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Veronika Goryunova — a methodologist at Liozno's Regional Centre of Children and Youth, a delegate of the 6th Belarusian People's Congress — enjoys her work with children

To propose and implement

On February 11th, delegates will meet for the 6th Belarusian People's Congress. At present, the active and responsible work collecting and summarising proposals for the further development of the country is in full swing. This process began long before the large-scale forum and, regarding the practice of its organisation, is unique in its own way. → 3



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Belarus is a nation with a beautiful soul

By Dmitry Kryat

When looking at the stage, it was obvious that the recent ceremony differed from the previous ones. The laureates took their seats on the stage, sitting in comfortable chairs, which produced a special atmosphere. There was a clear feeling that the people in whose honour the large hall of the Palace of the Republic had gathered were true hosts. Before Aleksandr Lukashenko came out, almost 3,000 people applauded the winners.

As is traditional, The President addressed the laureates and guests at the official ceremony with a welcoming speech.

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised that the awards ceremony is among the main events of the year. As the Head of State noted, it has firmly been established in the life of Belarusians as a modern tradition that connects the past and the present of their native land and fills the

The President bestowed 'For Spiritual Revival' awards and special prizes to the figures of culture and art, as well as 'Belarusian Sports Olympus'



goals and aspirations of citizens with a special meaning.

"Year after year such meetings bring us together with the best and most sincere feelings:

pride for deserving people, gratitude for compassion and kindness, courage and heroism, respect for the creativity and talent of our compatriots. We,

Belarusians, are a nation with a beautiful soul. I'm reminded of it every time when I study success stories and sign awards papers. There are primarily hardwork-

ing and honest people behind every professional or personal accomplishment, people who wholly dedicate themselves to their own mission, people who live and work for the benefit of their native country and the nation. It is what patriotism is all about," the President stated.

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, patriotism is manifested in love for children and a selfless aspiration to love those who are deprived of motherly care by fate. It is manifested in the selfless fight for the life and health of people, in the careful attitude to the cultural legacy of the nation, time-honoured traditions and spiritual values of the Belarusians. "It is manifested in the protection of historic truth, the memories of heroes of our land, the information sovereignty of the country, in the nurturing of young Belarusians to love their country and take pride in their ancestors, in sporting victories for the glory of Belarus," he added.

LAUREATES SAY

'FOR SPIRITUAL REVIVAL' AWARD

Marina Sokolova, Chief Physician at Minsk City Children's Infectious Diseases Clinical Hospital:



I think the 'For Spiritual Revival' award is recognition for our work not only with COVID-19, though it has become a particular challenge for us.

This is also a recognition of all that the staff of the Minsk City Children's Infectious Diseases Clinical Hospital have been doing for the thirty years of the institution's existence. During this time, the clinic has treated about 500,000 patients. We are very grateful for such serious recognition!

Emergency paediatrics is a team effort, so the effectiveness largely depends on the coherence of the entire team. We have 165 employees working in the clinic for more than 20 years. Some of them have been working in our institution since its opening. It's worth a lot, and we really appreciate it.

Tatiana and Andrei Baritol, parent-caregivers of the foster children's home at the Soligorsk District Executive Committee's Education Department:

We became foster parents for the first time 16 years ago. Now we have nine children in education, aged 2-16. We view them as our kin. Our biological son

is already an adult, serving in the army. Eleven children are already independent personalities; some already have families of their own and we have grandchildren.

The President's award has been a true surprise for us and the main event of the year. We have always received state support, and this refers to the material side, assistance on the part of the guardianship service and specialists from the correctional centre.

The main thing is that we feel we are giving back to all our children. This gives us great happiness and the meaning of life.



'BELARUSIAN SPORTS OLYMPUS' PRIZE

Aleksei Talay, Paralympian, multiple world and European record holder:

It's very unexpected and exciting. I am glad that my sporting achievements and efforts in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among children and young people in the 'Athletes of Belarus: The Strength in Unity' project has been acknowledged at such a high state level! This is very important since the project itself is of great importance for the education of new generations. I'm telling the story of my life, explaining that it is largely due to the fact that, in my childhood and adolescence, I managed to strengthen my health through swimming, rowing and karate and this helped me survive and cope with enormous hardships.



This is the first time I have received such a high state award. There are medals and more modest regalia. However, the 'Belarusian Sports Olympus', from my native country, the opportunity to receive an award from the hands of the President, is a very special honour for me. It is for a day such as this that I've worked so hard for all these years and tried to achieve something great. For me, everything that is happening now will become a great incentive to continue what I'm doing with even more energy.

SPECIAL PRIZE TO FIGURES OF CULTURE AND ART

Sergei Musienko, Head of the MEDIAFACT-ECO JSC ECOOM Analytical Centre:

I accepted the news of the President's special prize with a feeling of great satisfaction and relief and actually an idea, which has long been waiting in the back of my mind and was obvious to me. It required some implementation to present, in the forms of: newspapers, books, posters and even puzzles for children. This has finally become possible thanks to our large team of authors. It's great that this project has become a cultural phenomenon which lives its own life: today, when coming to the Presidential Library, I've noticed the 'Pride FOR Belarus' stands. I'm convinced that each of us should be proud of the place where we were born, our school and our university. However, on the newspaper's pages, we've only set the starting point: the momentum needs to be developed.



have become an additional decoration of Minsk, Vitebsk... the meaning however, is different: 'Pride FOR Belarus' has become an obvious embodiment of the grandiose achievements and successes of our country in years of its independence. In our daily routines, these sometimes wear out and get bored: people get used to good things quickly. The project has in turn made it possible to see a retrospective of the state buildings of Belarus, which is truly a source of pride.

Maksim Shnip, Head of the Illustration Preparation Department of Belarus Segodnya Publishing House's Joint Secretariat:

In 2008, my father received a special prize from the President. At that time, no one could have ever thought that, 13 years later, I would also receive the same award from the Head of State. The project, which started as a monthly newspaper, eventually transformed into a weekly publication, and then turned into a separate book and posters. It's obvious now that there are no boundaries to its development. However, the most important thing is that when preparing 'Pride FOR Belarus' we can't be anything but sincerely proud of the successes and achievements of our country. Therefore, I am very happy and proud that, together with my colleagues, I've been awarded a special prize from the President.

Maksim Osipov, a columnist of Belarus Segodnya Publishing House's Political Information Department:

The project, originally planned purely as a newspaper, has gone far beyond our publication. Today, not only Minsk and guests of the capital but also residents of other cities can see it at BelDruk news stands. Illuminated in the evenings, they

Medicine: from better to best

Domestic healthcare is ready to respond well to new challenges, as noted by Aleksandr Lukashenko at a meeting focusing on the improvement of the health protection system

Amendments to the laws on healthcare and on provision of psychological counselling were submitted for consideration. These are documents that define the legal basis for providing medical care to citizens. The Head of State said, “On the one hand, they have not been comprehensively revised for about a decade. During this time, there have been many changes in medicine, science and social development. The time has probably come to update these laws. On the other hand, when this work began, no one could have predicted that the current pandemic would break out. It has not only seriously affected our plans but showed us that the national healthcare system as a whole is ready to respond adequately to new challenges.”

