

# March set to break record

Belarus significantly augments potash fertiliser sales from early 2014

By Vladimir Khromov

"I think we've managed to reverse the situation and restore our sales. However, currency inflow is not yet sufficient, despite production and sales progressing — especially in March," Alexander Lukashenko noted, at a meeting devoted to the efficient functioning of Belarus' potash industry. The President added that 2013 had been difficult due to the owners and managers of Uralkali taking 'an indecent position' which brought great losses for the Belarusian company and Uralkali, as well

as crashing the international potash market.

Mr. Lukashenko stated that, from October-December 2013, export volumes of potash fertilisers rose by 13 percent (on the same period of 2012). He emphasised that an even greater increase was recorded between January and February 2014: 25 percent (in comparison to the same period of 2013). "We think March will be a record high in terms of production and sale," he added.

Nevertheless, the President is concerned that the inflow of foreign currency

is yet to be restored. Mr. Lukashenko demanded a report on measures to increase foreign exchange earnings and raise distribution efficiency, and asked whether an optimal sales strategy had been developed (taking into account current trends on the international potash market). He also asked how Belarus' pricing policy is calculated and how positions on key markets are being consolidated — particularly in Brazil, India and China.

The meeting aimed to analyse the present situation on the potash industry

and to elaborate measures to enhance efficiency. Mr. Lukashenko asserted, "We should remember that the potash industry is one of the country's largest currency earners for the budget." The President is keen to gain a wider understanding of the issues currently facing the Belarusian potash industry as a new company is being set up, with a new deposit to develop. He underlined that Belarus will not be establishing joint ventures in Moscow to sell potash fertilisers, despite reports in the media of such a move to 'restore a joint



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Belaruskali wins markets

sales company and establish a new Moscow-based firm." He explained, "I'm happy to assert that this is a lie! I heard this news from the media and wish to stress that no such joint company will be established in Moscow." He admitted that Belarus is ready for

talks — primarily, with Russian colleagues. "We're ready to restore co-operation — as in the past. However, if any company of the kind is ever set up, it will be located in Minsk. We'll found no foreign ventures, having learnt from bitter experience."

## Neighbours have much to discuss

By Vladimir Khromov

**Belarus' Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei meets Lithuanian counterpart, Linas Linkevičius, to discuss bilateral relations: co-operation in the political, trade-economic, investment, and transport-transit spheres, as well as relations between Belarus and the European Union**

Mr. Makei stressed to Mr. Linkevičius that relations between Belarus and the European Union are only likely to improve if the EU lifts its current sanctions against particular Belarusian citizens and companies. Regarding the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power station, the two ministers agreed that informal bilateral consultations of experts are needed, to encourage information sharing. Meanwhile, the Belarusian-Lithuanian border traffic agreement is reliant on the necessary infrastructure being set up at checkpoints and Mr. Makei added that EU participation in this matter is welcome.

Speaking to the Lithuanian Minister for Transport and Communications, Rimantas Sinkevičius, and the Vice Minister for Economics, Kestutis Trečiokas, Mr. Makei focused on issues of bilateral co-operation in the trade-economic and transport-transit sectors, alongside issues relating to the Belarusian-Lithuanian border.

Mr. Makei also met representatives of Lithuanian business circles, discussing possible investment projects for Lithuanian business in Belarus — including in the agro-industrial sector, the woodworking industry, alternative energy and education.

# Guests are always welcome

Belarus this year heralds the Year of Hospitality, bringing to the fore our national character and in line with the expected arrival of a great many tourists for the Ice Hockey World Championship, as well as for events marking the 70th anniversary of Belarus' liberation from Fascist invaders and the centenary of the beginning of the First World War



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Minsk sightseeing bus already escorting tourists around the capital

By Anton Kostyukevich

The Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism, Cheslav Shulga, notes that military-historical tourism is to become a focus, being of interest to around 8 percent of Western Europe-

ans. Of course, Belarus was twice the arena of military conflict last century. In addition, Belarus has been supporting the growth of rural and agrotourism, as well as sports tourism. For the Ice Hockey World Championship, TsentrKurort tour operator has devel-

oped more than 40 new excursions with wide appeal.

In advance of the main sporting event in Minsk, more than 1,300 guides and translators have been trained, with several hundred guides also improving their knowledge of foreign languages

— including Chinese and Arabic. The Ministry for Sports and Tourism's *Attitudes to Tourists* campaign has a long-term objective of changing public feeling towards visitors. Mr. Shulga is keen for people to stop viewing them as something extra-ordinary. Rather, he would like citizens to realise that in offering a warm welcome, the country, and individuals, can gain considerable material benefit. The initiative includes teaching owners of agro-estates foreign languages, and an advertising campaign aimed at popularising tourism.

The campaign also aims to encourage restaurateurs to offer national dishes on their menus, so that visitors gain a true flavour of our cuisine. Meanwhile, waiters and waitresses would naturally benefit from being able to understand colloquial English. Another step forward would be the translation of menus into English. Ever more shops are offering tax-free shopping for foreign guests: over 150 shops should be doing so by the end of 2014.

Various cultural events are to take place during the Ice World Hockey Championship. *Jazz Saturdays* are already proving popular with Minsk residents, and 'a town of craftsmanship' fair is organised regularly, attracting craftsmen from across the whole country. The *Vyasnovy Buket* (Spring Bouquet) festival-fair is also proving a great hit.

## More vacancies than job seekers

By Sergey Smirnov

**Level of employment among working aged residents of Belarus is higher than in Russia, Ukraine or Poland**

"The level of employment among those of working age is about 80 percent in Belarus, compared to almost 65 percent in Russia, 67 percent in Ukraine and 57 percent in Poland," notes the Minister for Labour and Social Protection, Marianna Shchetkina. She emphasises that there is high demand for labour and a low level of registered unemployment, with

double the vacancies compared to those seeking employment. In Minsk, there are 11 jobs per job-seeker, with about 75 percent being for non-professional occupations — in the spheres of manufacturing, building, agriculture, transport and communications.

Ms. Shchetkina stresses that labour is gradually moving from the industrial sphere into services and that the number of individual entrepreneurs is growing: by 16,000 last year. "Employers should realise that they need to attract and encourage highly-skilled personnel by, first of all, offering



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better salaries, while creating conditions for professional and career growth, granting a social package and creating favourable micro-environment."

## As never seen previously

**Belarus among top five most popular Internet search enquiries in the USA**

Against the background of our successes at the winter Sochi Games, interest in Belarus has been escalating abroad, bringing a huge surge in Google searches. According to its Trends Service, 'Belarus' has been ranking among the top five most popular enquiries within the USA.

As of February 17th, first place among search terms was 'President's Day' (celebrated on the third Monday of February), followed by the American actor, comic, singer, musician and TV host Jimmy Fallon. Third position was occupied by basketball player Michael Jordan, followed by American solo figure skater Tonya Harding.

According to news agencies, in Russia, top place in the Google Trends Service on February 17th belonged to Olympic champion Darya Domracheva, with a similar result observed in Ukraine.