright yellow rays of the sun on the shaggy-green needles and the red breasts of bullfinches on the branches of snow-white birches. Here you want to forget about your problems, breathe in the slightly frosty air and endlessly enjoy the silence — let the whole world wait...

"In the first months of widespread lockdowns, there was some confusion," says the director of the reserve, Andrei Prokoshin. "And then we actively began to work out ideas aimed at popularising domestic family tourism. We created our own honey museum, began to offer self-isolation programmes: two-week visits with food. In this case, a 50 percent discount was made on accommodation while breakfasts, lunches and dinners were delivered directly to the room. For almost two years now we have been observing the special popularity of our area. There are more and more people wishing to get to know the local sights better, plunging into the wild world of nature. Since the beginning of the year, over 50,000 people have already visited the Berezinsky Reserve. This is significantly more than last year's figure, and growth is about 40 percent. In a word, ecological tourism is on trend."

Of course, the number of foreign tourists has decreased, decreasing the exports of services. However, this is understandable during a pandemic with closed borders. Nevertheless, this year, dozens of Russian citizens, as well as Germans, Kazakhs, Dutch, French and even Brazilians, were welcomed here.

Not only relaxation

The central estate plus three separate sites — in total, over 200 people can stay in the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve.

Of course, there is also seasonality. Summer is a more convenient time for horseback riding, hiking and cycling along ecological paths, observing the life of wild animals and birds, alongside kayaking. In winter there are fewer tourists, yet the autumn-winter vacation has its own special feeling. In order to make it more interesting, dozens of new projects are being developed, aimed specifically at family and corporate arrivals.

Over 85,000 hectares of amazing beauty in the centre of Belarus... The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve is officially included in the international network of key botanical territories and territories important for birds. It is a member of the Wetland Link International. Moreover, the reserve also received a Wilderness Diploma from the PAN Parks Foundation for ensuring the guaranteed protection of over 27,000 hectares of unique forest resources.



She-bear Vasilisa



Black grouse



Noble deer



Lynx



Elk



Common wolf



European bison

For example, recently the guests gathered for a two-day festive tour *Veles Night*. The programme is closely related to the legends of the Belarusian land and folk traditions. It is believed that it is on Veles' night that all wildlife falls asleep, the earth goes to rest, where it remains until the first spring thaw. Tourists made a trip to the land of myths, walked through the night forest, met with the god of fertility and witchcraft, sat by the fire on the bank of an ancient, raised bog, ate fish soup, drank tea and listened to a fascinating tale about Veles' tragic love for the sorceress Yaguna. Then they warmed up in the restaurant of the hotel complex with festive food and an incendiary disco. At parting they made doll-charms against evil spirits with their own hands.

Income from tourism is a guaranteed opportunity to develop further, implement new projects, and improve the site.

The director tells us that the hotel complex in Plavno is now undergoing modernisation. It is planned to build two new houses next year at this small family-oriented holiday centre. Seven fisherman's lodges will appear on Lake Bereshcha, where paid fishing will be developed. In

addition, a small farmstead will be created in the centre of mythological tourism. Moreover, the documentation for the construction of the first camping site in the Nivki reserve is almost ready. The solution is the construction of an electric charging station for electric vehicles.

'Sweet' themes and more

Some of the projects of the Berezinsky Reserve may well claim the status of inventions, e.g., the project on beekeeping, which has no analogues in the country. A video camera will be installed in one of the hives created in the trunks of growing living trees, which will show everything that happens inside in real time: tourists will be able to observe different periods of bees' life and their work in the honeycombs.

It is also planned to build a 'Home' entertainment centre with a phyto-bar, featuring enlarged dwellings of various animals. Visitors will be able to go down, say, to the muskrat's house, inspect the hornet's mansions, and travel along the several hundred 'floors' of the anthill. All this will happen with the help of interactive technologies that create the illusion of reality. Cameras will be installed directly in the nests of birds.

A joint project with HTP will also be presented as an unusual computer game in the centre of mythology, enabling all those wishing to communicate with the Spirit of the Forest, Bolotnik, God Veles and other mythical characters using augmented and virtual reality methods.

Science to help nature

The natural reality is the local forest zoo. Many animals ended up here because they needed urgent help from specialists. The she-bear Vasilisa, the bison Valera and the lynx Rysya live here...

The forest zoo is slowly expanding and recently, a 'branch' was opened — the so-called contact home zoo.

No matter what interesting ideas the enthusiasts of the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve may have worked out for information and educational purposes and to attract tourists, the ecological and scientific components of their work remain the main ones.

