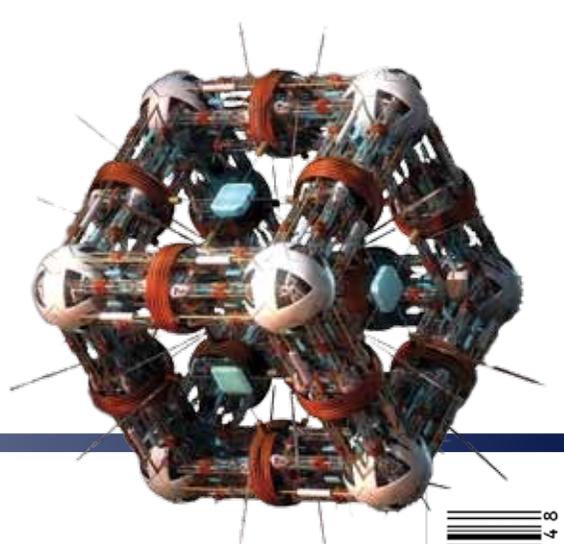


Scientists are convinced: strategy is based on tactics

2nd Congress of Scientists outlines major
drivers for knowledge-based industry growth → 3



INTERNATIONAL

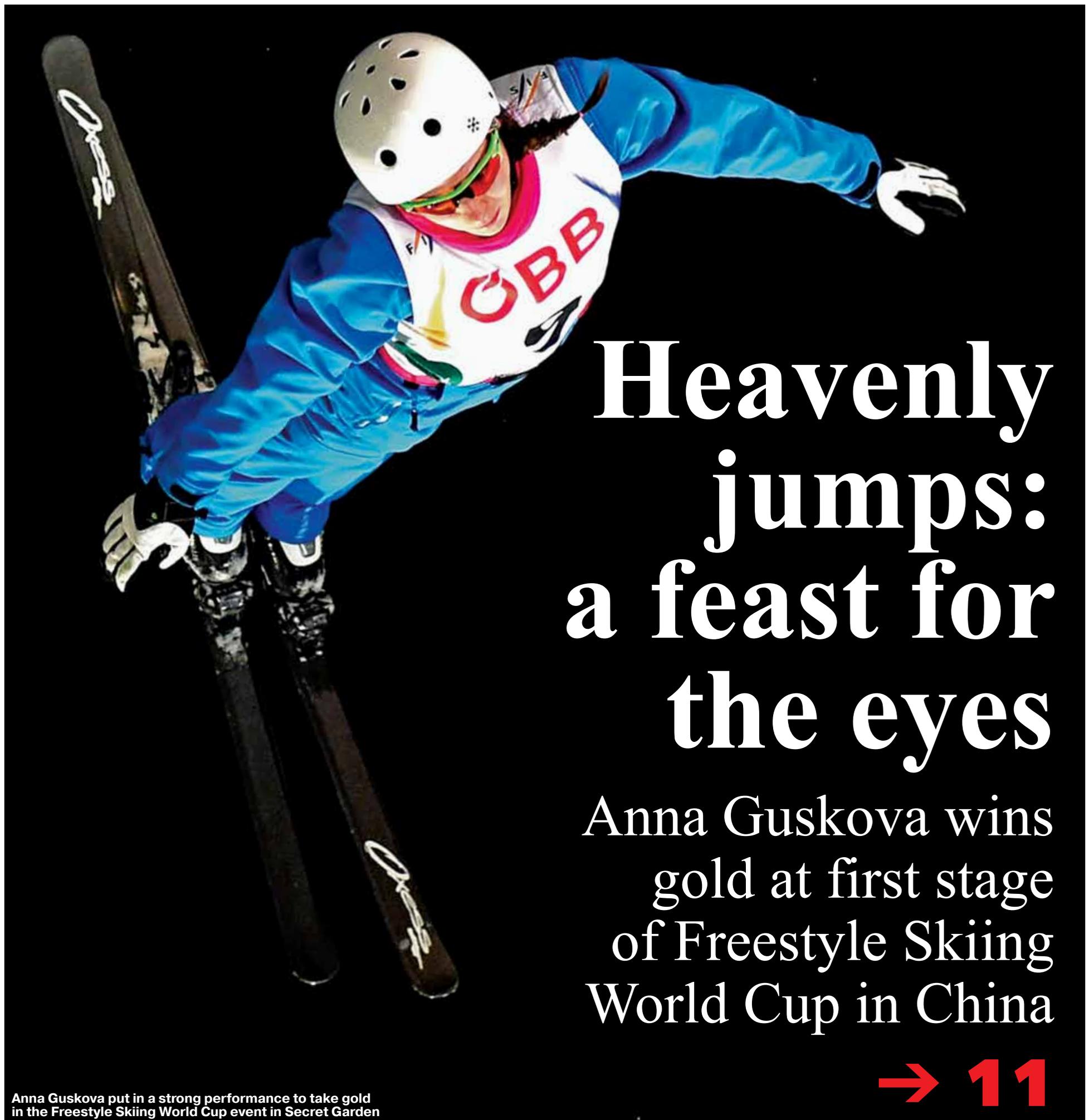
The Minsk Times

ISSN 1991-2978



Socio-political Weekly

PUBLISHED SINCE FEBRUARY 2003 ● NO. 48 (718) ● THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2017 ● WWW.SB.BY



Heavenly jumps: a feast for the eyes

Anna Guskova wins
gold at first stage
of Freestyle Skiing
World Cup in China

→ 11

Anna Guskova put in a strong performance to take gold
in the Freestyle Skiing World Cup event in Secret Garden

What to work on and where to set sights

By Vladimir Khromov

On meeting the Prime Minister of Moldova, Pavel Filip, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, noted our readiness to develop collaboration with Moldova, returning to the level that existed during the Soviet Union

“It’s great that there are no subjective factors in our relations with Moldova. There is common sense. If necessary, we’re ready to restore the level of relations which ex-

isted between us in the times of the Soviet Union. We don’t need to restore co-operation in other fields. We have never viewed Moldova as an alien state after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. We’re keeping an eye on what is going on there,” asserted the Head of State.

Alexander Lukashenko emphasised that Moldova is interested in Belarus, and Belarus is interested in Moldova. He remarked that he has visited Moldova several times since the Soviet Union. “This is a beautiful and blooming

country of great people who are as hardworking as Belarusians. There are good lands giving what we need. We can offer equipment and other things you may need,” noted the President. “The main thing is to have integrated and undivided countries. And people should live happily in these countries. If it is so, we will manage to increase the trade turnover.”

In his turn, Pavel Filip thanked the Belarusian side for supporting Moldova in the most complicated times when difficulties emerged at

the international level. “We’re very grateful to you for it. Our people will always remember it,” he said.

According to the Prime Minister, the relations between Moldova and Belarus are increasingly vibrant today, including at the level of contacts between business circles. “During my first visit we agreed to hold sessions of intergovernmental commissions twice a year. If you hold them often you can sum up the results, realise what you managed to do and what you still need to do to reach the goal.

This is productive,” added Pavel Filip.

The legal basis of the Belarusian-Moldovan relations rests on around 70 documents. In 2016, the trade turnover totalled \$227m. Belarus primarily exports oil products, sugar, tractors and road tractors, timber goods, tobacco goods, ceramic tiles, plastic film and glass fibre and imports from Moldova grape wines, corn, cognac and other goods of the agro-industrial complex, as well as gypsum, carpets and floor coatings.

More than 60 representa-



Pavel Filip

tions, subsidiary enterprises, sites of commodity distribution network and distributors of Belarusian enterprises are operating in Moldova, in addition to three assembly facilities. Meanwhile, 25 enterprises with Moldovan capital are functioning in Belarus, including 12 joint and 13 foreign ventures.

Format of rapprochement

Belarus views participation in the Central-European Initiative as an additional opportunity to improve mutual understanding with European Union

By Alexey Fedosov

On meeting the CEI Heads of Government in Minsk Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov noted, “The outcomes of 2017 allow us in Belarus to consider the CEI format a significant tool to involve the country more fully and efficiently in global European development. For us participation in the CEI is an additional opportunity to improve mutual understanding with the EU through specific programmes and projects, including in the field of regional development, which the CEI implements together with the EU.”

Within the framework of the Belarusian CEI presidency, particular emphasis was placed on the fact that the organisation unites the states that participate in various integration associations and formats. “Belarus has traditionally been at the forefront of the integration processes in the post-Soviet space, being a founding member of the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Today the EAEU and the EU are immediate neighbours and need to search for points of coincidence. I’m convinced that it is the harmonious and complementary development of the two big unions that is a guarantee of stability and prosperity in Europe,” stressed Mr. Kobyakov.