The President emphasised that the healthcare system should continue to be provided with everything necessary,

“In our country, the right to health protection, as you understand it, is non-negotiable. Every citizen of Belarus should receive free and effective treatment in public health institutions. The state, for its part, is obliged to maintain its conditions so that the hospitals have modern medical equipment, and the doctors have personal protective equipment, while patients, no matter where they live (in the capital or in the village), receive the help they need.”

Updating a number of legislative provisions will enable healthcare to become more modernised and move forward. The Head of State explained, “What are the re-



sults of the analysis of the existing trends? What are the trends in the development of medicine which have inspired the update? We should therefore answer the question of whether we need it or not, and why.”

The President asked for a report on how the new provisions will affect the healthcare system as a whole and in individual hospitals, affect doctors and, most importantly, patients. According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, it is impossible to ignore the problems which must be solved in order to preserve our citizens' health: the development of physical activity and sports, environmental safety, the ability to use health facilities, and the improvement of labour protection measures. As the Head of State emphasised, these areas should also be covered by legal mechanisms.

The President added that, no matter how the norms change, we must remember that people are the focus of our medical staff's efforts. “To cure and protect them and to improve their overall health

are our primary goals. A constant priority of the healthcare system is to provide affordable and high-quality medical care to the population,” Aleksandr Lukashenko added.

As the Healthcare Minister, Dmitry Pinevich, noted at the meeting, during the recent period of national healthcare development, the main issues affecting its effective functioning have been resolved. Thus, the structure of our medical care system was built, including paramedic and midwifery centres, central district hospitals and Republican scientific and practical centres — as well as the development of high-quality medical technologies to meet the highest standards. For example, in 2019 alone, 22,500 cardiac surgeries, 7,500 joint endoprostheses and 550 organ transplants were performed, and about 46,000 cancer patients receive radical treatment annually.

Every year, almost 3,500 young doctors and almost 4,000 secondary medical workers are trained in the country.

Banks operate in a stable manner

The President has received Pavel Kallaur, the Chairman of the Board of the National Bank, with a report. All aspects of the banking system were discussed: the results of its work in the past year and challenges for the upcoming period. One of the central topics which directly impacts the people's lives is prices. Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasised, “Price stability is our number one issue, and we will not leave it unaddressed. This is the lives of our people.”

Economy at the forefront

The President generally assessed the situation in the banking sector positively, telling the National Bank Chairman, “Of course, I'm primarily grateful to you for the fact that, in a difficult, one might even say, the most difficult situation (in other states, the banking system simply collapsed), you have not simply preserved the situation: it is more or less conducive to the functioning of our economy. However, let's be honest: the economy must develop. If the economy is in place, then the banking system exists. If there is no economy, then there will be no banking system, and the people will have no money. Therefore, the economy is the key.”

Learning how to resist sanctions

Since the economy is at the forefront, the topic of credit and financial support for the real sector does not lose its relevance. Certain enterprises and investment projects significant for the state are also in focus. This produces one of the key tasks.

“First of all, we need to find the possibility of crediting this sector of the economy,” Aleksandr Lukashenko said, also touching upon the issue of sanctions pressure on Belarus. “You need to understand that all sorts of sanctions are purely political things”.

“From the humanistic approach, there are no grounds to be targeted by sanctions. We have always been under such pressure, however, we need to learn to confront it. This is probably the third or fourth round of their attempts to destroy the economy and our statehood.”

The President strongly recommended looking at the world from a broader perspective, “The world doesn't mean the EU only. However, they are not fools: they understand that about 3,000 companies of various types function and depend on Belarus' economy to a varying extent. No one wants Belarus to collapse, because this will create certain problems for the European Union itself. That's why we need to work with everyone — with Europeans and Americans — but there is also the Asian market.”

Reliable lever for the economy

Following the report to the President, Pavel Kallaur told media reporters about what was discussed. In particular, he recalled that, last year, in conditions of limited domestic and external demand, the National Bank and the entire banking system solved two important interrelated tasks: they provided support to the economy in difficult times (through loans and export operations) and at the same time

maintained macroeconomic balance in the context of the global crisis and the depreciation of the national currencies of Belarus' main trading partners.

The National Bank Chairman noted, “These issues have been solved, the banking system has maintained its stability and national financial stability was ensured.”

At the same time, for specific reasons, there was a slight decline in the exchange rate of the national currency. However, the fundamental point is that the country has an equilibrium market rate, and there are no accumulated imbalances that have a negative impact on the balance of payments and the foreign exchange market in 2021.

At the same time, the profit from the banking system has somewhat decreased. Specifically, the profitability of the regulatory capital has dropped, but despite this, the profitability of the banking sector reached 8.9 percent. “It's quite a good result for the sake of ensuring stability,” Mr. Kallaur said, adding,

“We see a considerable safety margin that allows banks to not only operate steadily but provide support to our economy later on.”

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To propose and implement

Among the participants of the Belarusian People's Congress are people of different professions, activities and social status: businessmen, heads of large enterprises, doctors, teachers, scientists and representatives of international and public organisations. Here are some expectations they have for the 'five-year period' forum and what topics they are particularly concerned about.

Andrei Savinykh, Chairman of the Standing Committee on International Affairs of the House of Representatives:

Of course, the Belarusian People's Congress is expected to assess the direction of development: along which Belarus will develop, what the scale of the state's influence on the economic development of the country will be and in what directions and parameters the political reform of the main institutions of power in Belarus will take place. All these issues are very relevant, they concern almost the whole of society. I hope, at the Belarusian People's Congress, we will hear answers to all these questions.



Lidia Kravtsova, a chemistry teacher at Novolukoml's secondary school No.1:

It is necessary to change approaches in family, preschool and school education, as by doing this in such a complex way; neither side is able to cope with the task alone.

The emphasis should be placed on patriotism, development of real rather than virtual sociability and creative self-expression. Only in this way will we help our young citizens reveal their whole potential, become fully-fledged persons and determine the right professional paths. This is what I would like to say from the Republican rostrum. However, I view my participation in the People's Congress, where I'm honoured to represent the Chashniki District, as a pledge of trust and paramount responsibility. I hope to justify it.

Natalia Basarevskaya, Director of Minsk's Palace of Children and Youth:

What has happened recently in the country has shown that we are all different, we have different views on what is happening domestically and abroad. We've seen that young people are not indifferent to events in our social and political life. However, are they able to state their position without offending anyone, can they listen to the other side? There are problems with this. It's only possible to find a common denominator and work out a solution if people know how to communicate and know the basics of conducting a good dialogue, including political dialogue. Therefore, I believe it's now good time to introduce political culture lessons into educational programmes. These are especially important for young, active and energetic people.



