

Source of spiritual wealth still rich

Palace of the Republic hosts solemn ceremony of presentation of awards 'For Spiritual Revival' and 'Belarusian Sport Olympus' and for people of culture and art



BELTA

Presidential Award 'For Spiritual Revival' and Special Awards of the President to people of culture and art presented during solemn ceremony

By Vasily Kharitonov

The awards are a wonderful Christmas tradition, congratulating our outstanding countrymen on their devotion to the spiritual revival of our Fatherland. Each one recognised has contributed to society, strengthening its uniform spirit and promoting patriotic awareness. They glorify our country and those who live in it.

Naturally, the nation appreciates such work, inspiring these special awards, presented by the President on stage, joined by the Patriarch Exarch of All Belarus. The tradition began at the time of Metropolitan Filaret, of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, and now continues under Metropolitan Pavel.

Early in his speech, the President mentioned the appointment of the new head of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, saying, "The Orthodox Church is a spiritual pillar of society and the only confession with which our Government has concluded a co-operative agreement. It is vital that a wise, experienced person, who has seen the world, takes the role of new primate of the Belarusian Orthodox Church."

The cream of our intelligentsia gathered for the event at which Mr. Lukashenko noted the importance of eternal principles in defining our identity and our future path. He urged all those present, and all citizens of Belarus, with his short yet poignant speech,

"Quite often, we hear that morality is being undermined by 'wise egoism', since personal benefit and financial interest seem to lie at the heart of people's motivation. However, our material welfare is reliant on a strong spiritual base. We reject the idea of giving up our cultural identity for the sake of globalisation.

Europe is dominated by supporters of neo-liberal morals yet, in the East, in particular in China, we see progress based on modern reverence for past legacies. In Russia, the aspiration to move forward is gaining pace, built upon experience and traditions. The destiny of Belarusian people, like a pendulum, has always oscillated between these two geopolitical poles: the East and the West. Our culture has traces of influence from Russian, Western European and Asian cultures.

We have always preserved our identity — in some respects more, in others less. Nevertheless, the world knows us as Belarusians, which is worth a great deal. The time has come to define our uniting ethos: an idea in which all can believe — from academicians to agricultural workers. It must be based on patriotism and a readiness to protect our heritage. These feelings are not transferred at a genetic level so they need to be nurtured through an interest in history and the culture of our people.

Our history has never been a beautiful fairy tale. Belarus stands at the crossroads

of European and Asian roads, which has brought war and intervention. However, no matter how hard others have tried, nobody has enslaved the courageous people who live on this plot of land. Thanks to the belief and spiritual force of our ancestors, Belarus has risen from the ruins, like the Phoenix from the ashes. Our heroic heritage must be the basis for the education of our citizens. Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belarus and the Great Victory should be a powerful stimulus for lifting our patriotic spirit.

technological and cultural expertise built in the Soviet years — and our hard work in creating our sovereign Belarusian state.

We should not ignore the positive elements of this heritage, which can strengthen the spiritual platform of the state. Our national culture cannot be understood simplistically; it is more than folklore or works written in the Belarusian language. Our culture is many-sided, uniting the spiritual experience of various nations and confessions and all art forms through which talented

to blame the authorities. The authorities and intelligentsia are equally responsible for the country and the state is always ready to support your initiatives when they aim to improve life in all its aspects.

Today, we present the main awards of the year, which reflect two forms of culture: spiritual and physical. Among the winners of our awards 'For Spiritual Revival' and our special awards are clerics, culture workers, doctors, social workers and representatives of charitable organisations. The public is sincerely grateful to all of you for your sincere enthusiasm and service to your neighbours. We also congratulate our outstanding coaches: the winners of the 'Belarusian Sport Olympus' award. Their ability to nurture champions is a contribution to the spiritual strength of our people."

After Alexander Lukashenko warmly congratulated all laureates, wishing them inspiration in new achievements, we then chatted with some of those awarded. The Head Doctor of the Republican Children's Hospital of Medical Rehabilitation, Galina Rodionova, commends her colleagues, saying, "The whole team has earned this success; we rely on our brothers-in-arms. After all, the hospital tackles serious challenges: oncological, nephrological and neurological. Our patients are young but have doctors, psychologists, teachers and physiotherapists helping them overcome illness, physically and

psychologically. When we see success, it's the best reward."

The Chairman of the Belarusian Children's Fund, Vladimir Lipsky, considers the award to be the highest sign of appreciation, adding, "The award shows appreciation for my life's work. The word 'children' has been written in my heart with a capital letter for 35 years. I had no real childhood of my own, being born just before the war, in 1940. The Fascists burnt my village, so our family lived in the forest. My mother could only sign her name, but taught us to love and protect our Motherland, and to work and respect our elders. Thanks to her, I understood that I wanted to devote my life to children. In creating their world, we create the future."

Olga Chemodanova, the Head of Juvenile Inspection at the Department of Internal Affairs (Minsk District Executive Committee), admits that the award was unexpected. She tells us, "All my life, since the first day after university graduation, I've worked in one sphere. I never believed I'd one day join the laureates of such a prestigious award. For me, this is a historical moment not only inspiring me to continue my self-realisation but spurring me to achieve more and do even better, transferring my experience to others, with dignity."

We only can wish all winners new achievements. Their work is a noble example to us all.

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Our history is not limited to the events of those war years. Think of Polotsk and Turov principalities, from whence shot the buds of our statehood and culture. We have the works and thoughts of such enlighteners as Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya and Kirill Turovsky, and Frantsisk Skorina and Nikolay Gusovsky, as well as modern founders of Belarusian culture, like Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas.

Meanwhile, we have the

people express themselves. We have no right to ignore this or to throw away the legacy of former generations.

Our culture should embrace enlightenment and education. It is necessary to develop the humanitarian traditions of domestic art, and to support our national art schools. As Vladimir Korotkevich said: 'Each person carries their own sky within.'

It serves no purpose to lament the lack of an ideal or