Croatia takes over the CEI presidency in 2018 from Belarus. “We’re



Participants of CEI Meeting of Heads of Government

proud of the fact that during the Belarusian presidency, thanks to our joint action the CEI has maintained and enhanced its non-conflict and non-discriminatory profile, the focus on constructive work and specific results of collaboration,” noted the Head of Belarusian Government.

The migration issue was also debated as part of the CEI activity. Mr. Kobyakov paid attention that Belarus is traditionally in the forefront of international efforts on streamlining migration processes and human trafficking. However, struggle against terrorism remains a no less important area. “A comprehensive and well-coordinated international approach is needed here, as in the issues of migration,” believes the PM.

Cyberterrorism deserves special attention, as it is rapidly turning into a global threat with far-reaching political and economic consequences, Mr. Kobyakov pointed out. In this context, the problem of information security has been growing.

In October 2018, Belarus will host a high-level UN and OSCE conference, *Preventing and Countering*

Terrorism in the Digital Age.

In total, the Central European Initiative has proved its relevance as a venue for promoting dialogue and co-operation across a wide range of areas, asserted Belarus’ Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov.

We’re proud of the fact that during the Belarusian presidency, thanks to our joint action the CEI has maintained and enhanced its non-conflict and non-discriminatory profile, the focus on constructive work and specific results of collaboration

2017 was the year of Belarus’ presidency in the Central European Initiative. According to Mr. Kobyakov, it was not only a challenge but also an important and useful experience for the country. Belarus focused its CEI presidency on promoting compatibility and complementarity in a greater Europe. There is an increasing need to develop logistics and transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the context of aligning the Chinese *Belt and Road* initiative with the transport network of the European Union. During its CEI presidency Belarus did its best to add momentum to the effort

to synchronise the plans on the joint expansion of transport infrastructure, simplify customs procedures, develop logistics services, and harmonise the digital markets of the CEI member states. The main theme of the summit was the role of CEI countries in promoting compatibility and complementarity between the various integration processes in a greater Europe, strengthening pragmatic economic co-operation between different integration associations, joining the efforts in confronting new threats to the stability in the region.

A CEI Plan of Action for 2018-2020 was adopted — a major document of the organisation which determines areas of member states’ project activities for the future. It’s known that during the Belarusian presidency Minsk hosted the Annual Meeting of CEI Ministers for Foreign Affairs in June. Moreover, the ministerial conference on science and technology, dedicated to the development of biotechnologies and pharmaceuticals, was also successful. This format existed in the CEI previously but after a long break it was restored by Belarus and was very popular. For the first time in CEI’s history Belarus conducted a meeting of heads of chambers of commerce and industry of CEI member states.

Good tonality from Brussels

By Oleg Bogomazov

NATO praises Belarus’ unprecedented transparency provided during Zapad-2017 army exercise, note NATO representatives at a briefing for Belarusian journalists and experts in the organisation’s headquarters

NATO representatives drew attention to Belarus’ open approach to army exercises. They noted, “The Zapad army exercise is very interesting. It grows larger and develops. During this year’s Zapad army exercise Belarus demonstrated unprecedented transparency. Detailed briefings were arranged in the NATO HQ and OSCE structures in Vienna.”

NATO representatives also mentioned that in compliance with international requirements Belarus had issued the necessary notifications about the forthcoming exercise and the number of its participants in advance. The NATO HQ stated, “Belarus did not misinform anyone. The country mentioned 13,000 participants while the actual number was even smaller — about 12,700. Thus, Belarus was not obliged to invite international observers, but it did so voluntarily.” The military attaches of the diplomatic missions in Minsk, including from China, were invited to observe the exercise among other people. The source drew attention to the fact that Belarus had also invited NATO representatives, who could observe the Belarusian-Russian strategic army exercise Zapad-2017 for three days. Moreover, a five-day tour was arranged for a number of foreign observers, including from several NATO member states. They could see more than guests of honour. For instance, a flight over the exercise area in Belarus was arranged for them.

“We cannot comprehend how absolute laymen criticise Belarus in this regard. We see that the country is interested in expanding co-operation with the European Union and NATO in security matters. In our opinion, there are no serious hindrances to it,” said the source.

Scientists are convinced: strategy is based on tactics

2nd Congress of Scientists outlines major drivers for knowledge-based industry growth

By Vasily Kharitonov

The present Year of Science has enriched the global bank of progress with many Belarusian inventions and developments. Among them is a portable supercomputer able to process up to 20 trillion operations per second, a model of an electric vehicle, personal e-transport, and a system of human DNA passportisation. The Year of Science is concluding worthily, with the 2nd Congress of Scientists gathering over 2,000 delegates in Minsk. Participants arrived from all around the country, representing all scientific fields, as well as from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. The President addressed the scientific community with a speech.

Bank of achievements

Alexander Lukashenko noted that some Belarusian scientific developments have global significance, such as the creation of the largest BelAZ dump truck (450 tonne capacity) and a Belarusian low-floor electric bus with fast charging. Modernisation of the Belarusian energy system, from 2012 to 2016, has reduced imports of electricity three-fold. Within the next five years, around two million tonnes of reference fuel will be saved, with emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere reduced.

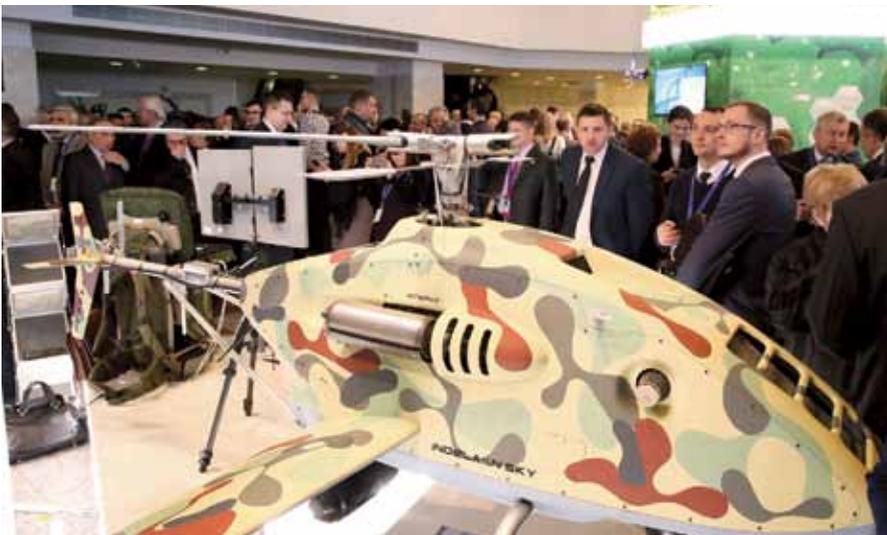
Meanwhile, the problem of food security has been solved, thanks to new — primarily domestic — scientific technologies.

Belarusian scientists, physicians and pharmacists brought over 250 new medical technologies into practice in 2016, in such important areas as cardiology, traumatology, oncology, and maternal and child health. Belarus is among the world leaders in the field of transplantation while a scientific approach to domestic healthcare has helped secure state demographic security. Since 2007, infant mortality has been falling, while Belarusians are living longer.

Scientific studies in the field of physics, mathematics, and computer and material sciences are helping create new technologies, with



The Science and Technologies: 2018-2040 strategy attempts to determine our future model — Intelligent Belarus. Its key goals are the development of cross-cutting digitalisation, creation of an IT-nation, a neo-industrial complex meeting the fourth industrial revolution, and a highly intelligent society.



At exhibition of scientific achievements

application commercially, while opening whole new sectors of the economy. Belarus is at the forefront of cutting-edge knowledge, with its own remote sensing satellite and a micro-satellite communication system. Peleng JSC has mastered satellite equipment with up to 1 metre accuracy, while Integral has launched production of new e-components for use in space.

All have contributed to Belarus' joining of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space. Our country is co-operating with many organisations and countries as part of international scientific programmes. Belarusian academic organisations have export contracts with nearly sixty countries: primar-

ily Russia, China, India, Turkey, France, and the USA.