It's now a part of the country's history

The most important economic events that highlight the past year

Last year, the economy was writing a new history. Under the conditions of the pandemic, markets were closed, conveyors were stopped, and business contacts moved to working on an online format. The new realities of 2020 were felt by the entire world market. Belarus, as an export-oriented country, refused to close borders and stop workshops. This has produced a good result, with no huge losses. At the same time, the state fulfilled all social guarantees and supported businesses in difficult times. Of course, targeted actions to destabilise our country's economy have also added to the problems. Despite this, not a single enterprise has stopped, labour collectives have been preserved and the economy is gaining momentum every month.

By Polina Konoga, Vladislav Sychevich



RESULT OF THE YEAR

In spite of the pandemic

2020 will go down in history as the year of global economic turmoil. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the whole usual technological order and the loss of global GDP is estimated in the tens of percent in annual terms. Belarus has gone along its own path: the country didn't close the borders and its business-

es continued to develop dynamically, since the market needed goods. In July, when the world was just recovering from the effects of the first wave of the pandemic and was beginning to accelerate the economy, our country had already regained its growth rate and was moving forward to the set new parameters.

The effectiveness of the chosen tactic is evident in the fact that the GDP of Belarus for 11 months of 2020 amounted to 99.1 percent, while inflation at the end of the year is around 7 percent. It's true that it's a decent result given the occurrence of the second wave of the pandemic. In these difficult conditions, all social obligations of the state were not only fulfilled but also exceeded. The average salary was 1,300 Roubles (about \$535 in equivalent). Almost a 9 percent growth in the incomes of the population is also an indicator that the economy has worked effectively.



PLANS OF THE YEAR

Building bridges to the future

The construction and reconstruction of bridges, underpasses and roads is a topic that the country's leadership has always paid close attention to. Last year, Aleksandr Lukashenko opened several infrastructure facilities, the most important of which, perhaps, being the bridge over the Sozh River. The new facility became a great present for residents of two districts of the south-

east of the Mogilev Region: Slavgorod and Krasnopolie.

During the official ceremony, the President announced, "We've agreed that 18 bridges will be modernised and built in Belarus in the next three years."

In December 2019, a 259m Euros loan agreement was signed between our country and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development as part of the *Republican Bridges and Reconstruction of the M-3 Highway* project.



FIGURES OF THE YEAR

Stability rate

In 2020, which was difficult for the economy, the National Bank lowered the refinancing rate to 7.75 percent per annum. Accordingly, over the past two

years, the fifth record has already been broken; never before in the entire sovereign history of the country has the refinancing rate reached such a low value.

The National Bank justified this decision with a faster decline in inflation than was previously expected. In addition, inflation processes slowed down more dynamically in the main trade partners of Belarus.

At the same time, the National Bank stressed that, when deciding on monetary and credit policy, it will continue to proceed from the need to maintain price stability, based on a comprehensive analysis of external and internal conditions, as well as a change in the balance of inflation risks.

OPENING OF THE YEAR

Light in the green tunnel

In November, the first four stations of the third line of the Minsk Metro were launched; in future, the line will connect the southern and northern districts of the capital with the central part of the city.

The movement of trains was opened by the President. Construction of this metro section began in October 2013, with the re-laying of engineering com-



munications. Simultaneously with construction of the stations, an engineering building for the metro and a building for the operating personnel were erected. About 5,000 employees were involved in the construction of the new metro line, and 60 subcontractors took part. The actual cost of the facility was just over 1bn Roubles (about \$410m). The new stations are of a new technical level, having a high process automation and control engineering equipment, intelligent systems for train movement control, fare collection, fire protection and new means of transmitting and processing data across all subway systems.

TECHNOLOGY OF THE YEAR

A strong argument

In November 2020, production of cold-rolled sheet was launched at the Miory Metal Rolling Plant. Its construction was carried out in accordance with the state programme of Belarus' innovative development. The production capacity of the enterprise at the first stage has reached 50,000 tonnes of cold-rolled sheet per year, and 150,000 tonnes of tinplate. At the second stage, the production capacity will increase to 240,000 tonnes. Belarus annually consumes up to 30,000 tonnes; therefore, most of the products will be exported. Over 360m Euros have been invested in the plant and these are investments from Belarus, the EU and Russia.

The General Direc-

tor of the company, Piotr Shimukovich, emphasises that the facility offers products which have not been previously available in Belarus. "Therefore, the Belarusian market and markets of the neighbouring countries can be replaced by us. We see this as a great development prospect. There aren't many similar enterprises in the world, and all of them have equipment which has exhausted its life span. We run a brand-new factory, with the equipment produced by a world leader in the field of metalworking," he explains.



LAUNCH OF THE YEAR

Welcome to the atomic club!

In 2020, our country fully joined the global club of states that use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The historic moment took place on November 7th, when the President gave permission to raise the electric capacity of the first power unit in the Belarusian nuclear power plant. Just a few decades ago, it was hard to believe this would happen.

Today, the Belarusian nuclear power plant is a 'fait accompli', being an

important milestone in the history of sovereign Belarus and, of course, a confident step forward along the path of our economic independence. Furthermore, the project opens up new opportunities in many areas, including industry, medicine and education. Peaceful nuclear energy will also be an incentive for the development of electric transport.

The Belarusian NPP project complies with all safety requirements, as has been repeatedly confirmed by international expert missions, including the IAEA. The facility was built according to the Russian AES-2006 evolutionary project with a third generation water-cooled reactor for increased safety. Its total capacity is 2,400 MW. This ensures our country receives a stable, environmentally friendly source of energy which will complete about a third of all domestic energy needs.



Ready for implementation



By Igor Platonov

The Great Stone Industrial Park has successfully completed testing of 5G networks — becoming the first site in Belarus where this technology was comprehensively tested. A presentation of the fifth generation of communication capabilities to the general public was organised in Pekinsky Avenue.

The project was realised jointly by the Industrial Park Development Company, the Ministry of Informatisation and Communications, Beltelecom and Huawei. According to the agreement, the project participants deployed five base stations on the Park site, capable of providing high-speed Internet throughout its area. The maximum traffic transfer rate here at the moment reaches 1,235 Gbit/s.

During the presentation, the Minister of Communications and Informatisation, Konstantin Shulgan, noted, “It’s possible to

Belarus successfully completes testing of 5G technology

say that we are at the final stage of the approach to the methods and solutions of how 5G technology will be distributed in Belarus. On the site of the Great Stone, Beltelecom and Huawei will show us other options that are necessary for the deployment of this system.”

According to the Minister, Belarus has ‘unique conditions’ for the introduction of 5G, and even those who have started to deal with the issue earlier cannot yet scale up this technology to the whole country. “Our conditions enable us to do this and one of the options envisages the coverage of the entire country within five years. We have plans to do this and we’ll work towards them,” Mr. Shulgan added.

In turn, Beltelecom’s General Director, Yuri Petruchenya, said that the company has completed testing of the 5G network and is now ready to implement it. The Great Stone Industrial Park was one of two 5G test locations, where the network operates in the 3.6GHz frequency range. The second pilot zone is located in the Kopyl District; the tech-

nology should help eliminate the digital inequality of cities and rural areas. Here, for the first time in the CIS, Beltelecom tested the fifth generation network in the 700MHz range. Huawei base



stations are installed at both sites.

