

# Effect of presence on continent



Raúl Castro Ruz meets Alexander Lukashenko in Havana

By Kirill Dovlatov

Mr. Lukashenko's stay in each country featured meetings and negotiations between heads of state, as well as with heads of ministries and our large enterprises. Every minute was scheduled tightly, with the Belarusian delegation also including the First Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Semashko. Clearly, the trip was inspired by more than diplomatic courtesy. Latin America is showing great potential for expansion of collaboration.

The ceremonial meeting of the President in Cuba was held in Havana's Palace of the Republic. Beforehand, the Belarusian delegation, headed by Mr. Semashko, negotiated with Cuban colleagues, while being welcomed by the Cuban Vice President of the Council of Ministers, Ricardo Cabrisas. He noted that

Cuba has adopted a programme of economic development until 2016 and that co-operation with Belarus harmoniously fits into this strategy.

During negotiations, prospects for collaboration in diverse areas were discussed, with several documents signed. An agreement on co-operation was concluded between our governments regarding quarantine and plant protection, as were joint memorandums between the Belarusian Industry Ministry and the Cuban ministries for Agriculture, Metallurgy Industry and Machine Building. A similar document was concluded by our health ministries and our head of the State Committee for Science and Technology signed an agreement with the Cuban Ministry for Sciences, Technology and the Environment.

Mr. Lukashenko arrived at

Revolution Square, laying a wreath at the Island of Freedom's José Martí Memorial. He also wrote in the book of honorary guests: 'I'm delighted by this historical site, which is dedicated to a wonderful son of Cuba — the poet, philosopher and great humanist José Martí. The energy, dynamism and freedom-loving spirit of the heroic Cuban nation is felt here especially brightly! I wish you all peace, health and prosperity'.

The Palace of the Republic hosted a solemn ceremony for the official meeting. Together with Raúl Castro Ruz, the President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of Cuba, Mr. Lukashenko walked along the formation of the guard of honour and top level negotiations then took place, with the heads of state warmly greeting each other.

The President of Belarus em-

phasised that his visit coincides with the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries. Over these years, Belarusian-Cuban interaction has reached a level of strategic partnership. The Belarusian President asserted that the expansion of multifaceted relations with Cuba is a top priority within the Belarusian state's foreign policy.

The visit by the President of Belarus to Havana had been long promoted by the local media, with the same situation observed in Venezuela; banners depicting portraits of Hugo Chávez and Alexander Lukashenko hung in Caracas' streets and TV channels gave full of reports on co-operation between our states. Even the severe faces of security agents in the hotel brightened on seeing our delegation — whether the minister, plant director, Foreign Ministry employee or journalist. The President of Venezuela's security was also very amiable, helping us around the official residence: Miraflores Palace.

Mr. Chávez waited for Mr. Lukashenko at the porch, looking at the television cameras and being unable to restrain a smile, being a very sociable person (a trait he shares with the President of Belarus). It's no accident that the word 'friend' is often heard when they chat; this time, the word 'brother' was used more often.

Mr. Chávez took a microphone from its stand and spoke warmly about relations with our country, stopping only when the Belarusian President's delegation arrived. The warm embraces of the heads of our two states weren't merely for show; they were evidently glad to see each other.

The military orchestra played the national anthem of Belarus and the guard of honour froze. Surprisingly, the solemn music was sung live by the men's military choir (no lip-synching, as you might expect). Throwing a glance at the main porch and judging by the movement of lips, it seemed that even the President

of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Rafael Chávez, was singing our anthem. He then sang his own anthem, soundlessly moving his lips in a touching manner.

I've long noticed that, when presidents Lukashenko and Chávez meet, formalities fade into the background. The President of Venezuela explained this emotionally and simply, saying, "Over the last year, we've built a strategic union of Belarus and Venezuela. We have a brotherhood. Welcome to Venezuela! Welcome to Latin America!"

The President of Venezuela noted that he had a telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin on the eve of the visit, telling Mr. Putin that he had chosen well in going to Minsk for his first official visit on being elected to the post of president of Russia. Venezuela is clearly keen on closer co-operation with all post-Soviet countries, which mirrors Belarus' interest in Latin America.

Mr. Chávez noted our opportunities for development and the presidents continued to chat, ignoring formal diplomatic protocols. After a short conversation, they went into the residence, from where a live television broadcast was launched, beginning with the two presidents' initial greeting and ending with their tête-à-tête. Mr. Chávez took on the role of host for the multi-hour TV programme.

He noted that this was the third visit by Alexander Lukashenko to his country, with initial conversations about intentions developing into definite agreements on co-operation. Now, we are at the stage of assessing results and making further plans. A TV bridge allowed connection with all key sites, including the factory making Belarusian MAZ vehicles in Barinas city, captured from a charming bird's eye view. Employees chatted with those in Caracas, saying how pleased they are with results. Belarusian MAZ vehicles are leaving the workshop, while our MTZ tractors are assembled nearby. Moreover,



Satisfied with work completed



MAZ in Venezuelan state Barinas targets to manufacture 5,000 cars annually