

Vital dialogue on outlined topic

On eve of new academic year, country's teachers meet in Minsk to discuss educational matters

By Vladimir Vasiliev

It is perhaps the first time that teachers have met on such a large scale — with about 3,000 school and kindergarten teachers, alongside heads of educational establishments, gathering from all over the country. The event allowed them to share their experience with colleagues, point out problems and jointly find solutions.

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, attended the meeting, noting that the UN has praised Belarus for its leading position worldwide regarding education, adult literacy and the number of schoolchildren and students. However, more can always be achieved.

Mr. Lukashenko set the tone for the discussion, outlining several topical issues. In particular, the degree of return on the huge sums spent from the state budget on the educational sphere came under focus. The President stressed, "You are the foundation of our state policy, the major guide of ideas and the basis for social stability. Being well-educated people, who analyse current problems, you should propose paths of solution."

The country has begun its new academic year with good results — even taking into



First lessons are among most important

consideration the economic situation. Seven new schools and five kindergartens are opening, with about 87,000 children starting school for the first time. In all, 150 educational editions have been published. As Education Minister Sergei Maskevich noted in his speech, the development of Belarus' education system is ensured by sustainable budget financing. This year, 6.1 percent of the GDP is being allocated to education — a significant rise on 2010's figures. Non-budgetary activity is also developing, while exports of educational services are growing. Meanwhile, a

socially weighed approach is being applied regarding fees. Mr. Maskevich hopes that exemption from taxation in the educational sphere might enhance active development.

Many other speeches were delivered — by teachers of secondary schools and university lecturers, heads of educational establishments, methodologists, ideologists and even representatives of parents' committees. Those involved in practical work spoke of today's most prominent issues, being familiar with the delicate educational process at first hand. Material provision and efficient man-

agement were topical points.

Speaking of possibilities for additional financing, the President noted that a well-considered approach is vital, since money must be allocated carefully in these times. "A step to the right or a step to the left on this thin ice could make us fall beneath. Of course, if we have money, we'll invest it into the educational system, as this is a priority. However, we must first earn this money," he stressed, adding that state paid education for all is not yet possible since our society won't be able to withstand this. The President noted that budget-paid

education is Belarus' greatest achievement and must be preserved, as all those present agreed.

The general feeling is that our educational system needs some improvement but that no radical reform is required. Summing up the results of the meeting, Mr. Lukashenko noted that, in the coming future, certain measures will be taken to socially protect various members of society, so there is no cause for concern. He admitted that, early in the year, a range of financial problems had become apparent. "I tell you openly that inflation, the devaluation of the Belarusian Rouble and a deficiency of foreign currency have led to a fall in the standard of living we've previously enjoyed," he said. He added that some factors have aggravated the economic situation, such as Belarusians importing over 250,000 cars on the eve of the levelling of customs duties on vehicles across the Customs Union; this was almost double the figure registered in previous years, with about \$3bn leaving the country for this purpose. Rising prices for energy and other raw materials imported from Russia comprise another \$2bn this year. "As a result, we have a figure of over \$5bn, in just one year. Of course, even the established economic

system would have failed to withstand this. Accordingly, there's been a shortage of foreign currency. What has happened has happened," Mr. Lukashenko noted.

The President assured all those present that the state won't leave people to struggle with hardships alone. On the contrary, economic success will be immediately used to enhance people's well being. He also invited political opponents and representatives of the EU and Russia to discuss the situation in Belarus at a round table session. "Our strength is in our unity and the future of Belarus should not be determined on squares and at barricades, but via the dialogue of human conversation," he emphasised. "I've invited representatives of the European Union and would like to invite representatives of Russia, and of other European and international organisations to attend a round table session. Let them see who is worthy in our country, what ideas are proposed and what goals are set. We are absolutely open and ready to give them this opportunity." Mr. Lukashenko asserted that sanctions and pressure on Belarus are pointless. "Let us talk. Let us engage in dialogue and we'll surely reach an understanding," he concluded.

Good words ever remain in the soul

18th Day of Belarusian Written Language, held each first Sunday of September, is this time hosted by Gantsevichi in the Brest Region



State plans to further support national book publishing and Belarusian editions which generate spirituality

By Yevgeny Lisitsky

On September 4th, Gantsevichi officially welcomed its guests, although it has long since been preparing. Its Avenue of Written Language, with its Literature Rotunda bearing poets' verse, is a sight to behold, honouring local writers such as Alexander Serzhputovsky, Victor Gordey, Vladimir Maruk and Ales Kasko. Gantsevichi may not boast ancient history but it

has its own literary and cultural traditions.

Yakub Kolas, a classical writer of Belarusian literature, once taught nearby; Lyusino village now has a museum in his honour. An unusual monument to Kolas was unveiled in Gantsevichi during the festival, with sculptures immortalising his young image — as he described himself under the name of Lobanovich in his *At the Crossroads* trilogy.

The holiday began be-

fore the official opening. On August 31st, a traditional scientific and educational expedition, entitled 'Road to Sacred Places' set off from Minsk's Holy Spirit Cathedral, to Gantsevichi, visiting churches in the Minsk and Brest regions. Candles were lit in relay from the flame of the Holy Fire, brought from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On September 4th, Gantsevichi's major stage

hosted a bright opening ceremony, with a celebratory script written by famous poet and writer Ales Badak.

Of course, the Festival of Book and Press drew huge crowds, eager to explore the numerous stands of new editions and old favourites. Each editorial office and publishing house prepared a programme of contests and performances. Meanwhile, *The Genius from Belarus* exhibition was organised, dedicated to poet and

writer Maxim Bogdanovich, alongside *The Oldest Book from the Family Library* show and other surprises.

Unfortunately, the complex economic situation of recent months has affected book publishing, with circulations down 15 percent in the first half of this year. Nevertheless, Lilia Ananich, Belarus' First Deputy Information Minister, noted at the press conference that over 5,000 new titles were published during this

period. Sadly, only 10 percent were published in the Belarusian language; Ms. Ananich is keen to see this number rise and stresses that the state will continue to support national book publishing, as well as Belarusian books, which bring spirituality.

This year, the winners of the Republican *Art of Books* Contest were not awarded at the Day of Belarusian Written Language; the ceremony is planned for Minsk's International Book Fair. However, the event still hosted an awards ceremony for winners of the Republican competition to recognise the best poetry, prose, drama, literary criticism and other genres. Meanwhile, poets, writers, bards and folklore bands from the Gantsevichi District performed throughout the day at the 'Berestie Voices' venue.

The holiday finished with a firework display and Gantsevichi passed the baton to Glubokoe, in the Vitebsk Region.