“The test zone at the Great Stone demonstrates the possibilities of 5G technology in the urban environment, industrial development, while the fragment in the Kopyl District — in rural areas,” explained Mr. Petruchenya.

The technology provides high throughput, low latency and the ability to connect a large number of devices at the same time.

During the presentation, the guests were shown the work of the ‘mobile smart checkpoint’. Thanks to its technical vision, its turnstiles are able to recognise employees’ faces and let them

pass. In the near future, it will be able to replace the personnel who previously performed this function.

A data transfer rate test was also conducted and an 8K resolution video was downloaded.

Yan Gang, the General Director of the Industrial Park Development Company, emphasised that the creation of such a project was a powerful impe-

tus for deepening co-operation and interaction between China and Belarus in the field of high technologies. “Fifth generation network technologies are at the forefront of the information and telecommunications sector. Ensuring the daily interaction of people is the foundation of 5G technology, and the main focus is on the development of the industrial Internet, covering many industries and creating a beautiful smart world,” he said.

According to Yan Gang, in the Great Stone, 5G is already involved in testing unmanned vehicles and ‘smart intersection’ equipment. Thanks to a video analytics module and a video camera connected via 5G technology, the system is able to recognise pedestrians and control traffic lights, regulating traffic.

“To date, we’ve already successfully completed testing of the relevant operations. We hope the project will soon become a commercial operation. We also expect our partners to enter the 5G sphere for further research and production activities here,” the official added.

A product with high potential

Sales of milk through Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange rose 9 times in 2020

Last year, 125,000 tonnes of raw cow’s milk of the highest quality were sold through the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange, for 119m Roubles (the equivalent of about \$49m).

Together with oilseed meal and feed additives, milk was among the top three best-selling agricultural products. Furthermore, compared to 2019, the volume of its

sales increased ninefold, both physically and in value.

“The exchange and trading of raw cow’s milk is one of our most successful projects. It aims to ensure the equal access of processing enterprises to free raw materials. In less than two years, the most transparent exchange market for raw dairy products was formed, uniting over a hun-

dred of regular participants from all regions of the country. As for the economic feasibility of using the exchange mechanism, in 2020 alone, the additional revenue of dairy producers exceeded 1.2m Roubles (about \$500,000). At the same time, the fee for participating in the auction still stands at 10 Kopecks per transaction (approximately \$0.04), the press service of the BUTB has



reported, adding that the potential of raw milk as an exchange item is quite high. Experts predict further growth in this segment this year. The first January trading sessions have already demonstrated significant activity in sellers and buyers.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Belarus’ gold reserves increased over the last year



According to the National Bank of Belarus, the country’s gold reserve in 2020 rose by 1 tonne to a total of 43.2 tonnes (gold equivalent) on January 1st, 2021. As of January 1st, 2020, Belarus’ gold reserves amounted to 42.2 tonnes, on January 1st, 2019, they came in at 41.2 tonnes.

The gold reserves comprise precious metals in the form of bank bullion bars. They are managed by the National Bank of Belarus and are part of the State Fund of Precious Metals and Precious Stones of Belarus. Availability of gold reserves supports the confidence of residents and non-residents of Belarus in the National Bank, as well as the Government’s ability to meet their financial obligations and to conduct monetary policy. Precious metals can be sold, exchanged or used in settlements, should such a need arise.

The department of the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre for Oncology recognised as the European surgery centre

The European Society of Gynaecological Oncology (ESGO) has recog-



nised the Department of Gynaecology Oncology of the N.N. Alexandrov National Cancer Centre as the European centre for advanced ovarian cancer surgery. The certification was issued for five years.

ESGO unites physicians and researchers specialising in the study, prevention and treatment of gynaecological cancer. Those centres that have accumulated experience in the surgical treatment of advanced ovarian cancer can apply for the ESGO certificate. The ESGO certificate confirms high levels of professionalism of all specialists involved in the treatment of this pathology.

Contract for 170,000 ‘Sputnik V’ vaccines signed by Belarus

Belarus’ Healthcare Minister Dmitry Pinevich has announced that this is the first batch of vaccines the Republic has received. It’s divided into several smaller batches. Some 20,000 vaccines arrived by the New Year; and their safety and quality were checked. The vaccination of healthcare workers is currently continuing. In



the near future, another batch is expected to arrive, with teachers next in line for a COVID-19 vaccine. According to the Minister, in Q1 2021, the country is set to release the ‘Sputnik V’ vaccine under the Belarusian brand, together with Russian colleagues, at the Belarus-based Belmedpreparaty pharmaceutical company.

From around April, when the vaccination of vulnerable and essential population groups will be complete, anyone who wishes will be able to be vaccinated.

Belarusian-Russian Zapad 2021 army exercise scheduled for September 10th-16th

The concept of the exercise is based on a possible variant of the escalation of the military and political situation with regard to a simulated state. The exercise is planned to take place over the course of seven days. On the suggestion of Russian colleagues, the exercise will take place on the territories of both countries, making it possible to practice the application of the Belarusian-Russian regional army group and the organisation of army operations.



A number of issues related to the deployment of joint assault teams in an urbanised area will be practiced during the exercise. The performance of new and modernised military hardware specimens will be evaluated. Representatives of western countries are planned to be invited to observe the exercise.

Our flag reaches the stars

On each of his orbital flights, the pilot-cosmonaut, the Hero of Russia, Oleg Novitsky, takes the national flag of Belarus

By Boris Orekhov

Oleg Novitsky has already undertaken two stellar expeditions, while the third one will take place in spring. The launch of the shuttle is scheduled for April, and the crew will include two more of our nation's cosmonauts. However, it is possible that the team will change, and the expedition will include a NASA astronaut. One thing is certain: Mr. Novitsky was appointed as the ship's commander. The flag will fly with him again. The cosmonaut, a native of the town of Cherven in the Minsk Region, was officially handed the flag at the Belarusian Embassy in Moscow.

"You are appointed again as the commander of the ship. This speaks of the highest level of your training, since you are entrusted with such difficult tasks," said the Ambassador of Belarus to Russia, Vladimir Semashko.



Oleg Novitsky was officially handed the flag at the Belarusian Embassy in Moscow

"Thank you so much for your trust," said Oleg Novitsky. "The flag of Belarus will be in orbit for the third time, as a sign that the Belarusian people truly belong to the land where we were born."

The flag will not reach the ISS immediately, but after careful pre-flight preparation. All personal belongings of the crew are always handed over in advance so that they can pass a strict check, biological, microbiological and

mandatory weighing. After that, a special commission makes the decision on whether they can be taken into orbit or not. However, Mr. Novitsky is confident that there will be no issues with the flag.

"The first Belarusian cosmonaut, Piotr Klimuk, when he flew, took a handful of soil with him into orbit. I might have taken that too, but the ground is frozen, it's winter. It's not possible to collect it," Mr. Novitsky said. "In total, we are allowed to take on board no more than a kilogram of personal belongings. In my luggage there are letters from relatives and photographs. I'll also take the banner of the Immortal Regiment."