So, recently, the generally accepted official data on the number of brown bears in the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve and on its adjacent territory have been disputed. Now scientists have proved that there are not 30 bears, but at least 84, including about 67 directly in the reserve. Such conclusions were made on the basis of a detailed study of bear tracks, data from camera traps, a survey of the population and employees of the institution.

Moreover, this year, scientists have found new species of rare plants in the reserve: long-leaved helleborine and bird's foot sedge. A lesser shrew — a rodent unique for Belarus — was also discovered though taiga was considered its usual habitat.

Light in the reflection of a shard

Vasnetsov, Bruni and Koshelev:
the Baranovichi Holy Protection Cathedral
contains masterpieces of world art
with a very tragic fate

The Louvre, the Hermitage, the galleries of Florence and Vienna...
Everyone who knows a little about art dreams by looking at the famous
creations of renowned artists and sculptors. But it turns out that the
masterpieces of world art can be seen very close: in the Cathedral of the
Protection of the Holy Virgin in Baranovichi. Why is it so unique and why
is it chosen by tourists from the USA, Germany and Italy?

CULTURE



The Mother of God with Angelic Ranks mosaic according to the sketch by Nikolai Bruni



Saviour with a Donator mosaic (artist Nikolai Koshelev)

By **Khristina Glushko**

Secrets of the ruins

The dome of the Holy Protection Cathedral rises almost in the centre of Baranovichi. The sun is reflected in the blue vaults of the church — a real piece of Greece in Belarus. However, the architectural splendour is not the only feature of this temple. The Holy Protection Cathedral contains unique mosaics: masterpieces of world art.

Recently, the Holy Protection Cathedral celebrated a wonderful date: its 90th anniversary. But, despite its attractiveness, was this temple so significant that the best artists of the Russian Empire came to decorate it with mosaics?

“Everything was a little different,” protodeacon Andrei Gorbunov tells us. “This story began in 1893 in Warsaw. The then Governor-General Iosif Gurko appealed to Emperor Alexander III with a request to approve the construction of a temple in the city. There were many Orthodox Christians among the inhabitants of Warsaw, so the emperor not only agreed, but also set an important task: this church should testify to the greatness of the Russian state and faith while also being a sermon for Catholics, so that they can immerse themselves in the history of Orthodoxy. It was decided to build the temple on Saxon Square, and a competition for the best project was held among the architects. It was won by the master of the Imperial Court, Leonty Benois.”

The construction of the cathedral in honour of St. Alexander Nevsky began in 1894 and lasted for six long years. It was a truly grandiose temple: the height of the bell tower reached 70 metres (the size of a modern 20-storey building).

While the construction was going on, famous artists arrived in Warsaw who were engaged in the decoration of the temple. Viktor Vasnetsov was in charge of creative works while Aleksandr Frolov looked after the creation of the mosaics. By that time, he had brought from Venice a unique reverse set technology, which significantly reduced the cost of work. The cathedral turned out to be grandiose and very expensive: gems, marble and granite were not spared for its decoration. According to various estimates, the construction cost 2.5 tonnes of gold (if you transfer this into modern money, you get about \$100m).

The heart of the cathedral, even years later, is considered to be mosaics: masterpieces of world art which were created by Viktor Vasnetsov, Nikolai Koshelev, Nikolai Bruni and Viktor Dumitrashko. The most impressive in terms of size was the mosaic ‘All of Creation Rejoices in You, O Full of Grace’. It was located in the altar of



The vault of the Holy Protection Cathedral



Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky in Warsaw

the temple and its area was more than a thousand square metres. This work is also unique because the image of the Virgin on it is considered perfect.

Vasnetsov searched for it for a long time. He studied and analysed all kinds of faces of the Mother of God, trying to create the same one. And, we must say, he did it, as many art critics attest. The Mother of God has an unusual face with large eyes and a heartfelt gaze. Later this image became almost canonical and the artist was nicknamed the creator of the Russian Madonnas.

The cathedral has preserved about twenty mosaics. According to art critics, 10,000 items represent world-class artistic value. Today we could have admired them in the rich expositions of museums, but this was not destined to happen. Everything that demonstrated the same greatness of power and faith was razed to the ground.

The inevitability of being

“These vile Byzantine domes have no place in the centre of Warsaw”, the Polish government thought in 1918. The hatred of Russian culture was so strong that the fate of the cathedral turned out to be fatal. The Warsaw magistrate even issued bonds for destruction — so that every Pole could become involved in the ‘great’ mission. People contributed cash, and in return they took bricks and other materials for this amount, thus destroying the temple. The cathedral was destroyed over two years, by summer 1926, not a trace remained of the Christian shrine.