Scientific benchmark

The effectiveness of Belarusian science is well reflected in international ratings, with Belarus ranking 45th (among nearly 200 countries) in the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI): up 14 points in five years. 2017 was named the Year of Science, aiming to strengthen the scientific community and inspire innovation. We can now objectively and comprehensively evaluate its results, using these to inform our next steps.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that the National Academy of Sciences should pay more attention to its

View from the outside

The President of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Sergeev, has praised the level of development of Belarusian science. During the 2nd Congress of Scientists, he said, "For the past two decades, I've been observing, with great pleasure and even some envy, how Belarus has managed to progress in the field of laser technologies and optics. It seems to me that our Russian scientists involved in laser instrument making and modern optics are buying more components and devices from Belarus than from elsewhere." He also stressed that Belarus 'has really succeeded in very difficult times to maintain science, technologies and industry, while significantly developing them'.

function as a system scientific integrator uniting science, industry and business. Information technologies are penetrating our daily life and our modern economy is truly digital, with robotics applied in industry and agriculture and IT platforms replacing traditional trade, while blockchains — finances. Artificial

REFERENCE

Belarus is developing innovative, scientific and technical contacts with foreign countries: agreements on co-operation in science and technology have been signed with forty-six countries. Meanwhile, collaboration in the innovative sphere has been established with over fifty states. In 2017, four new agreements in the field of scientific and technical co-operation and intellectual property were signed: with Slovakia, the Republic of Korea, China and Cuba. Similar documents are planned with Spain, Austria and Argentina.

intelligence is increasingly replacing human brainpower in various spheres.

"We should use our information-communication technologies to develop intellectual systems for handling ultra-large volumes of data, and for decision-making support for governmental bodies," the President notes. "Our developments in our country are more than dreams, although scientists abroad might only ever dream of what we've achieved. So much is being developed in Belarus."

Applied character of achievements

According to the President, the High-Tech Park is to reach new horizons of development. Not long ago, a draft decree was studied, which may become revolutionary. It creates conditions for the country to join the most advanced states, becoming a global leader in some areas.

Efficiency in the spheres of petrochemicals, woodworking, housing and utilities, services and sports could be improved, with the state intending to offer its support. Science needs to generate money through commercial application, so this is a prime focus, with state support provided. The Chinese-Belarusian Great Stone Industrial Park is offering wide opportunities for commercialisation.

Belarus is entering a new stage of development, building its knowledge-based economy. Mr. Lukashenko is convinced that we can improve the quality of life by raising the level of the Belarusian economy and creating new drivers for long-term growth.

Together — we're a whole IT country

By Vladimir Khromov

A recent session with the President was dedicated to discussing the draft decree 'On Development of Digital Economy'

Responsible state officials, as well as famous representatives of the IT community, were invited to the meeting.

Alexander Lukashenko remarked that the topic is very important and wide. However, several years ago no one could even imagine that such issues will be discussed in detail at the level of the President. "Life is developing so fast, and we cannot neglect the fact. If we start lagging behind in this hectic life, we will suffer and lack something important," noted the Head of State. "This refers not only to the development of the IT sector and advanced

technologies. The topic on the agenda is much wider. At the meeting in spring we made a decision to create the IT country. The title is relative, but the essence is clear to everyone."

Information technologies are penetrating all spheres, so the agenda included not only the problems of the IT industry. There is tough competition between countries for markets and capital. Moreover, they are often competing not only for the financial and human capital, they are competing for smart, educated and ambitious people, for new ideas and intellectual property.

"The Belarusian IT sector needs an impulse for development because young people should be able to realise their potential in full here. Belarus should become a real centre of gravity for talented people,



successful companies and international corporations. The country has a good chance to become at least a regional leader in the development of advanced fields such as the artificial intellect, big data, blockchain technology," the President is convinced.

Mr. Lukashenko emphasised that he is not going to slow down corresponding processes and has never been a retrograde person. However, he remarked that the fulfil-

ment of the plans will largely depend on the representatives of the IT sector.

The President urged to focus on the interests of the state while trying hard to get profits. The state creates conditions, guarantees stability and security. "Wise people now understand what stability and order are. And they are doing their best to find a reliable hub. We are ready to become this hub. You should be good owners of this hub. You should

give people an opportunity to make money. But the state needs power. Therefore, it should be supported. I'm trying to say that you should not forget about your state while making money," noted Mr. Lukashenko.

The President added that there are not universal responses to all global challenges deriving from the robust technological development. Therefore, the current draft decree will have to be revised after its passing. "This will be the foundation, but it should be developed," he said.

The draft decree comprises the ideas of the Belarusian IT-community and the world experience. Moreover, the document contains legal solutions which are groundbreaking for Belarus and its neighbouring states, as well

as for the most developed countries of the world. It also includes the support of the product model, the expansion of types of HTP presidents' activity, IT-education and the development of blockchain technology.

It's expected that in the nearest time the President of Belarus will sign a decree 'On the Development of Digital Economy', noted Belarus' First Deputy Prime Minister Vasily Matyushevsky after the session with the President.

Speaking about the work over the draft decree, Mr. Matyushevsky underlined that the government 'didn't polish anything', since the instruction of the Head of State was that the document should be wide to the maximum, i.e. to envisage wide frames for the development of new processes.

Don't say goodbye...

From January, men in Belarus won't receive their pension until the age of 61, while women may claim theirs at 56

By German Moskalenko

Three years within six

Last year, due to demographic pressures, the retirement age was raised for Belarusian citizens. The governmental initiative may not be popular, but a gradual increase using the 'additional three years within six years' formula is inevitable.

Belarus has about one pensioner for every two people working, and the nation is only becoming older; the number of those contributing taxes is falling while the number receiving a pension is increasing.

The reform has been extended for five years. From January 1st, 2017, the retirement age for men will be 60.5 years, and will be 55.5 years for women. The changes affect around 100,000 people.

In January 2018, the bar will be raised by a further six months until, by 2022, men will retire at 63, and women at 58. Belarus suffers from a gender imbalance, as in many other countries, with women receiving pensions for more years than men. On average, women tend to draw their pension for twenty-five years, against just over fifteen years for men.

What does the government expect from the reform? Economists have calculated the benefits, saying that the increase in pension age will reduce the deficit of funds in the State Non-budgetary Fund of Social Protection, from which pensions are paid. It will also increase

the number of those employed. According to experts, later retirement age should raise GDP by more than 1 percent, from 2019.

Size depends on merit

The size of Belarusian pension received depends on two major parameters: job tenure and the size of salary, from which insurance contributions have been paid. The minimum job tenure for women is twenty years while that for men is twenty-five years.

Recently, deputies at the House of Representatives adopted (at first reading) amendments to the law on pension provision, reducing job tenure for some categories of citizens by up to ten years (with payment of insurance contributions). Those who have served in the army for at least ten years but lack a military pension are now eligible, as are those who have cared for a group one disabled person or a disabled child, or someone elderly.

Pensions are set at approximately 55 percent of the average salary. Those

lacking the necessary job tenure may receive a social pension, reflecting the minimum living wage (currently, about Br200 or \$100 monthly).

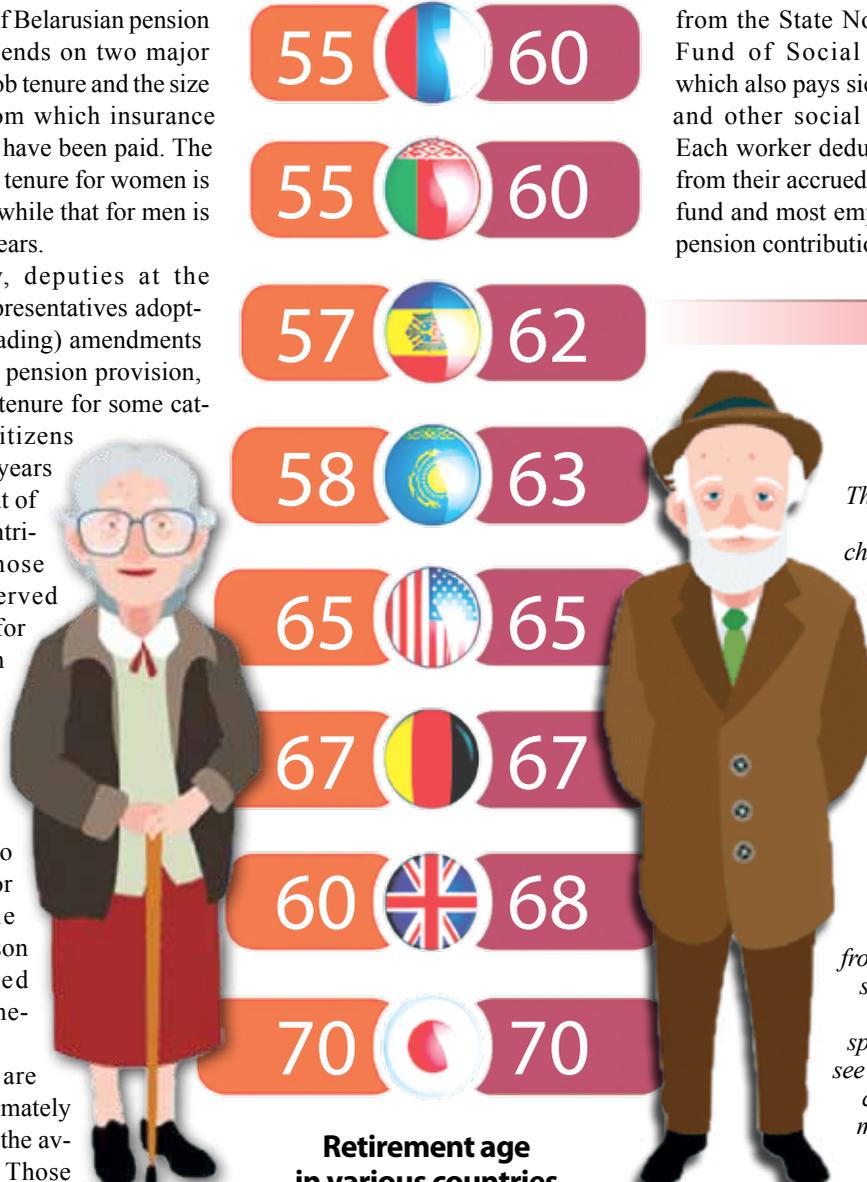
Those working past their obligatory years will receive an ad-

ditional bonus of an extra 6 percent for each additional year. State awards will also be taken into account. According to statistics, more than 25 percent of Belarusians of retirement age continue working.