The main part of the flight will take place at an altitude of four hundred kilometres. With this figure, the question of God naturally arose. "I don't know, I haven't met him," Mr. Novitsky smiled. "But I do believe that there is an unknown force supporting us."



By Khristina Glushko

An ordinary miracle

Despite the pandemic, a miracle has happened: the *Our Children* charity campaign has travelled all over the country arousing the nicest memories. Yelena Simakova, a chief specialist at the Education Ministry's Department of Social,

Educational and Ideological Work, shared the heart-warming figures.

Just think of the scale: this year, the campaign has embraced 800,000 children. Ministries and departments, public associations and large enterprises joined the congratulations. Fortunately, several organisations provide support not only during the holidays:

Fairy tales come true

More than 800,000 children took part in the *Our Children* charity campaign

many help throughout the year. In reality, the volume of material assistance, equipment and gifts has not yet been fully calculated but it's assumed that it will amount to at least 2m Roubles.

The nature of the holiday

This year's event was unusual since it was held in compliance with all the current safety measures: nobody forgot about the coronavirus. Larisa Yemelyanchik, an advisor at the Education Ministry's Department of Social, Educational and Ide-

ological Work, told us about the most significant events, "Among them was, for example, a charity holiday at the Palace of the Republic, with the President's participation. 2,400 children attended, including 1,300 from Minsk. They received wonderful presents: a backpack with New Year symbols, a 'Pride of Belarus' wooden puzzle game and a packet of sweets. The show was organised at a professional level and a cultural games programme was prepared. Another large-scale concert was held in the Palace of Independence, attend-

ed by children from large and single-parent families, winners of Olympiads and competitions. They watched *The Magic World* interactive show and received their wonderful gifts. In addition, the Palace of Independence hosted a Republican ball for the 350 best high school pupils and students."

Experts noted that children usually asked not only for toys and modern equipment as gifts but also made wishes for their whole families, so that their loved ones were healthy and happy.

Young and talented

I Am an Inventor educational exhibition opened in the Central City Children's Library named after A.S. Pushkin in Brest

By Pavel Bogush

One of the organisers of the event, Svetlana Ivashkova, noted, "The exhibition has been prepared for a unique festival, *Young Inventors' Day*, which is celebrated in many countries on January 17th. It just so happens that we know of many adult inventors, but the fact that many objects and devices were invented by children is less well-known. Their physical creations are still relevant, interesting and popular to this day. For example, tactile books invented by a thirteen-year-old girl or Braille script, which is used by blind and visually impaired people to read, was created by the fifteen-year-old son of a shoemaker named Louis, and there are many similar examples."

The exhibition showcases twenty exhibits. Their authors are children and teenagers who worked under the guidance of experienced mentors.

"We also have unique works that can't be seen anywhere else, because there is only a single copy. The youngsters who come to the exhibition will not only be able to look at the presented exhibits, but also to learn how and from what they are made, as well as the prin-

ciples behind them. During the visit, you can get to know the biographies of many famous inventors while also playing interesting and educational games," added Svetlana Ivashkova.

A talking book, graphics, robots, nothing has passed the children by. It's also true that, for many, this close experience with technology is occurring for the first time.

"I really like it here. I don't know where to look. Everything is so interesting and unusual. I was especially impressed by the robots. They can dance, squat and even do push ups. Furthermore, my classmates and I assembled cars from the constructor, attached an engine to them, and they drove themselves. Maybe I'll also try to make something like that someday," said a pupil of secondary school No. 19, Aleksandra Shelest.

Meanwhile, a 10th grader from secondary school No. 13 in Brest, Yelizaveta Shulgan, presented her holographic installation for the school museum 'Museum of the War in Afghanistan' at the exhibition, which shows images of twenty-eight Brest-born internationalist soldiers who died in Afghanistan.

"The idea to create something similar came to me two years ago. We took part in the 4th *Museums of Be-*



larus National Forum and decided to do something new and unusual for the school museum. We decided to use holograms. To make it you need four monitors and organic glass. Four images hitting one point are perceived by the human eye as a single 3D image. It was difficult, but thanks to the help of older children and teachers, we managed to realise our ideas," explained Yelizaveta.

Holographic images, waterfalls, LEGO-robots and much more can be viewed in more detail at the event which runs until January 25th.

Downhill on snow as fast as the wind



New Year holidays are over, but the presents are still there. Moreover, the weather is surprising for this time of year: Minsk has long been waiting for snow, which is now sparkling on the ground. Having enthusiastically accepted this 'gift' of nature, the city's residents immediately turned to traditional winter activities: throwing snowballs, skiing, sledging and skating. It's now easier than ever to have enjoyable pastimes and ski centres are welcoming an increasing number of guests; many are struggling for space. Apart from Silichi and Logoisk, skiing is available at Solnechnaya Dolina, Raubichi and Minsk's Vesnyanka...

By Inga Gorbatenko

Getting the skis on

We mainly go to the Solnechnaya Dolina ski complex in Minsk's Kurasovshchina residential district: it's the only one located directly inside the capital. The season started here on December 11th, offering runs for snowboarding and skiing, making it easy to actively relax without leaving Minsk.

The complex can welcome up to 300 people at a time and has three slopes: the first with a springboard aimed at snowboarders. The second is for teaching, being 125m long and having a height difference of 30m. The third slope is the highest and steepest: its length is about 250 metres with an angle of 45 degrees.

"These skis are light and move well," the novice skier Denis admits with satisfaction. "The snow is loose today, and I feel quite confident on the slope, though I'm only skiing for the third time."

Children's and adult's equipment can be rented. One set for two hours will cost 11-14 Roubles (about \$4-5 in equivalent). Also, a cable car pass for adults costs 17-28 Roubles (\$6.5-11) for two hours.

Solnechnaya Dolina's Director, Vyacheslav Yudin, explains, "For children, we have launched a unique attraction: 'Alpine Slides', a metal rail along which special sledges move, which was constructed in Germany. After its installation, the track was successfully tested for technical safety. The length of the route is 425 metres, the height of the slide from which the sledge descends is 145.5m. The descent complies with all safety measures: sledges are equipped with safety belts. The attraction is unique since it's available all year around: in winter and in summer. There is nothing similar to this toboggan in Minsk."

Let's go to a winter slope

This season, 25 ice rinks and 29 hockey rinks, 16 ski tracks and over 30 equipment rental points operate in Minsk. In addition, winter lovers can go to Raubichi: with a ski run over 4km long. Those who prefer alpine skiing to ordinary skis come here.



Logoisk ski sports and recreation complex



At Silichi Republican ski centre

Another point on the map for active recreation activities is the ski track in Vesnyanka. After the persistent frosts, it's expected to be extended to 5km (it's currently 2km long). The track is open around the clock, and the rental office has multiple types of skis. Those who have not yet reached the ski track have an additional incentive: the rental office has completely updated its inventory. In addition, a run was prepared for skiers in Minsk's 900th Anniversary Park.

