

# Demography inspires optimism

Birth rate and life expectancy rose last year

By Yury Chernyakevich

It's no secret that the population of developed countries grows older every year; it's a trend seen in the USA, Japan, and Europe. The European birth rate is dropping catastrophically; meanwhile, more migrants from developing countries across Asia and Africa enter each year. Some would say that this fall in the birth rate is a direct result of women's emancipation and greater independence. Belarus is also following this global trend, having seen a decline in the birth rate since the early 1990s.

As to whether it's possible to reverse this tendency, some would say it's unlikely. However, optimists remain positive, noting last year's rise in the number of babies born (as reported by the National Statistical Committee).

At the NSC's recent press conference, the demographic situation from the last decade was presented, showing that cities are home to more residents than ever and that downward demograph-

ic trends may have been turned around. "Last year, seven thousand more children were born in Belarus than in the previous year. We believe that this trend will continue in the future," stated Irina Shestakova, the Director General of the Demographic Statistics Department of the National Statistical Committee. In fact, it's becoming more common for couples to have second, third and, even, fourth children; it's a trend observed over the past few years.

Pleasingly, the average lifespan of Belarusians is increasing, standing at over 72 years as of last year — rivalling rates in the CIS and elsewhere worldwide. Everything points to the stabilisation of Belarus' demographic situation, as acknowledged by foreign experts. The fall in infant mortality and higher life expectancy have significantly affected Belarus' position in the UN's Human Development Index (from 65th to 50th place, among 187 countries). Maintaining these positive trends is now essential.



More young families appearing in Belarus

## Studies above all for queen

By Yuliana Leonovich

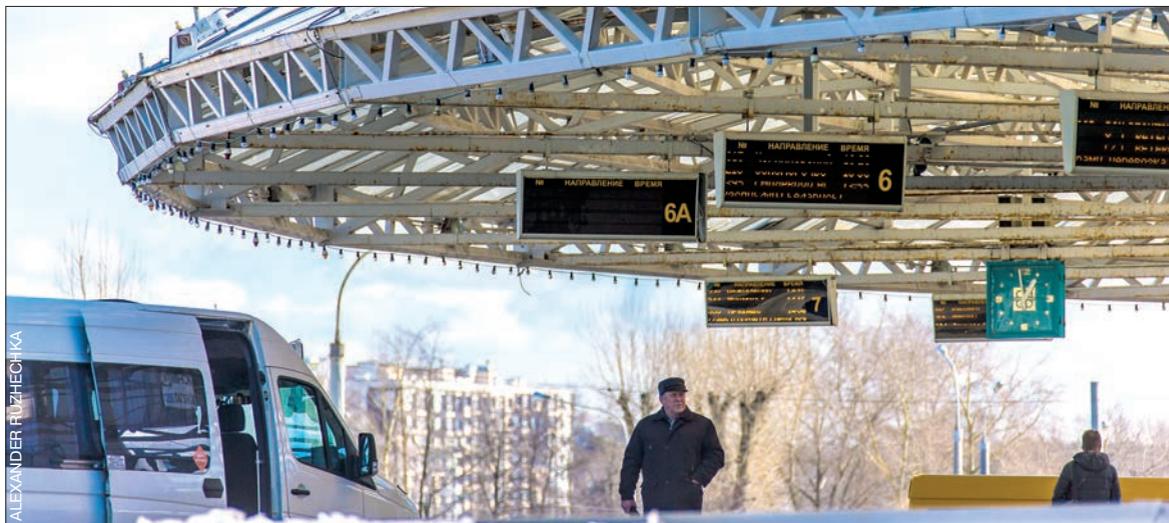
**Most higher education institutions in Belarus now organise contests to find the most beautiful, charming and talented female students. According to the organisers of the Spring Queen International Intercollegiate Contest, grace and erudition are more important than body shape.**

The final round of the national contest was hosted by the National Library, as usual, with 16 students taking part, one from each university. Questions posed to the young ladies related to the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship and the Newton-Leibniz formula. After four rounds, the jury chose two beauties to represent Belarus on the international stage. The first runner-up is Anastasia Perevoznikova, from the Belarusian State Academy of Music, while Darya Shmanay takes the main crown. A student of the Belarusian State Economic University, Dasha already holds the title of Miss BSEU. She notes calmly, "The euphoria of owning another title has already settled down; I don't plan to become a model as, next year, I'll graduate from university. Studies and future employment are my main focus."