Pensions in Belarus are paid from the State Non-budgetary Fund of Social Protection, which also pays sick certificates and other social allowances. Each worker deducts 1 percent from their accrued salary to this fund and most employers make pension contributions of 29 per-

cent, in addition to 6 percent as insurance contribution.

"Pensions and allowances are always paid on time, though the Fund does have difficulties," explains the Finance Ministry of Belarus. "These are connected with falling numbers of employed in comparison with pensioners, as well as being linked to overdue payments. From January to September, contributions into the fund totalled about Br9 billion (270 billion Russian Roubles) while payments from the fund stood at Br62 million more."



OPINIONS

Alexander Segodnik, Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly's Commission for Social Policy, Science, Culture and Humanitarian Issues:

The increase in pension age is an efficient and optimal measure. Reforms don't appear from nowhere. Any change is studied thoroughly by experts, while proposals are discussed with the nation. Life expectancy is rising worldwide and Belarus is no exception. The problem is that the number of working people has fallen, while the number of those who need 'feeding' has risen. It's a burden on the economy. We can't allow the situation to continue: of one ploughing, feeding seven with a spoon.

Oksana Nekhaichik, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly's Commission for Social Policy, Science, Culture and Humanitarian Issues:

The increase in pension age is a global situation, from which we've borrowed. However, it's only a small step. It's no secret that the law needs reform, with the funded component of retirement pensions requiring special attention. Some issues remain to be settled. We see what's happening in other states where, sadly, funds collected privately have not followed the rules. Some money has mysteriously disappeared and, as a result, pensioners have suffered, despite having expected a comfortable retirement.

MAZ buses to expand Kiev automobile fleet

Twenty new MAZ buses have been supplied to Kiev, with two more units being delivered to the Ukrainian capital soon



By Alexey Fedosov

One of the Belarusian buses has been personally tested by Kiev Mayor Vitali Klitschko. The new buses offer an alternative to mini-buses, which are less comfortable and convenient.

The auction for the purchase of buses took place in June in two lots: the first included seventy MAZ-203 models, while the second comprised thirty MAZ-215 buses. MAZtransservis — an official dealer of JSC MAZ — won the tender for both lots.

Minsk Automobile Works (MAZ) supplies city, inter-city, tourist and special buses to dozens of countries and its models regularly receive awards at international exhibitions and contests, for their design, functionality, quality and reliability. MAZ has fifteen models of bus and over a hundred specifications.

Innovative approach from scientists

By Alexander Pimenov

Unique device developed in Belarus for aerospace industry

The Institute of Applied Physics at the National Academy of Sciences has created a device unrivalled worldwide, designed for use by the aerospace industry, as well as other branches where graphite and hydrocarbon materials are applied.

Scientists from the Institute have developed a range of other innovations, including a portable instrument to measure the density of metals used in machine building, the petrochemical branch, and pipeline transport. This should enhance safety and, as the device doesn't damage what's being measured, it can be used even on the smoothest of surfaces.

The Institute of Applied Physics has developed a whole range of small-scale multi-functional devices for assessing metals and alloys, polymers, resins, construction materials (concrete, asphalts, and bitumens), and hydrocarbon composites. Devices are designed for precise and prompt measurement of the physico-mathematical features of materials.

Free economic zone ready to welcome new residents

By Alexey Fedosov

Large Austrian company to build wood-processing enterprise in Grodno Region

Grodnoinvest FEZ has signed a protocol of intentions with Austrian SPB Industrieinvest GmbH, aiming to develop investment activity within its free economic zone.

"The company will consider the possibility of registering as a resident company of the FEZ Grodnoinvest in 2018, to set up a wood processing plant in the Grodno Region," notes the FEZ Administration. A site is being selected for the plant, which aims to cover the full processing cycle, producing all kinds of lumber and related goods, bound for export.



At Schweighofer enterprises

SPB Industrieinvest GmbH represents the interests of the Austrian wood processing company Schweighofer, which has more than 350 years of experi-

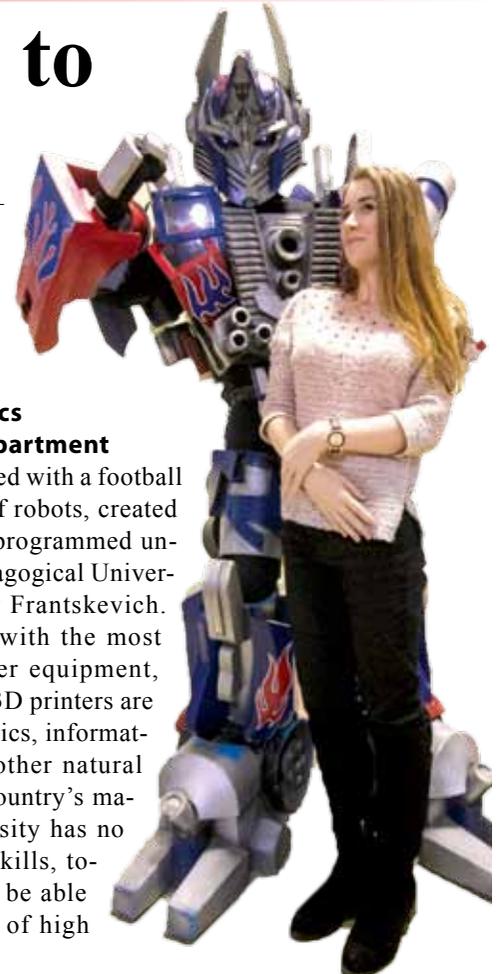
ence. Schweighofer operates six wood processing plants across Europe, with a total output of over 4 million cubic metres of wood annually.

Robots to assist

By Olga Konstantinova

Republican Resource Centre of Educational Robotics opens at Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University's Physics and Mathematics Department

A project has launched with a football match between teams of robots, created by schoolchildren and programmed under the guidance of Pedagogical University teacher Alexander Frantskevich. Classrooms equipped with the most contemporary computer equipment, educational robots and 3D printers are to train teachers of physics, informatics, mathematics and other natural science subjects. The country's major pedagogical university has no doubt that, with such skills, tomorrow's teachers will be able to promote knowledge of high technologies.



Focus on Rouble becoming more profitable

By Vladimir Volchkov

National Bank makes foreign currency deposits even more unfavourable

The National Bank, like a professional boxer, is consistently landing blows against the US Dollar. Since January 1st, 2018, the ratio of foreign currency deductions by banks and non-banking credit and financial organisations (from

attracted funds) into the fund of obligatory reserves will increase from 15 to 17 percent. This means that, from next year, foreign currency deposits will become more expensive for banks, obliging them to again reduce interest rates for depositors and the profitability of Dollar-Euro savings, which now lose out to savings in Belarusian Roubles.

The actions of the National Bank are not unpredictable. Back

in late 2014, the country's regulator voiced its new strategy. One of its key points was the principal dedollarisation of the Belarusian economy. The ratio of deductions is one of the major instruments in the struggle against the domination of US Dollars and Euros inside the country. Moving away from import equivalents is one of the major conditions of the move of the National Bank to a principally new model of

monetary policy.

Today, the regulator is restraining inflation by controlling the supply of money; this sometimes arouses unconstructive yet fair reproach from the private sector. The National Bank comments that, mid-term, it plans to hold back inflation of prices via interest rates charged on loans. Such an approach is used commonly worldwide, although interest rates only indirectly influence

the foreign currency component of the financial system. It is less efficient when the share of foreign currency deposits reaches 67.9 percent of the total amount of deposits. The efforts of the country's regulator aren't in vain, since foreign currency deposits once stood at 76.2 percent of the total. The National Bank has never concealed that it won't be speedy to shift emphasis away from foreign currencies.