Lucky for those who enjoy it

It's also possible to spend the winter season with fun and activity at the Silichi ski centre. Due to its location in the most mountainous area in the country, the resort, apart from the Logoisk ski centre, has long been a place of attraction for ski and snowboard lovers from all over Belarus and beyond. No wonder, Silichi is called a Belarusian Switzerland. There are tracks for beginners and professionals and an instructor can help if necessary, for 35 Roubles (about \$13.5) per hour.

Silichi has long been loved not only by our skiers and snowboarders but also by fans of winter sports from neighbouring countries. However, this season's visitors are almost entirely Belarusian. According to estimates from the resort staff, about 1,000 people visit Silichi every day and most prefer the tubing track, because it is free. The peak level of activity is seen at the weekends.

There are 2 rental points at the ski centre, offering more than 1,000 sets of equipment: snowboards, skis and skates.



At Solnechnaya Dolina ski complex

Some have been renewed specially for the season. The measures to prevent coronavirus are also in place: after each rental, each pair of skis, poles and boots is disinfected.

Winter is the season of frost

The Logoisk ski sports and recreation complex was the first to launch winter activities this season. On December 4th, track No. 4 and the training slope opened.

"We have our own microclimate. It is not just that the main ski resorts of the Republic are located here," Leonid Kravchuk, the Head of the Marketing Department, comments. "Due to the mountainous terrain, a pressure difference is observed and, accordingly, it can snow even in above-zero weather. Therefore, we have a huge flow of guests for the holidays. Many people come to us to enjoy the New Year atmosphere!"

Logoisk has five tracks at different levels of difficulty, stretching for

3,679m, while the height differences are up to 82m. These levels enable experienced sportsmen and beginners to find a suitable run. The tracks are equipped with a four-seat cable car which can service 2,000 people per hour (the trip takes about five minutes). There is also a rope lift. In short, there is everything you need for a comfortable stay!

The excellent condition of the slopes is provided by a snow cannon and modern equipment. As a result of the perfectly co-ordinated work of the team, great quality slopes are available to visitors. For example, an educational slope is perfect for beginners. Its length is 120m and height is 11m. Beginners can study at the ski school with an instructor, while special mascots, to make training more interesting, were placed for young skiers

and snowboarders on the training track last year.

Snowboard and ski equipment rental is available and Mr. Kravchuk adds, "On weekends, we are visited by 2,000-3,000 people, sometimes more. People come not only from Minsk, but also from the regions: Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk... Many families of 5-6 people visit. The priority

is placed on our citizens who have lost their opportunity to holiday in the mountains due to the pandemic. We are doing our best to organise a high-quality holiday for them here, in Belarus, despite the vicissitudes of the weather. We also work as a health complex and, accordingly, offer spa holidays, trails, horse rides and barbecue sites for our guests."

Spending a night in a double hotel room of the Logoisk complex will cost 70-80 Roubles (\$27-31). However, those who prefer more comfort and want to live separately, can rent a two-room cottage for 150-180 Roubles (\$58-70) per night.

Due to the pandemic, most of us will spend our winter holidays at home but our ski resorts are ready to fill this gap! We may not have our own Alps or Carpathians, but the relatively mild climate, the lack of risk of avalanches and modern infrastructure for mass sports make our ski centres excellent places to relax.

Frozen castles in China



The 37th Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival has opened with a theme *Magical Harbin, Ice Snow Charming China*

The annual festival, in China's north-east Heilongjiang Province, is one of the biggest ice and snow festivals in the world. It features towering ice and snow structures, and hosts activities like sledding, ice hockey, ice football, speed skating and Alpine skiing competitions.

With entry to China restricted because of the coronavirus pandemic, domestic tourists are expected to make up the majority of visitors.

The Harbin Ice Festival began in 1963 and was interrupted for a few years because of China's Cultural Revolution, resuming again in 1985.

In December, about 300 'ice miners', many of whom are construction labourers and farmers, built the festival's towering ice structures.

To build the frozen city, tens of thousands of ice blocks were prised out of the kilometre-wide frozen

River Songhua, which winds its way through Harbin.

The blocks were then moved by truck to the festival venue, where they were used to build life-sized castles, pagodas, bridges and even a functioning hotpot restaurant.

Ice miner Wang Qiusheng explained why they needed to use ice from the river, "Artificial ice isn't that thick, and isn't strong enough to stand in the wind."

The workers wore knee-high rubber boots, down jackets, thick gloves and hats with flaps to protect their ears from the freezing temperatures.

"We came to mine ice at 6am every day," Zhang Wei said. "We needed to work overtime some-



times, until 8 or 9pm, even late after midnight."

The ice blocks were laid on top of one another to build walls. The workers then shaped, trimmed and cut them to size with chainsaws, pickle forks and tooth chisels.

The elaborate ice structures are lit up at night in a splendid array of colours. Harbin Ice and Snow Festival runs until February 25th, 2021.



Leaders to boost space sector

The 13th European Space Conference in Brussels was taking place in a hybrid mode, with physical attendance limited to speakers and online attendance for other participants

This year's theme is *Space Embracing a Changing World: Green, Digital, Resilience & Security*, with speakers focusing on issues such as space exploration in the digital world.

The EU's enthusiasm for space is clear: just before Christmas the European Commission and Parliament approved a 14.8bn Euro budget for EU space activity. The funding for the period 2021 to 2027 includes 9bn for *Galileo* and 5.4bn for *Copernicus*.

A key focus of the Conference was the desire for Europe to develop a vibrant and independent private space sector. So far, major initiatives like *Galileo* and *Copernicus* have spawned a large number of small and specialist space startups selling value-added services based

on the free data from these two projects. However, the old continent has so far struggled to create the kind of attention-grabbing commercial space firms like SpaceX and Planet Labs that NASA has helped foster in the US.

A hot topic around the virtual and real water coolers in Brussels was also the Commission's new plans to create a network of low-Earth orbiting Internet satellites, which should offer broadband, 5G and more to rural communities across the bloc.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton, with a broad consortium of space industry players comprising Airbus, SES, Arianespace, Eutelsat, OHB, Orange, Telespazio and Thales Alenia Space.

New duties

The United States announced the imposition of additional duties on French and German products as part of a long-running dispute over subsidies for civil aircraft manufacturers: the European Airbus consortium and the American Boeing

The tariffs are for airplane parts, some still wines, and French and German grape cognacs and brandy, which will be added to the 2019 taxable product list, said the US Trade Representative's Office (USTR) statement. The move was a retaliation for EU-imposed tariffs, which the US administration deems to be unfair.

This decision is another twist in a 16-year trade dispute between the two sides. It concerns subsidies to civil aviation, including the European aviation company Airbus and the American Boeing. The dispute grew during the four-year presidency of Donald Trump, who pursued a protectionist trade policy. The USTR's decision came three weeks before Joe Biden was sworn in. The EU associates hopes of a warming up with the strained trade relations with the US in recent years with the choice of a Democratic Party politician.

"In implementing its tariffs... the EU used data from a period when trade volumes were drastically reduced due to the terrifying effects of the COVID-19 virus on the global economy. As a result, Europe imposed tariffs on far more products than would have been the case if it had used the normal trading period. While the US explained to the EU the distorting influence of the period it had chosen, the EU refused to change its approach," the USTR statement said.



