

Olympic triumphs are among the nation's greatest asset

By Vasily Kharitonov

The President has underlined that Belarus has earned international recognition thanks to its 22nd Winter Olympics medallists, who performed so magnificently in Sochi. "Millions of people and millions of Belarusians held their breath, watching them at the Olympics. The nation enjoyed unforgettable moments of patriotic uplift and unity. Olympic heroes are a precious asset and objects of pride for any nation, including ours," Mr. Lukashenko asserted, speaking at the ceremony.

The medals, five of which are gold, are an outstanding sporting achievement and a first for Belarus. Our country occupied a worthy place among the top ten in the medal standings, leaving behind many traditional favourites. "The entire world had cause to speak about Belarus, which made a huge contribution to improving our country's image and its prestige as a sporting nation and sports power," the President noted.

Mr. Lukashenko thanked the Belarusian Olympians for their courage and commitment, presenting high state awards to the champions and their coaches: in recognition of their professionalism, outstanding achievements and significant personal contribution to the successful performance of the Belarusian national team at the Olympic Games in Sochi.

"Your achievements deserve the highest awards," emphasised the Belarusian leader. "On the way to the medals podium, you endured thick and thin. A more

significant test lies ahead however: the test of fame and success."

Mr. Lukashenko asked that the winners bear their championship titles with dignity and selflessness and that they remain committed to sport. He requested that they continue to be modest, sincere and open, saying, "Let your example guide those entering the sporting field; help them become fearless and determined, training through fatigue and the pain of overworked muscles — to compete fairly and win beautifully. Then, they will have their moment to glorify Belarus."

Mr. Lukashenko bestowed the Hero of Belarus star upon triple Olympic champion Darya Domracheva, stressing, "Words cannot describe our feelings watching Darya Domracheva's performances. Power, speed, stamina, courage and marksmanship fused into triumph by a great athlete: a triumph previously unseen on the planet."

"In winning three gold medals at a single Olympics, you, Dasha, became a legend of world sport. Today, your sporting and civil deed is honoured with the highest award of the country: Hero of Belarus. We bestow very few," stressed Mr. Lukashenko.

Mr. Lukashenko conferred a 3rd Degree Order of the Fatherland upon Olympic champions

Anton Kushnir and Alla Tsuper, as well as upon bronze medallist Nadezhda Skardino.

The Head of State noted that spectators and fans vigorously supported the aerial skiing

team, whose sport is extremely challenging, with no room for error. He commented, "A friend and colleague recently told me 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. Both of them [Alla Tsuper and Anton Kushnir] ventured and didn't leave their rivals with a chance. They left behind athletes from legendary countries, where freestyle and aerial skiing are at the highest level — such as Canada, the USA, the People's Republic of China and Australia. Our athletes were victorious: not only because they ventured and did incredible things but because they worked hard and were motivated. They believed in their success and — most importantly — had the desire to win."

Mr. Lukashenko underlined that the medals won by aerialists Alla Tsuper and Anton Kushnir are of special value. "Your jumps were unique in terms of elegance and technique. Your victories will forever be part of sporting history: in Belarus and globally."

Speaking of bronze medallist Nadezhda Skardino, Mr. Lukashenko noted that her success was the result of faith and hard work. "Nadya, you didn't give up in the face of difficulties; I saw this. You bit the bullet, calmed your nerves and moved forward — no matter what. You won the medal and once again confirmed the strength of Belarusian women's biathlon," said the President, addressing Nadezhda.

The Head of State underlined that Orders of the Fatherland acknowledge services rendered by athletes to their Homeland. He also pointed out the courage and determination of Sergey Dolidovich, who performed well against the most famous athletes, to take fifth place. The President expressed his opinion that Sergey could also have won a

style team head coach Nikolay Kozeko, who has raised a whole constellation of champions, was shown special gratitude, being given a 1st Degree Order of the Fatherland. This makes him a full cavalier of this supreme state award of Belarus.

Mr. Lukashenko declared, "We must also remember and thank the parents and coaches who were the first mentors of our Olympians. Without your love for your children and

to be discussed at a traditional working session reviewing the results of the Olympic Games. "All heads of federations and government members should be ready for this," warned the President. "Olympic results not only make us happy but provide food for thought."

Mr. Lukashenko reminded that, very soon, Belarus will be hosting the IIHF World Championship and that there are high hopes for the Belarusian team doing well. "These days, hockey players do not merely compete: they fight for victory. If you can't play hockey or you aren't ready, it's better not to take part in competition matches," he announced, underlining that Belarusian athletes would be taking part in many important international tournaments in future. He expressed his hope that they would push themselves to the limit and win more medals.

During the ceremony, triple Olympic champion Darya Domracheva solemnly handed over the national team's flag from the 22nd Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, presenting it to the Head of State. Mr. Lukashenko handed it to students from the specialised Olympic reserve school, which trains young gymnasts and freestyle skiers. Later, it will find a home at the Olympic Glory Museum.

Figures of culture and arts attending the solemn ceremony performed for the audience, concluding with a joint rendition of the State Anthem of the Republic of Belarus.

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Nikolay Kozeko

medal. At the ceremony, Mr. Dolidovich was awarded the Order of Honour.

The President especially recognised the contribution of coaches and other specialists in achieving victories at the Games. According to the Head of State, the coaches of the national aerial and biathlon teams, as well as other specialists, were responsible in helping secure Olympic medals, through their talent and hard work.

National freestyle

your belief in their talent, there would be no champions today. Their victories are your victories; you have every right to take pride in them. Servicemen, medics and administrators — everyone who has helped our athletes — deserves the kindest words. Your enormous contribution to preparing Olympic winners and medallists cannot be overestimated. I thank everyone who has contributed to the sporting success of Belarus."

Nevertheless, Mr. Lukashenko drew attention to the need to remember the problems facing sport, which are



Anton Kushnir, Darya Domracheva, Nadezhda Skardino and Alla Tsuper receive state awards for their Olympic Game victories