

Mood of evening capital

Fanciful game of light and shadow transfigures festive city

By Polina Lokhmanenko

On Christmas eve, I wonder who is responsible for the festive pre-New Year mood of the city's residents. Shops large and small are illuminated like rainbows, competing to show their products in the most attractive light to buyers.

Gradually, the city is gaining new features and its appearance over Christmas is impressive. Avenues and streets are lit in an artful manner, while trees decorated with bright fairy lights are becoming commonplace; parks are full of lit characters from New Year fairy tales.

Staff from Minsk-Reklama city advertising agency tell me that the demands placed on the capital's lighting are simple: everything should be festive, beautiful and create a good mood. The agency has created a fairy tale on the city's streets, paid for from Minsk's budget and fulfilling their own artistic potential.

Some novelties have been applied this year, in addition to traditional decorations. For example, lit fountains have been launched in many Belarusian cities, in addition



New Year and Christmas illuminations brightly characterise the Belarusian capital these days

to the usual luminescent fairy lights. This bright and attractive decorative element is common in Europe

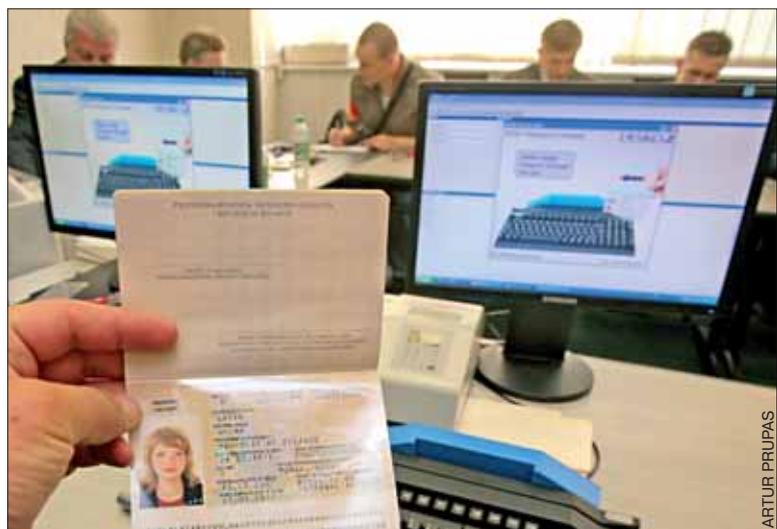
but has been a surprise for Belarus. Moreover, this year, the capital has another site in which to celebrate

Christmas and organise mass New Year celebrations: near Minsk-Arena, the ultra-modern sports com-

plex. The latter has already become a city sight, with many Minskites gathering to enjoy its unique lighting.

No scheduled date fixed to introduce biometric passports

First biometric documents to appear in Belarus in 2012



Corresponding services work from samples of biometric passports

By Vasily Malashenkov

The Council of Ministers has approved a plan of action for 2011 regarding the introduction of biometric documents, with major work to be performed this year. In 2012, the Interior Ministry plans to issue the first biometric passports. However, these will actually be documents for refugees and stateless persons.

The exact date for launching biometric passports for Belarusian citizens hasn't yet been specified but Alexey Begun, the Head of the Interior Ministry's Citizenship and Migration Department, notes that world technologies in this area are

constantly improving, while costs are reduced. The Interior Ministry is continuing its work to introduce such passports, while studying world experience. Representatives of many countries are sharing their experience with our state.

Mr. Begun also stresses that biometric passports won't be issued to every citizen in Belarus automatically, only given on application, for travel abroad. Within the country, traditional passports will continue to be used as a form of identification. Moreover, he explains that no single standard for biometric passports has been established worldwide; Belarus plans to use fingerprints for their issue.

Mitigating consequences

65th session of UN General Assembly discusses co-ordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimise consequences of Chernobyl disaster

The Deputy Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations, Zoya Kolontai, has reminded delegates of the need to minimise the consequences of one of the largest man-made disasters in human history, which occurred at the Chernobyl nu-

clear power plant. She thanked everyone for their broad support regarding the draft resolution *Strengthening International Co-operation and Co-ordination of Efforts to Study, Mitigate and Minimise the Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster*.

She stressed that the resolution aims to provide favourable conditions for further measures to restore affected areas, with Belarus being one of the worst affected countries from the accident. "Belarus received two-thirds of

the radioactive fallout, with 23 percent of its territory contaminated. Belarus' economic damage from the accident is estimated by experts to reach \$235bn," Ms. Kolontai noted. She explained the country's efforts to provide social security and health services for the affected areas, which are home to 1.7m people today, while helping them redevelop. "Assistance and support from the international community, including UN organisations, is essential to the success of our national measures," she admitted.

Scientists outline joint plans

Belarus and Poland to hold joint scientific forum in spring

A Belarusian-Polish scientific forum is to be held in Bialystok in April 2011, as agreed at a Minsk session of the Intergovernmental Com-

mission for Co-operation in Science and Technologies.

The Belarusian and Polish experts have discussed a joint programme of sci-tech collaboration for 2011-2012. It is planned that our

countries shall implement fourteen joint projects over two years. As part of the current joint programme, Belarus is fulfilling seven projects and Poland, nine.

Just four hours needed to safely reach Turkmen capital

By Anna Levkova

National Airline Belavia launches new regular route between Minsk and Ashgabat

Flights to Turkmenistan's capital are to take place once a week — on Tuesdays, with return flights organised on Wednesdays. A plane will leave Minsk at 23.40, arriving in Ashgabat at 06.40 (local time) — spending four hours in the air. The return flight is to leave at 07.40, landing in Minsk at 08.50 (local time).

The flight schedule ensures convenient transit routes via Minsk to Ashgabat from Western Europe and the CIS: Berlin, Warsaw, Vienna,



Boeing planes to serve on Minsk-Ashgabat-Minsk route

Kaliningrad, Kiev, Milan, Moscow, Paris, Prague, Riga, St. Petersburg and Stockholm. Passengers from Ashgabat will be able to travel on to Amsterdam, Warsaw, Vienna, Kaliningrad, Kiev, Moscow, Prague,

Rome, St. Petersburg, Stockholm and Frankfurt via the Belarusian capital.

The flight is to be serviced by a Boeing-737-500, offering economy and business classes.