

Sincere and friendly holiday comes to every house

More than a thousand children from Chernobyl-affected areas take part in 20th *Christmas Tree — Our Children* charity programme at Minsk's Holy Spirit Cathedral and at Belarusian State Circus

By Yelena Velikhova

Minsk recently hosted children from the Gomel and Mogilev regions, from the Novozybkov and Surazh districts of the Bryansk Region and from Shumyachi, in the Smolensk Region of Russia. The youngsters were joined by foster children from Ivenets' Boarding School for Physically Disabled Children, as well as those from creative groups.

The Cathedral Children's Choir and *Ternichka* Choir from Minsk's Palace of Culture joined the Railwaymen Sports Choir in singing at the holy mass hosted by Holy Spirit Cathedral, before the young guests set off for entertainment at the Belarusian State Circus.

The *Christmas Tree — Our Children* project was organised, as ever, by the Department for Mitigating the Consequences of the Catastrophe at Chernobyl, alongside the Diocesan Administration of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, with support from the Ministry of Education and, for the first time, the Belarusian Peace Foundation. Over 40,000 boys and girls from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have taken part over the years.



Holiday of happiness and smiles under ancient walls of Holy Spirit Cathedral

Visa to detention

By Katerina Charovskaya

Border guards recently detected three Vietnamese people attempting to cross near Budenovka checkpoint (500m from the Lithuanian border, near the village of Sailyuki in the Oshmyany District)

Following with a tracker dog in the opposite direction, the guards detected another five Vietnamese without documents. Under questioning, it was revealed that the men had been brought to Moscow just before the New Year, with promises of being taken to the EU, in return for advance payment. They surrendered their Vietnamese passports to the unidentified criminals, being told that they would receive Schengen visas. Several days later, the men were then taken to the border by bus and instructed to walk on foot through the forest, to meet with those waiting to help them cross into Germany.

The Deputy Head of Smorgon's border squad, Alexander Kolobov, is convinced that the swindlers had no plans to help the men cross the border, saying, "It's quite possible that they failed to return the passports, to create the illusion that the necessary visas would be present. It's hardly possible to imagine that someone would dare to fix an appointment for eight illegal migrants close to the border and further help them cross two borders."

New rules for cabin baggage

As Sochi Olympic Games approach, extraordinary safety measures are introduced in Russia

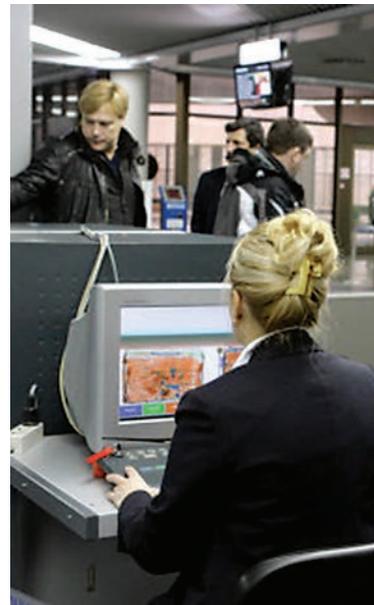
By Artem Vasev

Until 21st March, passengers travelling by air within Russia will experience a total ban on liquids in the cabin of aircraft. Rosaviatsiya Federal Air Transport Agency explains that terrorists may use explosives and strong oxidizers, which appear indistinguishable from water. In 2006, three British passport-holders attempted to blow up a plane in this manner, using 'liquid air bombs'. This inspired a worldwide change to policy on the volume of liquids carried by passengers into the cabin: no more than 100ml per bottle. The restriction covers baby food and medicine (other than that prescribed by a doctor). Of course, Belarus also implemented the restriction.

As noted by Sheremetyevo airport officials, the usual rules apply to those travelling into Russia from outside. Minsk National Airport PR representative Tatiana Minchenko confirms, "As before, on departure from Belarus to Russia, as from other countries, it will be possible to take up to 100ml of liquid on-board."

The new rules from Rosaviatsiya have caused questions regard-

ing baby milk and the possibility of bringing such items as nasal drops. Airlines are offering boiled water, to prepare dried milk mixes, but medicines will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Airport representatives assure us that they will do their



Examination at Minsk Airport

best to accommodate passengers. Unsurprisingly, Sheremetyevo and Vnukovo social network sites have been inundated by questions from concerned passengers.

Some passengers are simply concerned at being offered enough drinks on-board, since air travel causes us to become more thirsty than usual. Svetlana Kalenik, of the Division for Transport, Certification, Registration and Foreign Economic Relations of the Aviation Department at the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Belarus, urges us not to panic. She notes that flight attendants will be on hand to bring water to passengers but that unnecessary items — such as nail varnish, perfume and other cosmetics — really need to be stowed in the hold (or applied before flight). As ever, alcohol will be forbidden. She believes that the new requirements will not cause too much disruption.

Svetlana also emphasises that it should take no longer to travel through security at the airport, since machines were previously used to check for liquids anyway. It is yet undecided as to whether similar safety measures will be introduced for Belarus' hosting of the World Ice Hockey Championship in May. However, as the saying goes, 'it's necessary to blow on water, to avoid burning our fingers.'

Monitoring helps avoid mistakes

By Sergey Kulyagin

Central Election Commission to inform public about elections to local councils primarily through Internet

"We plan to primarily use the Internet to cover the election campaigns of local councils: electronic media and official websites of executive committees. Without offence to the printed media, most of the active civil population in Belarus seeks out information online, so this has determined our choice," notes Lidia Yermoshina, the Chair of the Central Election Commission.

Ms. Yermoshina notes that, at the start of the last election campaign, not all regional websites worked responsibly or promptly, with websites showing out-of-date information in a number of regions after the New Year. Only Minsk and the Vitebsk Region kept their data current. The latest monitoring of Internet resources shows that the situation has improved, allowing the Central Election Commission to avoid criticism of coverage of the election campaign and public information dissemination.

International experience is useful

Belarus to receive around 2m Euros to combat illegal migration, in line with EU/UNDP project

In early December, Smorgon hosted a conference entitled *Supporting the Republic of Belarus in Solving Problems of Irregular Migration and Protecting the Human Rights of Vulnerable Migrant Groups*: feeding into an EU/UNDP international technical aid project. The aim is to help the State Border Committee of Belarus in combating illegal migration, with the project running until 2016. Over this time, foreign organisations will provide support to improve our system of recruiting and training personnel, in line with EU practice. Moreover, the organisation and technical potential of the State Border Committee's Psychological Assistance Service will be improved. Mechanisms are to be developed to ensure legal and social assistance to victims of illegal migration.

Flights from Ho Chi Minh City to Sidney

Belavia National Airline notes significant increase in number of passengers

In 2013, Belavia transported 1,600,000 passengers: up 25 percent on 2012. August saw the airline carry its millionth passenger and, by November 24th, the number had reached 1,500,000. In 2013, six new routes were launched, bringing Belavia's network to 43 regular routes to almost 30 countries across Europe, CIS and Asia. At the end of May of the last year, the airline signed an agreement with Etihad Airways, resulting in joint flights to Abu Dhabi, Sidney, Melbourne and Ho Chi Minh City.