Among top ten

Belarus among world leaders for Internet availability



By Olga Pasiyak

The country is gradually enhancing its position in the world of digital technologies. According to BDRC Continental (an independent consulting company) and the British provider Cable.co.uk, Belarus is ranked seventh worldwide for availability of broadband Internet. Moreover, according to the National Statistical Committee of Belarus, we also lead in information and communication technolo-

gies within the CIS.

Foreign analysts have thoroughly studied the cost of more than 3,000 broadband Internet packages across 196 countries, comparing prices for August-October 2017 and orienting on a monthly average salary (converted into US Dollars). In Belarus, twenty-four proposals by Internet providers were assessed by the jury and the average price stood at \$12.77 per month (about Br25). Meanwhile, Iran leads, with average charges of

just \$5.37 monthly. Burkina Faso is most expensive, at \$954.54. Ahead of Belarus are Ukraine (\$5.47) and Russia (\$10.10) while Georgia is ranked tenth, boasting average costs of \$16.68 per month. Our western neighbours charge slightly more: \$19.39 in Poland and \$70.50 in Lithuania.

Undoubtedly, we can improve, being ranked 64th for speed. It's also still difficult to find Wi-Fi hotspots, which are yet to become commonplace in schools, hospitals

and on public transport. However, the International Telecommunication Union has called our rates of development 'rather high'.

Belarus was assessed across eleven positions. Despite being ranked first in the CIS, we came only 32nd worldwide. As of January 1st, there were 11.1 million subscribers (up 1.6-fold on 2012, and including legal entities and individuals, as well as individual entrepreneurs). Moreover, 9.5 million subscribers (or 85.4 percent of the total)

had broadband Internet. Almost 92 percent of organisations had fixed broadband access while wireless Internet was available to 20.7 percent. As of the end of the previous year, mobile operators had 6.4 million subscribers of broadband Internet (or 79.9 percent of those who use a mobile phone to surf the Internet). Meanwhile, TV viewers saw the greatest increase in new technologies: the number of digital format subscribers has increased more than 10-fold over the past five years.



Princess Tania de Bourbon Parme with her husband Louis Arnaud

Princess' trip from Minsk to Grodno

By Olga Korneeva

Tania de Bourbon Parme tells Belarusian school-children about Christmas traditions in France

The Princess, who has visited Belarus previously, enjoyed Christmas brunch with Minsk pupils and their teachers, while chatting in French, telling them about Christmas traditions in France and inviting them to sample French sweets. In the evening, she attended an evening of cuisine, prepared

by Belarusian chefs using the family recipes of Princess Tania de Bourbon.

The next day, the Princess travelled to ancient Grodno, taking in the delights of Nesvizh Palace and Mir Castle on the way, alongside the House-Museum of Adam Mickiewicz in Novogrudok, and the glass-blowers' town of Berezovka.

She attended a tea-party in Grodno for young francophones, and a solemn eventing at a Grodno restaurant famed for its French cuisine.

The recipes of the Princess de Bourbon can be sampled in Minsk and Grodno until January 10th, 2018.

Tania de Bourbon, a direct descendant of the French royal dynasty, is a designer of luxury home interior goods. She enjoys travel, including through Belarus, sometimes attending exhibitions at our national museums. She follows the work of our young designers, and likes to chat with our young French-speakers, leading seminars on the art of hospitality.

Planet struggling to breathe

By Anton Kostyukevich

World Meteorological Organisation — a specialised UN agency — warns that carbon dioxide in atmosphere has reached highest level in over 800,000 years. The population of the Earth has increased several fold over the past fifty years, resulting in rapid aggravation of the situation, largely due to the development of industry and mass motorisation. CO2 concentrations have risen from approximately 310ppm in 1960 to 403.3ppm in 2016. CO2 in the atmosphere during the last ice age increased in the

same way over a period of 11,000 years.

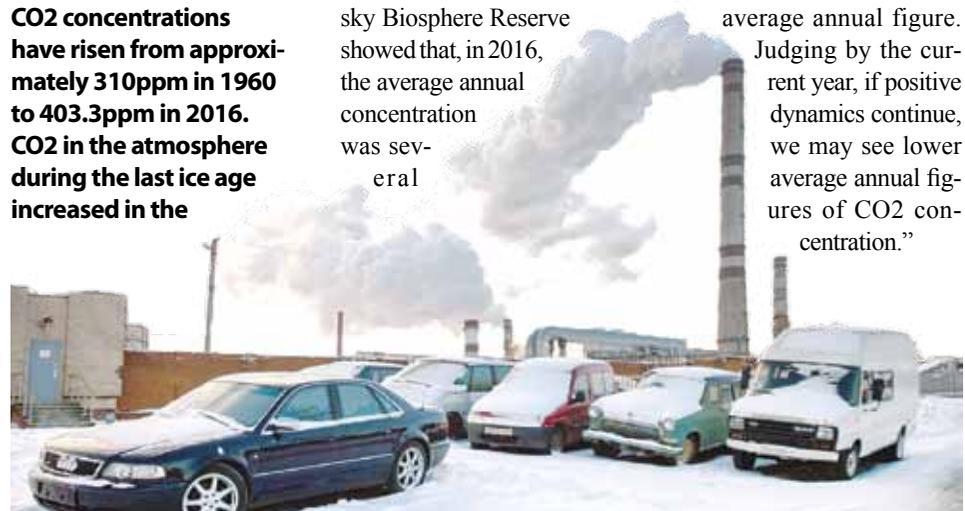
UN experts warn that our planet has never experienced such a drastic change. Belarus' own data is following the world trend. However, according to the Head of the Atmospheric Air Monitoring Department at the Republican Centre for Hydrometeorology, Radiation Control and Environmental Monitoring, Bogdana Kozeruk, there's no need for extreme concern. She tells us, "Data from the monitoring station at Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve showed that, in 2016, the average annual concentration was sev-

eral



times higher than in the previous two years. This information complies with that received from foreign background monitoring stations, primarily those in Europe: concentration is increasing but not at some crazy rate. From month to month, we're seeing fluctuations of 5 percent either way, and modest growth in the average annual figure.

Judging by the current year, if positive dynamics continue, we may see lower average annual figures of CO2 concentration."



To the sound of grapeshot whizzing



One of bloodiest battles of 1812 Patriotic War recreated near Borisov, on Brilevskoe Field

By Anna Kurak

Preparation is essential

“A question is when to die,” a young man in the uniform of the Napoleonic army is speculating. “You died last time, so could stay alive today,” his comrade smirks.

I overheard them on the bus, on the way to Berezina’s Brilevskoe Field. Despite the rain, it was hot — as it was 205 years ago, when Napoleon experienced his last major failure of his Russian campaign.

Around five hundred participants, from Belarus, Russia, France, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and other countries, came to take part in reconstructed battles on the banks of the Berezina River recently. Their commands — *Garde vous! En avant — marche! Gauche! Gauche!.. One! Deux!..* — were heard everywhere: an express course in French for those Belarusians and Russians acting out the Napoleonic battles.

While ‘recruits’ were engaged in rough work, experienced participants were putting on headgear and twisting their moustaches. As we know, the 1812 Patriotic War was called ‘the last beautiful war’.

A Dragoon officer with a helmet of horse hair, Muscovite Alexander Batov, was



The battle of the Berezina River took place near the town of Borisov, from 26th-29th November (14th-17th according to the old calendar), in 1812. Napoleon’s army was falling back from Russia and our troops tried to cut off its retreat. In all, 85,000 Frenchmen (less than half of whom were combat-ready) tried to cross the Berezina. After a bloody battle, Napoleon’s losses reached 50,000, while about 8,000 Russian soldiers were killed. However, Napoleon managed to avoid complete defeat and retreated to Vilna.



at the reconstruction for the third time. He tells us, “It’s a sacred place. It’s good that we create more than just a spectacle; organisers focus on preserving our awe of

history. We watched a play based on memories of a Frenchman who fought on the Berezina River. I can say, without exaggeration, that it was incredible.”

Horses and people combined

It was the infantrymen who first faced each other, followed by the cavalry. Suddenly, a canon began firing,

and the field was covered with smoke, like thick fog. The events taking place immediately after would have been described by Russian writer Mikhail Lermontov as:

‘Frenchmen attack like a cloud through dense smoke’, adding ‘The enemy learnt much that day of what a varmint Russian battle looks like...’

“It’s only possible to compare these events with Borodino: everything is impressive and large scale!” commented Vladislav Nemchinov, from Bryansk’s Sevsk Infantry Regiment.

Observing the reconstruction, it was easy to forget that those involved were acting, such was the smell of gunpowder and the clash of sabres.