Mass vaccination

Russian President Vladimir Putin tasked officials with launching mass coronavirus vaccinations from this week, touting Russia's homemade jab as the world's best

"We have to switch from the big-scale vaccination to a mass one, and I'm asking you to keep this in mind, to get the relevant infrastructure ready," Mr. Putin said. "The Russian vaccine is the best in the world. Thank God it does not require extreme conditions during transportation. This is much simpler and more effective." Mr. Putin noted, however, that it remained to be seen how the vaccine would behave given the emergence of new strains.

Russia in August registered Sputnik V — named after the Soviet-era satellite — months ahead of western competitors and before the start of large-scale clinical trials. It began vaccinations in early December, gradually opening registration to the most vulnerable groups, such as doctors, teachers, social workers, and numerous others, even though it was still in its third phase of clinical trials.

The country has in recent months been battered by a second wave of coronavirus infections, but the Kremlin has held back from introducing sweeping restrictions like in the beginning of the pandemic.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



Every brushstroke feeds the soul

Dmitry Kovalev has dreamt of large-scale sacred works since his youth. For many years he has been spending his free time at the church, transferring scenes from the Bible to its walls, combined with his own artistic vision.

By Olga Valchenko

The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the agricultural town of Uritskoe is relatively new. The parish was formed after the revival of the Gomel diocese. The first services were performed in a small wooden house purchased by the congregation, and the church was consecrated in 1994.

Recently, the church has been working on interior decoration. Artist Dmitry Kovalev is responsible for painting the walls. Some of them already depict sacred scenes while tall scaffolding stands against others. Dmitry examines the canvases with reverence and admits that he painted from early childhood, “By the time my parents realised, at just three years old, I was already diligently drawing things in my notebooks.”

He was born in Gomel and studied at the Gymnasium-College of Arts in Minsk and Gomel’s Art School. He wrote his graduation work on wall painting and created two icons for the Church of the Intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God in the village of Golovintsy. Therefore, the offer to work in the church came as a blessing for the artist. For his sake, he even refused a lucrative order in Moscow.

Surprisingly, Dmitry was not brought up religiously and came to God rather late: he was baptised at the age of 27. Now he knows for sure: faith always helps him to create.

The artist climbs up and down the scaffolding several dozen times a day.

“Now, above the choir, the height of the scaffolding is 10-12 metres, and under the dome it was as much as 24m. I often have to work with my head thrown back and my arms outstretched, so the physical load is great. No gym needed!”

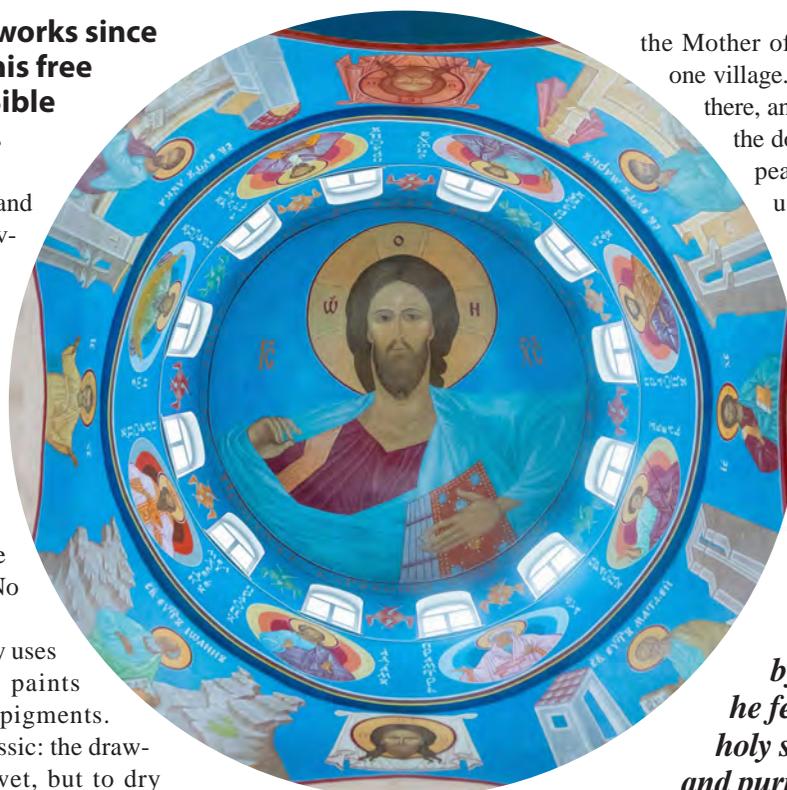
For his work, Dmitry uses tempera, water-based paints based on dry powder pigments. The frescoes are not classic: the drawing is applied not to wet, but to dry plaster, and then the walls are covered with varnish, which will protect the images from candle soot and moisture.

The main theme of the painting is scenes from the life of the Mother of God. What exactly will appear on the walls, the painter discusses with Father Artemy, the rector of the church.

“There is a certain canon, icons, tracery,” Dmitry explains. “Taking this into account, Father Artemy and I consult and decide what subjects we will choose. Everything else is down to me.”

At first, the sketch appears on paper, and then the artist transfers it to large canvases. More often than not, images have to be corrected already in the process of drawing: due to the unevenness

For three years now, the Gomel artist has been working on the painting of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary



the Mother of God to the headman of one village. A church was being built there, and a cross had to be put on the dome. The Virgin Mary appeared and ordered them to use a wooden cross. They did not obey and decided to use a metal one. Together with the cross, the man who installed it fell to the ground. So, they erected a wooden cross on the dome, as the Mother of God ordered,” he explains.

Dmitry Kovalev is pleased not only by the praise, but by the process itself: he feels working on the holy subjects transforms and purifies him spiritually

and bends of the walls, the figures are modified and look completely different from that on paper. To make them look good from below, it’s necessary to distort them on the face of the wall.

The artist connects several scenes into one large-scale composition with a single relief so that the life of the Virgin Mary is read as one story.

“The ready-made scenes include the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the appearance on Mount Athos, the crucifixion of Christ, the appearance to the myrrh-bearing wise men, while here the Mother of God is sitting with 12 apostles. But closer to the centre there is an interesting episode: the appearance of

Dmitry has been working on spiritual paintings for three years, devoting all his free time to this process. The artist has to earn his living very prosaically: he used to build furniture, was a carpenter, and now he is engaged in the manufacture and installation of plastic windows and doors. It is not customary to touch on material topics within the walls of the church, but I wish to clarify whether the artist receives payment for his work. Dmitry tactfully answers, “It’s good when someone donates money. Anyway, even if there’s none I won’t quit my job. I’m not doing this for the money, but for the benefit of my soul.”