Miraculous salvation

By the grace of God, something was saved, with Orthodox believers in Poland taking doors, icons and mosaics. They were literally ripped off the walls in pieces, just not to be torn to pieces. But how did some of these masterpieces end up in Baranovichi?

“In 1908, there was a wooden church on this site,” says Father Andrei, leading us on a tour. “But in 1921 the church burned down. In the years when Baranovichi was part of Poland, churches were erected only on the territory of Belarus while in Warsaw, on the contrary, they were destroyed and closed. Therefore, the Metropolitan of the Polish Orthodox Church, Dionysius, decided to transfer part of the mosaics to the cathedral under construction and the first gifts came to us in 1926.”

Near the side entrance to the Holy Protection Church, you can see in detail the panel by Nikolai Koshelev ‘Saviour with a Donator’ — it is placed on the facade under the roof itself. Its small-coloured pieces of glass shimmer in the sun. The mosaic tells a story: it depicts the architect Leonty Benois, who presents to Christ a model of the majestic Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. The Saviour gives the benefactor (donor) a golden crown because he did not hide his talent but used it for the good of people.

On the north side of the temple there is a mosaic *Cathedral of the Archangel Michael*, designed by Nikolai Bruni, depicting Christ in adolescence and angels. Fragments of the panel have been collected together.

These mosaics were made using the Venetian method: the reverse set method. The craftsmen had over 20,000 shades of smalt, which is why the colours of the mosaics are so vibrant.

Appreciate and cherish

Five more unique mosaics are kept inside the church. The protodeacon opens the gates of the altar so that at least from afar we can see the very work based on Vasnetsov’s sketch, which in the last century crowned Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. A host of angels and saints, images of churches: much of this panel will never again appear before the eyes of the Orthodox. But the central faces of the Mother of God and the Child have survived and now rise above the worshipers in the cathedral, as if blessing them.

On the sides of the altar, in the columns, there are two mosaics based on Viktor Dumitrashko’s sketches: *Saint Alexis of Moscow* and *Saint Joseph of Volotsk*. They were made in memory of Iosif Gurko, who initiated the construction of the Warsaw church. The vestments of St. Alexis are a separate work of art: it is woven from biblical subjects.

And under the vaults of the temple, two more mosaics were placed: *The Mother of God with Angelic Ranks* according to a sketch by Nikolai Bruni (it was assembled from nine fragments) and *Deesis with Bystanders* by Nikolai Koshelev.

The Rector of the temple, Father Aleksandr Dzichkovsky, has been serving here for several decades. He sadly admits that many parishioners do not even know about unique images they pray with. But the priests try to conduct excursions for people, they never refuse to give interviews to the press and do their best to preserve history.

The masters of the Silver Age have much to surprise us with.



Fights without rules

How western politicians are turning sport into a dirty mess of their private desires

Calls to isolate Belarus, to cover the country and its people with a cap of sanctions and destroy it are not new, including in the sporting world. Recently, this vector has been developing more and more actively, more impudently and more shamelessly. Let us recall the ultimatums of the International Olympic Committee, the shameful deprivation of Minsk of the legal right to host several international tournaments, including the World Ice Hockey Championships and the dirty political provocations at the hockey forum in Riga, where our national flag was lowered, as well as attempts to compromise our delegation at the 2020 Games in Tokyo... A once honest world, revived by Pierre de Coubertin, becomes a disgusting slaughterhouse without any rules, where sadistic techniques are not prohibited, but are introduced into the cult and are encouraged. There are no principles here, let alone justice.



By Sergei Kanashits

Bad brakes

The Dakar Rally has long been a brand event in the world of auto racing. In fact, this is Formula 1 for rally drivers: the elite pool of the automotive world. The additional weight given to the race is added to by the fact that this is not just a competition of pilots, motorcycles or trucks, but a large competitive contest of the world's leading automobile industries, veiled under a colourful show. The racing conditions and the structure of the track are so difficult that the Dakar is a survival sport, which has almost cosmic technology. It is all the more pleasant to note that Belarus in this crazy race of technologies has always been at the forefront and boldly swung to the championship title. Our MAZ vehicles are not afraid of dirt and sand, having proven to be reliable, fast, powerful and safe over the years while our racers are virtuosos and professionals.