“I work for a Russian TV company and must say that TV is an amazing thing. This 1812 Patriotic War has many times been filmed and screened. However, no scenes or 3D effects can replace this true recreation of the 200-year-old events,” Andrey Fokhtin said, after the battle. “Staying in the centre of the battle and sniffing true gunpowder leaves an impression.”

Both sides

Belarusians fought on both sides in 1812. Most served in the Russian army, while volunteers were more common on the French side, believing Napoleon’s promises to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Belarusians also chose different camps during the reconstruction. Minsker Natalia Oralina joined the Alexandriysky Hussar Regiment, together with her husband and children. “It’s an opportunity for my husband to ‘touch’ history and imagine himself as a true hussar. I support him and love wearing the beautiful dresses! All women dream of trying on a romantic dress and going to a ball,” she said. Konstantin Demidovich chose the ‘dark side’, saying, “The 22nd Linear Regiment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was formed in Minsk in 1812. It’s quite possible my ancestors served there. Any battle involves two opponents.”

EU leaders have agreed to second stage of Brexit talks

European Union leaders have agreed to move on to the second phase of Brexit negotiations with the United Kingdom

The next round of talks will focus on future trade and security relations between Britain and the EU.

At a press conference German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed the breakthrough but described the next round of talks as 'an even tougher piece of negotiations than we have had until now'.

French President Emmanuel Macron said 'we managed to keep the unity of the 27, the integrity of single market, and compliance with our rules'.

The heads of government meeting in Brussels last Friday also agreed to guidelines that would allow for a transition period after the UK formally leaves the bloc in March 2019.

However, EU countries insisted that during the transition period Britain must follow the rules of the EU's single market, which covers everything from state aid rules to workers' rights, and accept the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

The guidelines also said the EU



Sufficient progress on Brexit

would not give its chief Brexit negotiator final instructions on what to seek in a trade deal with the UK until March — compressing the timeline

for the negotiations even further. The UK will not have a vote in EU matters during the transition period.

Earlier, EU Commission Presi-

dent Jean-Claude Juncker said that British voters and Parliament, not Brussels, would be the ones to decide whether or not Brexit goes ahead.

France Millas train crash: children killed as bus cut in two

At least six children have died after a school bus was split in two in a collision with a train in southern France

The collision occurred at a level crossing near a wooded area in Millas — near the town of Perpignan — and left at least 18 people injured, many seriously. The bus was carrying 16 youngsters aged between 11 and 17 from a secondary school in Millas and was 'shredded' by the collision, according to witnesses.

The front half of the vehicle was left on the track pointing at an upwards angle, with the body crushed towards the middle.

One of the train passengers told local media the impact was 'very powerful', adding that she thought the train was going to derail.

Power restored to Atlanta airport after outage led to partial shutdown

One of the heaviest travel weeks of the year began with the cancellation of hundreds of flights at the world's busiest airport

A power outage left passengers stranded in darkened terminals or in aircraft idling on tarmacs in Atlanta.

The early afternoon outage paralysed operations at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport through Sunday evening.

Even though power was finally restored at close to midnight Sunday, the incident continued to cause massive disruption to holiday travel plans for thousands of people hit by airline cancellations extending into Monday.

Aid agencies warn of a humanitarian crisis in Syria's besieged communities

Charity officials working on the outskirts of Damascus have warned that humanitarian conditions have reached crisis levels

On the outskirts of the Syrian capital, one in eight children are reportedly starving because the Syrian government continues to block trucks carrying relief supplies from reaching badly affected areas.



Norway becomes the first country to switch off FM signal

Norwegian national broadcaster NRK radio programmes can now only be heard on digital radios after the last FM signal was switched to DAB

Norway has become the first country in the world to shut down national broadcasts on its FM radio network. From now on all the state broadcaster's radio programmes can only be heard via DAB — or Digital Audio Broadcasting.

The Scandinavian country made the final switch to DAB on Thursday, when the last FM signal was switched off in the counties of Troms and Finnmark.

"There will be new products in

the next months", explained LIne Langnes of the Norwegian Media Authority earlier this year. "You will have touch screens and it will be possible to read to texts on the display".

But older people in particular maybe not be so familiar with digital radio. One Norwegian newspaper reported that national public broadcaster NRK has lost a fifth of its listeners since January when the process of switching from FM started. Some technical problems have also been reported. But the government says DAB radio will save money, allow for more broadcasters, and ultimately sound better.

Steven Spielberg's new movie about the leaked Pentagon Papers premieres in US

Steven Spielberg's new movie, *The Post* has premiered in Washington telling the story of the battle to publish the leaked Pentagon Papers detailing the US government's misleading portrayal of the Vietnam War

It may be set in 1971 but the theme of press freedom in Steven Spielberg's new movie is just as relevant today.

The Post is about the battle to publish the leaked Pentagon Papers detailing the US government's misleading portrayal of the Vietnam War.

Starring Meryl Streep as the late *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham and Tom Hanks as late editor Ben Bradlee, *The Post* was named the best film of 2017 by the



National Board of Review, a New York-based 100-year-old group of academics, filmmakers and professionals.

"It is definitely about the legacy of the Vietnam War and what 40 years of policy did to the United States of America," said Tom Hanks. "And it's also about the journalistic integrity of people who were destined to — who view it as not their job, but their responsibility to go out and get the truth."

Spielberg rushed to get *The Post* filmed and released within a year and it premiered on Dec. 14th.

Good tradition to make presents

National Art Museum of Belarus solemnly presents *In Search of Wisdom: Talk of Confucius and Laozi about Dao* sculptural composition

By Veniamin Mikheev

The composition has been sculptured by world-known Wu Weishan, the Director of the National Art Museum of China. Drawing on the rich traditions of Chinese culture, he creates significant works, which have been showcased around the world. Wu's sculptures introduce Chinese culture to the globe. His *Creating Images of Time* collection depicts major Chinese historical figures, and has been recognised by international critics as truly reflecting the spirit of the time.

Many of Mr. Weishan's pieces — including *Qi Baisi Talks with Leonardo da Vinci*, and *Confucius Asks Laozi About Dao* — are kept at the National Museum of Rome, Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, the National Museum of Brazil, and the



During solemn ceremony. Wu Weishan and Vladimir Prokoptsov in the forefront

Russian Academy's Arts Gallery. At present, the National Art Museum of Belarus also boasts its own Wu Weishan. The sculptural composition currently in Minsk is inspired by *The Lives of Laozi and Han Fei*: a Chinese historical *Shiji* work which tells of how Confucius came to the capital of the Kingdom of Zhou to meet local archivist Laozi, to talk about Dao with him. Before the meeting, Laozi took a bath. Afterwards, he told Confucius that he would have the

opportunity to demonstrate his abilities one day but that, until then, he should remain humble and not openly demonstrate his talent. Later, Confucius described the meeting to his disciples: 'I don't know how dragons fly into the sky through the clouds but I've seen Laozi today and he resembles a dragon'.

Belarus' Culture Minister, Yuri Bondar, stressed at the unveiling ceremony that this is a landmark event, taking place in the year of

the 25th anniversary of Belarusian-Chinese diplomatic relations. He views cultural co-operation as an important aspect of comprehensive interaction. Belarus and China are actively exchanging cultural events.

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Belarus, Qui Ciming, expressed confidence that the event would greatly contribute to the development of cultural relations between our two countries. "As

part of the Belt and Road project, Belarus and China will continue developing their relations in all fields, including cultural," he said. The Ambassador stressed that Confucius and Laozi were great ancient Chinese philosophers and thinkers. Depicted in two sculptures, they are pulling upwards, like columns upon which spirituality rests. He added that millennia-old teachings of Chinese philosophers are still relevant and preach moral values.

As Mr. Weishan added, "Coming to Belarus, Chinese sages can learn something new from Belarusian people." He believes we can achieve much by uniting our efforts. Interestingly, the sculptures presented in Minsk are cast in bronze and are over 2.5m tall. They seem like skyrockets, upon which the spiritual universe rests... The present show is in response to a presentation made by the Director of the National Art Museum of Belarus, Vladimir Prokoptsov, several months ago, when he gave one of his paintings to the National Art Museum of China. It's already on show at the museum's permanent exhibition in Beijing and his Chinese counterpart responded by sending the incredible sculpture to Minsk, for a visit. We hope to see this become a good tradition.

PALETTE — JOINT PROJECT OF NATIONAL ART MUSEUM AND NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL OFFICE

Returning to your roots, or a life of creativity

By Alexander Pimenov

Symphony of Life exhibition, dedicated to 70th birthday of artist and graphic painter Nikolay Taranda, exhibits works from the master's studio

Nikolay Taranda was born in the village of Velikoe Podlesie, in the Brest Region. He graduated from Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute's Art and Graphics Department, then headed a pictorial art studio at Orsha's

Palace of Culture. In the 1980s, he helped create monuments to residents of Baran who had died during the Great Patriotic War.