The international *Spring Queen-2013* Contest will see entrants gather from higher education institutions across the CIS, hosted by the Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre on May 3rd.

## Station in standby mode

Initially, some liked this project while others didn't. Today, Moskovsky bus station remains an object of contention, for different reasons.



Multi-purpose complex to appear at Moskovsky bus station

Designed like a circus tent or flying saucer back in 1989, work stalled on the collapse of the USSR, due to lack of funding. However, it was finally completed in 1999, receiving a number of awards: a grand prix at a national contest recognising the best construction of the year; a silver medal at the International Architecture Contest in Moscow; and a diploma from the Ministry for Architecture and Construction.

About a year ago, rumours began to fly that the bus station might be demolished, making way for an office high-rise for Gazprom. The Minister for Architecture and Construction,

Nikolai Ladutko, contemplated relocating the station or passing its functions to other transport structures; few passengers used the bus station, which was not well placed.

In early 2013, new information appeared, as Gazprom and Beltransgas met leading architectural companies to choose a designer for their multi-functional complex, being built near Filimonov Street and Nezavisimosti Avenue. The high-rise is to accommodate Gazprom offices, a congress-centre, a hotel, a clinic and a fitness centre, as well as a child development centre and some shops. Beltransgas notes that

the designers will make suggestions regarding demolition or preservation of the old bus station.

Minsk's Chief Architect, Alexander Petrov, tells us, "Beltransgas is conducting an international contest, inviting major American and European architectural companies to take part. Demolition of the bus station is not vital." Already, Internet forums are seeing much public discussion on the subject but it's too early to draw conclusions, since the original award-winning site could still find a place in the final plan, being revived with a 21st century purpose.

## Belarusian to fight for Russian Award

By Yevgeny Pimenov

**Belarusian writer Mikhail Shelekhov on Russian Award shortlist**

The shortlist was recently announced in Moscow, at a press conference held by the literary award's founders. Mikhail Shelekhov is nominated for the Russian Award for 'Short Prose' for his *A Flood Well*. *Oriental Novels* collection.

In all, nine Russian language writers of prose and poetry, from eight countries, are on the short

list: from Belarus, Australia, the UK, Germany, Denmark, Kyrgyzstan, the USA and Ukraine. The contest's three nominations are 'Short Prose', 'Longer Prose' and 'Poetry' — each with three nominees. These were selected from an original list of 33 nominees, put forward from 15 countries.

The international *Russian Award* literary contest was founded in 2005, by the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre, and is considered to be among the top five Russian literary awards for prestige.

## New life for old tower

Museum of water to be created for Novogrudok residents and guests

The old water tower in the district centre is attracting as many tourists as the ruins of any medieval castle, rising majestically above the city. Although it has no historical or architectural value, Novogrudok residents are keen to preserve the building as a landmark on their horizon and even hope to build an observation deck, to allow tourists to enjoy the beautiful panorama of the ancient city.

World Water Day is inspiring the idea of creating a museum of water in the tower, explains Lyud-

mila Fedorchuk, the Chief Specialist of the Novogrudok District Executive Committee's Tourism Department. She tells us, "With the appearance of a new cultural facility, our city will become even more attractive to tourists. For example, right at the entrance, we plan to place a map on the floor, showing all local waterways: 47 rivers and streams, and 20 lakes. The local authorities are to help with funding and a special commission will check the technical condition of the water tower."