

# Cuban vector strengthens

Belarus ready to help modernise Cuban economy, notes President Alexander Lukashenko, on meeting Deputy Chairman of Cuban Council of Ministers, Marino Murillo, in Minsk

By Victor Khristinkov

Mr. Lukashenko remarked that the visit to Belarus by the Cuban delegation aimed at developing arrangements made by the two heads of state during a recent official visit of the Belarusian President to Cuba. "We agreed that a Cuban delegation would arrive in Belarus and that we'd discuss all issues raised by its head," noted the Belarusian leader.

"I know that the Cuban leadership is interested in avenues of development and the reform of our economy so I've promised Raoul Castro that we'll show him everything, explaining our path in Belarus. If any particular prospect appeals, we can certainly help in implementing it in Cuba, as we've

done in Venezuela," Mr. Lukashenko emphasised.

Agriculture is an area where Belarus and Cuba may promote mutually beneficial co-operation, since agricultural development is a priority in the modernisation of the Cuban economy. "Cuba has huge resources for modernising its agriculture, spending at least \$1.5bn on importing food and other things necessary for farming. Reducing this sum by \$100-200m annually, while substituting some of these imports with Cuban-made products would be a good way of saving money," said the Head of State.

Belarus is also interested in areas in which Cuba is more developed. Mr. Lukashenko asserted, "Cuba is rich in its development of healthcare

and the production of medications; we've developed and are currently implementing a similar programme, so your experience could be extremely valuable."

Mr. Murillo is keen to see Belarusian-Cuban collaboration promoted, asserting, "The programme of our visit is tightly packed and interesting. The transformation of the Belarusian economy and society are of great interest to us. It's important for us to see all the processes with our own eyes, as they're well-organised."

"I'm convinced that, over the next few years, we'll be able to maintain contacts between ministries and specialists, which could be beneficial to both sides. We should work on this in order to find mutually beneficial areas of bilateral co-operation



Mr. Murillo

and to implement concrete projects," remarked Mr. Murillo.

The President's meeting with Mr. Murillo was so friendly that it seemed hard to believe that four months had passed since their last meeting, in June, in Havana. The October meeting in Minsk tackled the same issues, from intentions discussed regarding several promising areas of interaction. Of course, interstate dialogue is continuous, with details polished at governmental and ministerial level. Nevertheless, the Cuban visit has helped to reinforce all previous agreements.

## Promptly agreeing all questions

The Presidential Press Service has announced that the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, has had a telephone conversation with the President of Israel, Shimon Peres, discussing the development of bilateral relations. It states: "The Belarusian Head of State renewed his invitation for the President of Israel to visit Belarus, timing the visit to coincide with the Israeli leader's jubilee anniversary next year." Mr. Peres thanked the Belarusian President for medical aid in the treatment of a high-ranking representative of Israel.

## Foundations laid for future trade liaisons

By Vitaly Khitrov

### Foreign Ministries of Belarus and Ethiopia sign co-operative protocol

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus has joined that of Ethiopia in signing a protocol on co-operation. By order of both our foreign ministries, the documents were signed in Moscow by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Russia, H.E. Mr. Igor Petrishenko, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia to Russia, with concurrent accreditation in Belarus, H.E. Mr. Kasahun Dender Melese.

Mr. Petrishenko stressed that the protocol is the first in Belarusian-Ethiopian relations, laying the practical foundation for legislation governing bilateral liaisons — especially regarding trade. He noted that Belarus and Ethiopia have been implementing a major project since 1984: assembly production by the Minsk Tractor Plant in Ethiopia. "This enterprise should be a platform for delivering not only tractors, but a whole range of hinged equipment across the entire African continent," said Mr. Petrishenko.

He added that he has discussed the possibility of training Ethiopian scientific staff and students in Belarus. As he told the Ethiopian Ambassador, just five Ethiopian students are currently studying here, although they numbered hundreds in Soviet times. Clearly, co-operation in this sphere could be greatly extended.

The Ambassador of Ethiopia noted that political co-operation between our two countries has a long history. "We hope that, in the near future, besides our protocol on co-operative foreign policy agreements, we can sign similar agreements for trade, science, education and other areas," stressed Kasahun Dender Melese. He explained that over 70 percent of his country's population is engaged in farming. "Our goal is to increase productivity in this sector," he emphasised. "Minsk Tractor Plant vehicles suit us in their specification and price; we're fully satisfied." He notes that Ethiopia is keen to expand assembly production of Belarusian tractors, since it will promote the development not only of Ethiopia, but of all countries in the region.

# Parliamentary traditions gain new impulse

Alexander Lukashenko believes that the Council of the Republic is an essential element within the Belarusian governmental power system

By Mikhail Viktorov

At the first session of the National Assembly of the fifth calling, he announced, "The Council of the Republic plays an important role in the political system of our country. It's no secret that some of our detractors call the Council of the Republic an excessive element or artificial superstructure in the system of Belarusian authority," said the head of state. "However, life itself has shown that only by acting together can our Chambers establish effective Parliament, serving the people and protecting stability, peace and tranquillity in society. Moreover, the Council of the Republic, together with the President, makes the most important decisions at the most critical moments. You should remember this. This says everything," said Mr. Lukashenko.

The President noted that the Council of the Republic is like a political-legal filter, assessing draft laws already passed by the deputies. "This is extremely important: essential in fact," stressed Mr. Lukashenko. "From real life experience, we need to look at whether a law will bring real benefit to people and to the country, if it is workable and if it will actually be used."

According to Mr. Lukashenko, about 50 draft laws are still to be passed by the House of Representatives. "So, we should be working on this from the first day," he told the senators. The head of state sees economic production and social policy as being among our legislative priorities and would like to see the newly elected Parliament continue working on ratifying international treaties within

the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space. He also believes that the Council of the Republic should remember the regions.

Senators' work on developing international relations and inter-parliamentary contacts is also important. "Energetic and thoughtful international contacts by Parliament can and should help promote our products and



At the first session of the Council of the Republic

attract investments while strengthening the image of Belarus. Work with those who respect our nation and recognise our sovereignty, being ready to build relations with us on equal terms," said the President. "This covers most countries in the world: brotherly Russia, great China, India, the highly developed countries of East Asia, the rich Arab countries, Venezuela, the whole of Latin America and Africa."

Mr. Lukashenko noted that the Council of the Republic, together with regional councils, can make a significant contribution to establishing direct links between the Belarusian regions and those of the Russian

Federation. "Your personal contacts with foreign colleagues are vital for active and successful parliamentary co-operation," he added. He also believes that it is necessary to support local self-government. "You are elected to local councils so should feel the regions' concerns most acutely. How are the regions, districts, agro-towns, townships and villages living and

developing? Local, or territorial, self-government is a key theme which I'd like to see given proper attention."

"The situation in the country has been stable and manageable for a long time. Our society has matured enough to develop further, including stimulating and supporting citizens' local initiatives. Indeed, local government is the basis of democracy," Mr. Lukashenko asserts. "You are responsible for local self-government development, controlling its operation and making suggestions on how to improve it."

"Senators' work should be visible in the regions. Modern information technologies provide great opportu-



New building for the Council of the Republic