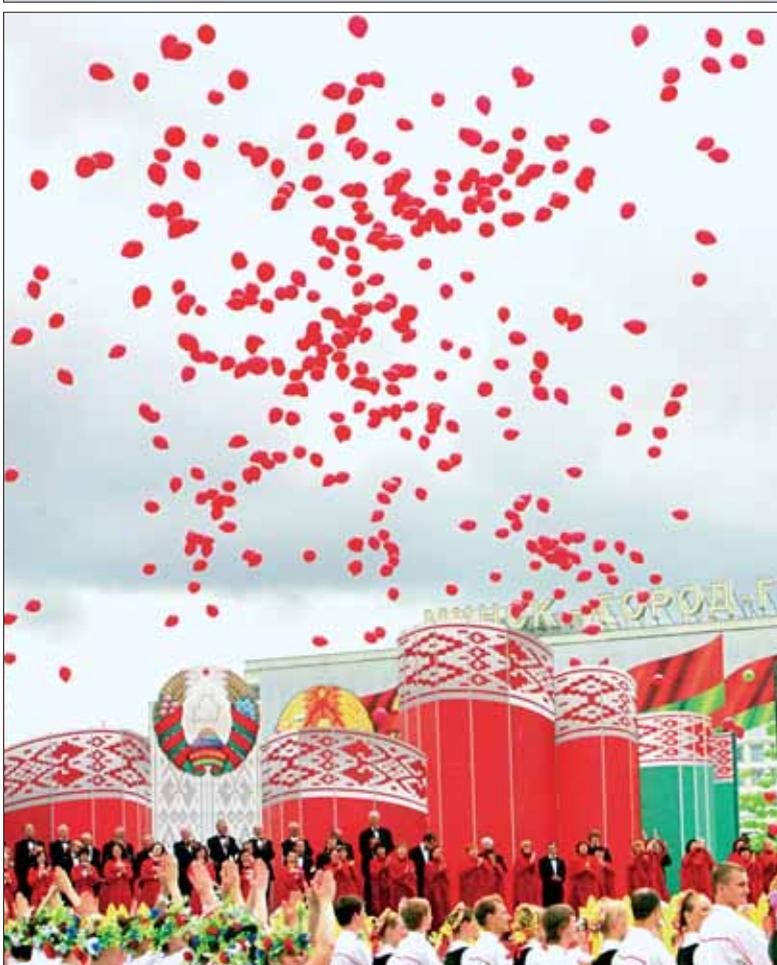


Date which embodies heroic deeds, courage and sovereignty

On July 3rd, Belarus celebrates Independence Day, or Republic Day



Independence Day celebrations in Belarusian capital

This major holiday of Belarusian statehood was declared in 1996 following a decree by the President of Belarus. It is a symbol of the state's national revival and, in line with citizens' will (as expressed at a national referendum) is celebrated on the day of Minsk's liberation from the Nazi invaders in July 1944.

Celebrating Independence Day honours the heroism and determination of those Belarusian people who sacrificed themselves for the underground movement and of those whose unprecedented efforts restored the Republic from ruins, constructing factories, houses and schools and manufacturing the first produce at enterprises.

Festive concert programmes, exhibitions, contests and sports competitions took place country-wide, with a military parade being the major solemn event in the capital. A theatrical, sporting and youth parade also took place, with a festive pop concert and a 'Town of Craftsmen' exhibition-fair. Performances by amateur talent groups and a children's holiday completed the celebrations.

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, congratulated his fellow countrymen on Inde-

pendence Day. 'Following tradition, on July 3rd, we pay tribute to the valour and heroism of the frontline soldiers and the workers of the rear, partisans and resistance fighters who liberated the Belarusian people. We honour the unrivalled feats of arms of Soviet soldiers while mourning the millions of those who perished in the name of the Great Victory. May they rest in eternal glory!' reads his congratulation.

The Head of State underlined that descendants of those victors feel deep responsibility for the future of their Motherland, continuing the traditions of senior generations by preserving and building upon their achievements and by maintaining peace and security while consolidating the sovereignty of the Belarusian state.

Over past decades, independent Belarus has been revived by people's creative efforts and now occupies a worthy place within the international community.

'I'm confident that, through unity and diligence, we can deal with any obstacles on our path towards a common goal — further prosperity of our dear Belarus,' emphasised Mr. Lukashenko. The President urged his fellow country-

men to love their homeland sincerely and to believe in themselves and in the beautiful future of their country, while remaining healthy, to live in peace and prosperity.

Speaking on July 3rd, at the Independence Day Minsk Garrison's military parade, Mr. Lukashenko noted that Belarus' national security system is always ready to protect the constitutional foundations and sovereignty of the state. He stressed, 'Our Belarus solemnly celebrates its major state holiday: Independence Day. This holiday unites the greatest and most sacred for all notions: liberation from the Nazi invaders and independence for the Belarusian state.'

He noted that, today, we gratefully remember those who didn't bow to the enemy, giving their lives for the Victory and immortalising their names. 'The deeds of these heroes will never fade with the passing of the centuries! We'll bring to life their legacy — to love, take care of and protect our homeland — with honour, dignity and pride,' accentuated the President. He stressed that people take pride in their army: the heir of Victory, a secure foothold and spiritual fortress of the country. The army is a

faithful defender of creativity while serving as a school of courage for thousands of young Belarusians, many of whom took part in the parade.

Mr. Lukashenko stressed, 'At present, there is no military threat to our country. However, history, including the recent past, shows that we should always keep our powder dry. Peace and creativity should be reliably protected. We have what to defend: our native land, our glorious history, the unity of our nation, social justice and the spiritual values of people.'

According to the Head of State, the memory of millions of victims of World War II should force us to reject the use of force, choosing peaceful and positive methods to resolve conflict. 'The intention today of certain circles to use force, political pressure and economic sanctions to promote their interests remains a constant source of tension,' asserted Mr. Lukashenko. 'Information intervention is escalating. Public opinion is manipulated without constraint. Widespread defamation, including on an anonymous basis through the media, is taken for granted today. Powers make use of the weapon of mass in-

formation destruction against dissenting countries.'

According to Mr. Lukashenko, these methods aim to enforce dictatorship, impose political will and force nations towards a new world order. 'This 'new order' (a sadly familiar notion) envisages the division of the world into the 'gold billion' and all the rest — miserable and poor, without even a voting right,' he underlined.

'We survived the years of the Great Patriotic War, overcoming breakdown to create a beautiful and proud state on our land with our own hands. We've proven our right 'to be called people' and, as our classic-prophets dreamt, 'we occupy our own worthy place among nations,' said the President.

According to the Belarusian leader, our multi-directional foreign policy, based on principles of mutual respect, equality and partnership, envisages comprehensive co-operation with Russia and former Soviet Union states, alongside the development of mutually beneficial relations with other unions and countries.

The Head of State underlined that our enduring priorities are the strengthening of national defence by developing the armed forces, the maintenance of a proper level of readiness of Belarus-Russia regional troops and consistent strengthening of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

'Every Belarusian can be confident that the national security system is ever ready to protect the constitutional foundations and sovereignty of the state. It ensures a clear sky over our country and peace of mind for everyone,' assured Mr. Lukashenko.

Around 150,000 people watched and took part in the military parade and a sporting and youth parade to honour Independence Day in the centre of Minsk. The day finished with Belarus' anthem being performed and a festive firework display.