The painter spent many hours not only working in his studio but attending plein-air, and improved his style in pictorial and graphic art. Recognition was not long in coming. His

landscapes and still-life works proved popular not only in Belarus but in Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and the USA.

Speaking of his creativity, Mr. Taranda once said, "Nature and the Belarusian land have always been a source of inspiration for me. Here, I live and work. My landscapes are diverse: hills and plains, ancient churches and rural



One of N. Taranda's works



Exhibition attended by many

buildings, magnificent silhouettes of trees, and roads stretching off into the distance... In my pictures, I try to preserve their unique beauty, since life and creative are inseparable for me."

The painter's works have an air of ease, and their own special rhythm. Even his industrial landscapes have a sense of peacefulness to them, demonstrating a balance between reality and the author's eye. Mr. Taranda's works show a

particular perception, reflecting the spirit of the age, in the highest sense.

Originality, naturalness and solidity are features of Nikolay Taranda's creativity. The painter was brought up in Polesie, to a rural, patriarchal family, as the thirteenth child. He knew hard work but didn't sing loud praises of labour, as was a common Soviet theme. Labour, in Mr. Taranda's works, is presented

as part of life, interlaced with real existence. He also conveys kindness and love for his characters: ordinary workers and rural residents, for the most part. This derives from his personal feelings towards people and his homeland.

At the opening of the exhibition at the National Art Museum, there were warm words from friends and colleagues for the work of this talented and hard-working master.

He was marching from Vitebsk

How Eugene Magalif's songs arrived in America

By Yelena Davydova

Music by famous composer Eugene Magalif has been again heard in Minsk, with works by the Belarus-born American performed by the Sound Light Chamber Orchestra in the Upper Town Concert Hall. The event coincided with Mr. Magalif's 60th birthday. Despite living and working in the USA for many years, Mr. Magalif retains strong links with his homeland. Here, he tells us about his career in music.

One incident changed everything

I was born in Vitebsk. My grandmother had attended the same gymnasium as Marc Chagall's sisters and my mother was a teacher of Russian language and literature. My father wrote music and taught at Vitebsk's Musical College.

The Magalif family is rather well-known. Eugene's grandfather worked in Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), making friends with Mayakovsky. He even saved Mikhail Prishvin during the Patriotic War years, about which the latter wrote a story. In 1937, he was shot as part of the 'case of Marshall Tukhachevsky'. Eugene's father didn't manage to escape the repressions, studying at the VGIK (All-Russian State University of Cinematography named after S.A. Gerasimov). He was enrolled under director Sergey Gerasimov and acted in the film *Young Guards*, but was sentenced to a camp for ten years (as a son of an 'enemy of the nation'). Meanwhile, his mother was taken to a GULAG (the Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps) following a fabricated case regarding an attempted assassination of Stalin.

They were married after the camp. My father was studying at the Conservatoire's composing department, together with Igor Luchenok and Sergey Kortés. However, he wasn't among anyone's favourites, because of his defiant character. He received his diploma

but the Union of Composers was closed to him.

Eugene studied music from early childhood, playing a small accordion at the age of four, and learning the piano, as well as composing verse. He gained a diploma in teaching the theory and history of music. In 1974, his *Uspenka* (based on V. Pchelko's poetry) was published in the regional newspaper *Vitebsky Rabochy* (Vitebsk worker): a great achievement for a 17-year-old.

I decided to enter the Conservatoire's composing department and my teacher was Professor Anatoly Bogatyrev, who'd also taught my father. Alas, the relationship failed and, when I was a third-year student, I moved to the musicological department. Until about 1985, I was composing and writing only for myself.

Everything suddenly changed however, during perestroika, when a newspaper held a 'telephone call-in show', featuring the Chairman of the Union of Composers of the USSR, Tikhon Khrennikov. Eugene managed to get through.

The piano was playing

On hearing the surname Magalif, he asked whether my family came from Yelts. The Khrennikov family rented part

of my great-grandfather's home, and my father had taught Tikhon to play the accordion. Hearing that I composed music, the maestro invited me to see him. I played for him over two evenings and impressed him enough that he wrote a letter to Luchenok, asking for me to be accepted into the Union of Composers of the BSSR. Though Igor Luchenok was its chairman, he couldn't facilitate this but sent a letter to the leadership of Melodiya firm, recommending the release of a gramophone record of my songs. Alas, this didn't come to pass.

The first recording took place much later. At that time, only three of Magalif's songs (out of seventy-four) had been accepted by the artistic council in Moscow. One was *The Piano was Playing* (based on Magalif's own verse). It was successfully recorded by Leonid Serebrennikov with the orchestra of the All-Union Radio, and Magalif finally began to gain recognition.

Eugene Magalif boasts a huge collection of awards, including gold and silver medals from the Global Music Awards in California



Eugene Magalif's grandmother attended the same gymnasium as Marc Chagall's sisters

*I Won't Call You Anymore, A Call from Childhood, At the Last Milestone, Juniperic Forest, Fogs, and Rain over the Nieman... were songs written by Eugene Magalif, inspired by the verse of Gennady Buravkin, Sergey Grakhovsky, Adam Globus and Sergey Sokolov-Voyush. They were constantly heard on radio and TV, performed by such stars as Tamara Raevskaya, Leonid Bortkevich, Yadviga Poplavskaya and Alexander Tikhanovich, Galina Galenda and Vladimir Kudrin. Before Magalif moved to the United States, he released musical pieces for the piano, and music for documentary and TV performances, as well as *Barmaley* — a children's cantata. On leaving Belarus, he didn't believe he'd be able to pursue his love of music, but fate favoured him.*

In the 1990s, I went to the USA, invited by my former classmate. Yadviga Poplavskaya lent me money for the trip: \$200, for living and for buying gifts for my family. However, the collapse of the USSR was close and my wife Tatiana advised me to try to find a way to stay in America. I found myself in New Jersey State, where my wife and children joined me, several days before the collapse of the Soviet Union. We settled in East Brunswick, 70km from Manhattan.

For several years, the Magalif family worked for a French company, receiving a steady salary, insurance and the opportunity to buy a house. They then gained certification to teach music in state schools.

Colibri's flight

The work of a school teacher is difficult but well paid and stable. We both remained in the sphere of music, which most emigrants fail to do. For a long time, I concentrated on making my family secure, putting aside composing. However, in 2010, at the request of my conservatoire classmate, Eduard Sytyanko, I wrote a piano piece for his daughter and she successfully played it with the orchestra of the Polish philharmonic. Eduard's brother, who was teaching music in Finland, suggested writing a piece for flute and string orchestra. In this way, my 'Colibri' appeared. It was a great success and was performed in many other places. This was my first victory in the USA. I then received a proposal from a British publishing house, which resulted in the release of twenty collections, sold in various countries. A large American musical publishing house also proposed co-operation.



Wonderful ballet for all times

By Yuliana Leonovich

Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus touring Austria and Germany for seventh year

From December 18th-22nd, our Belarusian ballet artistes will perform the classical Christmas favourites of *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker or Another Christmas Story* by Piotr Tchaikovsky, to audiences in

Germany and Austria, touring cities large and small.

Ballet master and stage manager Alexandra Tikhomirova recollects, "Much effort has been taken by the theatre and by German impresario Victor Sheller, and his wife Natalia Lutoshkina, to show Europe our Belarusian ballet. There was a time when no one knew of the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus; we had to push

our 'brand'. Before co-operation with the Shellers, our troupe rarely toured Europe, although we did perform in Asia. Once the German impresario became our partner, European theatrical agents also began contacting us, wanting to work with the Bolshoi Theatre."

The Bolshoi Theatre stage won't be empty during the ballet company's tour, as the Minsk

International Christmas Opera Forum will bring together friends from all over the world, finishing on December 22nd with a gala-concert by laureate singers from past years and present. Maestro Andrey Galanov and his colleague from Italy, Gianluca Marcianò, will conduct.

Heavenly jumps: a feast for the eyes

By Kirill Karin

In the super-final, our athlete managed to finish ahead of formidable Xu Mentao — owing to her fumbled landing. Anna received 74.82 points from judges, while Xu was placed second, with 71.55 points. American Ashley Caldwell finished third (68.04).

This is Anna's first gold medal in a World Cup stage. Other Belarusian athletes have also done well. Alexandra Romanovskaya finished 4th (63.80), while



Sochi-2014 Olympic champion Alla Tsuper came seventh (after giving birth to her second child, the sportswoman

has recently returned).