Last year, the crew of the Belarusian MAZ-SPORTauto team led by Siarhei Viazovich took third place in the Dakar's final standings of trucks, losing only to two Russian KAMAZ trucks. Every year, our trucks have consistently been among the leaders. In terms of reliability and equipment, MAZ vehicles today are one of the most promising vehicles, as seen by the whole world. Our team took part in the rally nine times, and the new event was supposed to be an anniversary one. The athletes and the management of the plant had serious plans for the current Dakar. The level to

which the Belarusian team has risen enabled them to talk about the most ambitious task. Our experienced pilot, a participant of all nine Belarusian Dakar raids, Aleksandr Vasilevsky, voiced them quite specifically, "We already have a second place at the Dakar, and we have been third too. It remains now only to add gold to this collection. I think MAZ can win." But, alas, there will be no victory because the barrier was brazenly lowered in front of our athletes and they were not allowed to go the distance.

Just last week, A.S.O. (the organiser of the Dakar rally-marathon) officially announced that the Belarusian team MAZ-SPORTauto will not be able to take part in the race in 2022 and this decision is related to the sanctions imposed on the Minsk Automobile Works (MAZ). In a statement to the Championat portal, the organisers stressed that they had to remove the MAZ crews from the starting list by the decision of the French authorities (A.S.O. is based in France). "Due to the measures taken by the European Union and affecting various Belarusian legal entities, including the car manufacturer MAZ, the French authorities informed the organisers of the Dakar that it is legally impossible for MAZ to take part in the 2022 race. The organisers of the Dakar were forced to inform MAZ about this decision," the A.S.O. press service told the Championat correspondent.

The very fact of this decision is surprising, as well as the way the representatives of MAZ-SPORTauto were informed of it. Minsk did not

receive any notifications and our trucks went to Marseille on time to cross by ferry to their destination. However, the crew was not allowed to load.

Without explaining anything or presenting facts or any documents. Everything is as always: in the best traditions of the triumph of lawlessness, imposed on the world as the most correct law.

At a press conference, the head of our team, Siarhei Viazovich, described what happened, "We are very upset about this. For us, what happened was a complete surprise."

The team continues negotiations with the organisers to find a way out of this situation. Siarhei Viazovich has no doubts that A.S.O. did not make such a decision on its own. The pressure exerted on the organisers of the race forced them to take this step, which once again proves that sport does not remain outside politics.

It is not hard to guess that the red light for Belarusian trucks in front of the Dakar is not just an accident, but another hard and dastardly blow. What does the rally and the athletes have to do with the sanctions against the plant? Everything is very simple: to eliminate rivals in the world car market and on the race track.

Are they tired of seeing Belarusians among winners and awardees? Can't overtake? Then they decide that it is better just to break and to destroy!

Why would anyone know that Belarusian MAZ vehicles

are more reliable and cheaper than other world analogues?

Scoring an own goal

In their desire to annoy Belarus, western democracies have long been happy not to shy away from openly underhand methods. However, what happened in the Czech Republic looks almost like legalised state terrorism, like a scene from Franz Kafka's surreal novel. The Head of the Belarusian Football Federation (ABFF), Vladimir Bazanov, who arrived in the Czech Republic as part of an official delegation for the qualifying match for the Women's World Cup 2023, was detained in police custody for a day. Even those who arrested him cannot say what exactly the official is charged with: either illegal stay on the territory of the Czech Republic, or violation of sanitary measures. ABFF and UEFA immediately contacted the Czech Football Association regarding this incident. It is interesting that the head of the ABFF was detained 'during a routine inspection at the place of residence'. The case is clearly a bit too thin; even COVID, which is always convenient in such situations, was added. Why then did they not arrest the entire national team of Belarus with coaches and service personnel? After all, they are in the Czech Republic

on the same terms. Although not everything turned out well for the team: the game didn't take place being postponed due to the positive results of coronavirus tests among several players of our national team. It is noteworthy that a week ago, everyone left Minsk vigorous and healthy. In Cyprus, where they played before that, the tests were also negative. It's clear that the disease could be caught anywhere, but all these coincidences of circumstances look painfully strange.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus demanded appropriate explanations from the Czech side.

No fair means used

They break futures like matches, they don't care about anything except their own benefit. One cannot help but recall another French incident: in spring 2016, just a couple of months before the Olympics, the local police detained the Belarusian rowers at the training camp in Angers as criminals and terrorists. There were also commands to get 'face down on the floor', and the use of force, night interrogations and a total search, which looked more like a gangster scam, as well as the threat of criminal cases. They looked for doping, but, of course, found nothing. Nevertheless, no one apologised, and while the proceedings were underway, the entire men's team was removed from participation in the 2016 Games.