In the men's team Maxim Gustik won silver at the World Cup first stage (117.26



Anton Kushnir shows third result at World Cup second stage

Anna Guskova wins gold at first stage of Freestyle Skiing World Cup in China

points), losing to China's Jia Zongyang in the super-final (127.88).

Meanwhile, the 2014 Olympic champion Anton Kushnir was placed third at the second stage of Freestyle Skiing World Cup in China. The competition was held in the Secret Garden Ski Centre, where judges gave 124.34 points to the Belaru-

sian sportsman. China's Jia Zongyang was placed first (127.88 points) while second position was occupied by Chinese Qi Guangpu (127.60).

At the first stage of the World Cup in China, Anton Kushnir failed to impress judges, finishing 27th. The day before, Maxim Gustik came second but, eventually, finished 13th (99.56 points). Stanislav Gladchenko was placed 10th (115.42), Dmitry Mazurkevich finished 15th (97.99), Artem Bashlakov — 17th (94.47), and Denis

Osipov — 18th (91.59).

Among the women, Belarusians failed to win a medal at the second stage of the World Cup. Danielle Scott from Australia captured gold (100.11), silver went to China's Xu Mentao (87.42) and bronze was awarded to Russia's Kristina Spiridonova (86.94).

At the second stage, freestyle sportsmen competed in teams. Belarus was represented by Anna Guskova, Maxim Gustik and Anton Kushnir, who finished fourth.

The more unexpected the success, the greater the joy

Belarusian biathlete Irina Krivko causes major sensation at World Cup in French Annecy, finishing second in mass start

By Igor Grishin

Irina Krivko qualified for the mass start following success in recent races. Alongside Nadezhda Skardino and Darya Domracheva, who missed the stage in Annecy, she now claims a place in the top thirty.

It was the first mass start in Krivko's career, and she not only hit every target, finishing behind French Justine Braisaz (0+0+1+0), but skied well.



Irina Krivko on victorious distance

Before the final firing range, the Belarusian was ranked sixth but her rivals began to miss targets. Irina left the fourth firing range in fourth position, a full ten seconds ahead of German Laura Dahlmeier, and eighteen seconds ahead of Slovak Anastasiya Kuzmina. Her titled opponents

began to chase Irina but she strained every sinew, refusing to allow her rivals to close the gap.

During the final rise, Dahlmeier made a last attempt to catch Irina, closing to just four seconds behind. However, she realised that Krivko wouldn't give her second place.

This is the first medal for the Belarusian biathlete, aged 26, in personal races at World Cup stages. Before this, her best result was ninth position in the pursuit race, at last year's World Cup stage.

"My first medal podium? It's incredible! Over my entire biathlon career, I haven't imagined that I'd be able to stand on it, even in a relay race, let alone a personal one. I'm delighted to rank among those athletes who've managed to earn medals in personal standings," Ms. Krivko told journalists.

Immediately after the race, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, congratulated Irina Krivko, wishing her every success in future.

The national women's biathlon team of Belarus has earned four awards at three December World Cup stages. In Swedish Östersund, Nadezhda Skardino won gold in the 15km individual race. Meanwhile, in Austrian Hochfilzen, triple Olympic champion Darya Domracheva claimed gold in the sprint and silver in the mass start. In French Annecy, Irina Krivko won silver in the mass start.



They claim silver medals

Good swim in short water

By Sergey Menshov

Belarusians capture silver in mixed combined 4x50m relay and bronze in men's combined relay race at European Short Course Swimming Championships in Denmark

The Belarusian squad reached the final with the best time but had to catch up with the Russians and Italians in the decisive swim. After the second transfer of the relay, Yevgeny Tsurkin swam his 50m butterfly in 22.23 seconds, taking our quartet to second place. However, it was a true challenge for Belarusian Anton Latkin to compete against Russian Vladimir Morozov and Italian Luca Dotto in the final 50m freestyle race.

On the final day of the competition, Belarusian Pavel Sankovich was close to claiming a medal in the 50m backstroke, fighting until the last centimetre. Sadly, he touched the side after 23.13 seconds — just 0.01 seconds behind bronze medallist Jeremy Stravius of France (23.12). Gold went to Italian Simone Sabbioni and silver to Russian Kliment Kolesnikov.

Belarusian swimmers won silver in the mixed combined 4x50m relay in Copenhagen: Pavel Sankovich and Ilya Shimanovich completed their stages in first place, while Anastasia Shkurday, aged 15, finished second in her distance and Yulia Khitraya achieved the same in the final stage.

Illumination of the week



On the eve of the New Year holidays, illuminations are lit along Brest's central streets

EXHIBITIONS

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM OF BELARUS

20 Lenin Street
Until 28th December. Art of Nomads of Great Steppe Until 7th January. *Symphony of Life*

NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM

12 Karl Marx Street
Until 10th January. *Fashionable Century*
Until 14th January. *Krakov Kolyady Batleika*

BELARUSIAN STATE MUSEUM OF GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR HISTORY

8 Pobediteley Avenue
Until 24th December. *We Fly in Sky Alone*
Until 31st January. *Fighting for Homeland*

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF BELARUS

116 Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 31st December. *Francysk Skaryna and His Epoch* Until 15th January. *Passenger from Nastrom* Until 15th February. *Valery Slauk's Graphics*

STATE MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF BELARUSIAN LITERATURE

13 Maxim Bogdanovich Street
Until 29th December. *Kandrat Krapiva: from Childhood to Maturity*

CAT MUSEUM

23 Internatsionalnaya Street
Until 31st December. *New Year Season in Cat Museum*

MIKHAIL SAVITSKY ART GALLERY

15 Svobody Square
Until 31st December. *Meeting the Master*
Until 7th January. *Naked Nature*

MUSEUM OF THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL CULTURE HISTORY

5 Muzykalny Lane
Until 28th December. *Valentin Yelizariiev: Ballet as Art of Soul*

UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE ART GALLERY

1 Oktyabrskaya Square
Since 7th December. Exhibition of painted carpets: *For Happiness, For Life*

GALLERIA MINSK

9 Pobediteley Avenue
Until 31st December. *Large New Year Market* Until 14th January. *13th World Miracle* Until 15th January. *Robots and Transformers* Until 15th January. *Museum-Factory of Fir Tree Toys*

HOUSE-MUSEUM OF FIRST RSDRP SESSION

31a Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 14th January. *Minsk 1917*

CHELYUSKINTSEV PARK OF CULTURE AND REST

84 / 1 Nezavisimosti Avenue
Until 30th June. *Legacy of Belarus: Dedicated to Minsk's 950th Anniversary*

THEATRES

NATIONAL ACADEMIC BOLSHOI OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

1 Parizhskoy Kommuny Street
21.12. *La Traviata* 23 and 24.12. *The Swan Lake* 24, 27 and 28.12. *The Nutcracker*

BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street
21.12. *Cherry Orchid* 22.12. *Jane Eyre* 26 and 27.12. *The Flying Dutchman* 26.12. *Blue Cameo* 28.12. *Ball with Cinderella; Tristan and Isolde*

YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street
21.12. *Weltmaster-Accordion* 22.12. *Paulinka* 23 and 24.12. *Kolyady Night* 24.12. *Art* 26.12. *Jeweller's Jubilee* 27.12. *Two Souls* 28.12. *School of Taxpayers*

YOUTH THEATRE

17 Kozlov Street
23.12. *Old Fairy-Tale* 24 and 27.12. *Wolf's Birthday* 25 and 28.12. *Morozko* 26.12. *Adventures on Kingdom of Dreams*

THEATRE-STUDIO OF FILM ACTOR

13 Pobediteley Avenue
23-25.12. *The Nutcracker* 27 and 28.12. *Nobody Ever Said Life Would Be Easy*

REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street
22.12. *A Two Dogs' Tale; Adel* 23 and 24.12. *Two Miraculous Umbrellas* 26.12. *A Two Dogs' Tale; Performance-Surprise* 27.12. *Golden Heart* 28.12. *I'm Not Ashamed*

MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsky Street
21.12. *Circle of Love* 22.12. *Oedipus* 23.12. *Lady for a Day* 24.12. *Divers* 26.12. *Pygmalion* 27.12. *Twelfth Night* 28.12. *Tricks of Khanuma*

BELARUSIAN STATE PUPPET THEATRE

20 Engels Street
23-24 and 28.12. *Snow White* 25.12. *Christmas Story* 26.12. *Morozko* 27.12. *Little Red Riding Hood*

YOUNG SPECTATORS' THEATRE

26 Engels Street
21.12. *How Kikimora Turns to Snow Maiden*

MINSK CONCERT HALL

21.12. *New Year Tricks of Baba Yaga* 23-18.12. *Miraculous Flight on New Year* 23-25.12 and 30.12. *Father Frost Changes Profession*