On what grounds? Because there was an order to do it. How do you not lose faith in humanity and justice after that? How do you live if the Olympics is what you have been aiming for your entire long career?

Recent world sports events leave no doubt that there is a purposeful hunt for Belarusian-Russian sports, our coaches, athletes and the entire system as a whole. This is cynical persecution, boorish destruction, shameless ostracism, the purpose of which is to deprive obstinate countries of their state symbols, depersonalise them and leave them without a national anthem and a flag.

All this unprecedented sports terrorism is served under the cover of a sacred concern for the pure ideals of Olympism.



"We would like to support MAZ-SPORTauto in their aspiration to become participants in the upcoming 2022 Dakar Rally. Politics should not influence sport in any way. Guys, we are with you! #MAZ4DKR2022," wrote the Czech racer, multiple participant of the Dakar rally-marathon, winner of the Silk Way Rally, Aleš Loprais, on his Instagram account.



Photo of the week

Everyday life of refugees in the transport and logistics centre at the Bruzgi border checkpoint

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



On December 9th, 1891, Maksim Bogdanovich was born — a Belarusian poet, translator, critic and literary historian. He is one of the founders of Belarusian literature and the Belarusian literary language of modern times. Together with

Yanka Kupala, he became the founder of landscape and intimate lyrics; he was the first in Belarusian literature to turn to urban motives. He is the author of the collection of poems *Wreath*, folklore-romantic poems *Maksim and Magdalena*, *Stratim-Lebed* (The Stratim Swan) and others. He translated Horace, Ovid, Schiller, Heine and Pushkin into Belarusian, Kupala, Shevchenko and others — into Russian. He died in 1917 from tuberculosis in Yalta, where he was buried.

On December 9th, 1976, the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle was founded. It is located in the open air on the picturesque bank of the Ptich River, between the villages of Strochitsy and Ozertso. The museum exposition reflects the regional features of traditional Belarusian architecture and material culture. All the buildings are original. The exposition includes more than 30 monuments of folk architecture from the late 17th-early 20th centuries.



On December 10th, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus adopted the resolution 'On the Denunciation of the Treaty of 1922 on the Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' and 'On the Ratification of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States'.



On December 10th, 1821, Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878) was born — a Russian poet, prose writer and publicist, classic of Russian literature. In 1847-1866, he was editor and publisher of the *Sovremennik* magazine, since 1868 — editor of the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* magazine. His poems were devoted mainly to the suffering of the people and the tragedy of the peasantry. He is best known for such works as the epic poem *Who Lives Well in Russia*, the poems *Frost*, *Red Nose*, *Russian Women*, *Grandfather Mazai* and the *Hares*, *Railroad*.

On December 10th, 1901, on the fifth anniversary of the death of the Swedish engineer, chemist, inventor and industrialist and founder of the Nobel Prizes, Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-1896), the first awards were presented in



Stockholm and Oslo. Nobel Day (December 10th) has the status of a public holiday in Sweden and is accompanied by the official raising of the national flag.

December 10th is International Human Rights Day. On this day, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), a landmark document that proclaimed the inalienable rights inherent in every person, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, property, class or other status. The day has been celebrated all over the world since 1950.



December 11th is International Mountain Day. It was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on December 20th, 2002, in order

to draw attention to the problems of the development of the mountainous regions of the planet and the need to provide assistance to their population.

On December 12th, 1766, Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826) was born — a Russian writer, publicist and historian, honorary member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, official historiographer of Emperor

Alexander I. He founded the Russian sentimentalism and created *The History of the Russian State* — one of the most significant works in historiography. He is also the author of poems, critical and journalistic articles, reviews on literary and theatrical topics.



On December 14th, 1911, the Norwegian expedition led by Roald Amundsen reached the South Pole for the first time in history. During the expedition, important scientific results were obtained, and a large cycle of meteorological observations was carried out, enabling Antarctica to be included in the system of global synoptic measurement.



On December 15th, 1956, the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus was founded. This is the largest historical museum in Belarus, which houses a unique collection of objects of material and spiritual culture. Unique artefacts include the remains of a primitive dwelling made of mammoth bones (18th-16th millennium BC), as well as Neolithic tools from flint mines. Among the works of medieval craft and art are metal icons, Slutsk belts, polychrome tiles, Urechie and Naliboki glass.