By Nadezhda Dekola

World management is a powerful ability

At the *Crystal Keys* festival, all the Belarusian works were presented in the 'Animation. Short Length Films' category and the 'For Romance' special diploma went to *The Beauty and the Beast* animated film directed by Natalia Darvina-Khatkevich. Second place was taken by Igor Volchek's *How the Bear was Looking for a Friend*, while a prize and a 1st degree diploma were won by *The Best Place in the World* cartoon by Irina Tarasova who said, "It's a simple story about how a mouse went looking for happiness. For him, this was a full barn, where everything was provided and everything could be eaten. As it turned out, such a place really exists but it didn't bring happiness to our hero..."

Irina doesn't reveal the ending but notes that — despite its simple plot — the film is multi-faceted. Therefore, it will be interesting not only for children. "It lasts slightly more than 13 minutes, though it took us actually 18 months to complete the work. It has many characters and, in some scenes, as many as 30 mice appear — which makes the task of the animators even more difficult. Moreover, the sites and actions change all time and our technical aspects — computer re-laying — is quite complex. We firstly drew our characters and backgrounds with pastels and pencils on kraft paper, then scanned the drawings, cut out the details and made them move on the computer screen," she adds.

At the same time, Ms. Tarasova doesn't assume any victories for the cartoon in this and other competitions (*The Best Place in the World* has already been shown at festivals in different countries). She believes festivals are always a lottery. At the same time, the lady notes that western animation is now following the path of minimalism and is mainly created on a computer — which is immediately noticeable. In turn, ours has preserved the best traditions of the Soviet school.

"We still have a lot of hand-work — in a good sense. This is a winning feature at international festivals. This doesn't mean we've remained in the Stone Age and take pride in it. We also have a lot of computer work but we also have hand cut and interesting creative solutions," she says.

When asked about the best place for her in the world, Ms.

Altai Krai and *Crystal Keys*: these names — of the place and the international festival of this fabulous genre in children's and family cinema — have brought success to three Belarusian cartoons. They have received prestigious awards there and the Belarusfilm Studio is happy for its colleagues — as always. After all, this event is no ordinary occurrence: every year our cartoons win up to 40 such prizes and awards at festivals in different countries. We asked the animators to comment on the secret of their victories.



Igor Volchek

Our cartoons win up to 40 prestigious prizes and awards annually at festivals around the world

ADDITION

The Animation Film Studio is preparing to launch a joint project — *263 Nights* — about the Holocaust: an animation work with documentaries based on real events



Igor Galinovsky

Tarasova smiles, "It's where I'm present. I have always been an artist, engaged in painting and theatre. I came to the animation to animate pictures. After succeeding in this, I realised that it isn't enough and I wanted to be a director — to create worlds and manage them. This is a very powerful profession."

How the bear was looking for a friend

Director Igor Volchek agrees with his colleague, "Animation is a very deep independent art that begins where the possibilities of feature films end. In animation, you can do anything that comes to your mind. The main thing is that these ideas should come."

Igor has been making cartoons for children for over 40 years and notes that he received his first prize as a director back in 1987 — for *Capriccio*: the cartoon then collected nine awards at the most prestigious international festivals. However, his *How the Bear was Looking for a Friend* is not for a festival at all; it was made for a

wider children's audience. By the way, at the *Crystal Keys* event, the winners were chosen by children.

"In this cartoon, we also use plasticine models: it's something like a revived bas-relief. I think we captured the hearts of the children's jury with bright characters, an interesting and diverse story. Moreover, our cartoon is musical. With some sadness in his voice, Igor adds that poverty is crafty — implying that Belarusfilm is now experiencing hard times, "Importantly, our films — while entertaining — educate. This must be used."

Igor Volchek gives examples of his cartoons which, he believes, children will enjoy watching. Among them

are *Nesterka's Adventures*, in Russian and Belarusian, *Oceans and Miracles on Birthday* — all are colourful and dynamic. At the same time, he says some popular foreign animated series are 'animated fast food', "They have somehow forgotten that animation is a spiritual food, which can be both useful and harmful. Therefore, we must think more about how to educate the younger generation. Underestimating the role of animation is short-sighted — to put it mildly."

Even in difficult times for Belarusfilm, 90 minutes of animation, or 8-10 cartoons, are created annually at the studio. Each of them boasts numerous diplomas from different festivals. Igor Galinovsky, the Director of the Animation Film Studio, continues, "For you to understand, our cartoons collect up to 40 awards a year. This year, for example, they have been shown at festivals in India, China, Japan, Thailand, Croatia and the United States. Their victory at the *Crystal Keys* — where the works of such studios as Soyuzmultfilm, Kinofest, WizartAnimation and Unimaccord were also presented — is one of many. However, our cartoons still lack advertising and promotion domestically."



How the Bear was Looking for a Friend



The Best Place in the World



The Beauty and the Beast

Queen of Abu Dhabi

Arina Sobolenko conquers the tennis world

By Sergei Kanashits

In Abu Dhabi, heat, lively tennis and the Belarusian flag fluttering in the wind — the main star of the season that recently started was Arina Sobolenko. At the first tournament of the year, our number one player stunned everyone with her pressure and incredible play, confidently covering the distance, giving her opponents only one set and defeating Veronika Kudermetova of Russia in the finals — 6:2, 6:2.

For Arina, this was the 13th WTA final in her career (and the third in a row; before that she played in Ostrava and Linz last year and won both times), and this is her ninth 'queen' title. It is also good to note another fact: the unbeaten run of the Belarusian number one, taking into account the past season, has already reached 15 (!) matches — this is a career record, which, we dare to hope, will be continued. But that's not all! From now on, Arina Sobolenko is the number seven in the world. She hasn't yet managed to climb higher. Top-5 looms ahead, and there, maybe, the title of best in the world. There is no doubt about it: Sobolenko has reached a completely new qualitative level in her game and is able to conquer the most fantastic peaks. The main thing is that Arina knows the goal and sees the reference point, "I concentrate on the right things. This helps me, firstly, not to think about all these victories and, secondly, to continue winning. I guess I need to keep focusing on my game, on moving around the court, and try to do my best at the moment. I think it works great. I want to improve in everything. There is still so much to do and improve upon. I would say that focusing on the right things helps

me have fun on the court, and it makes my life a little easier. I just enjoy the process and the game."

For the number 36 in the world, Veronika Kudermetova (up 10 positions!), the final in Abu Dhabi was the first in her career. This is a milestone for her. Such a successful start to the season has already enabled Kudermetova to bypass Svetlana Kuznetsova in the national rating and advance to the position of the second in Russia (Yekaterina Aleksandrova is also not that far away). In the semi-finals, the Russian tennis player defeated 18-year-old Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine — 7:6, 6:4 — and before that she beat another Ukrainian athlete, the fifth racket of the world Elina Svitolina — 5:7, 6:3, 7:6. Kudermetova is also not easy, and she seriously expected to give a fight in the finals, claiming that her main advantage is psychological: they say, Sobolenko, as a one hundred percent favourite, will be pressured by the burden of responsibility, which the Russian woman planned to use. But Arina did not allow her to doubt her superiority even for a second, giving a convincing answer to the sceptics: she has matured and improved a lot, both in



Arina Sobolenko with the champions flowers in Abu Dhabi

physical condition and skills, as well as mentally. She is no longer emotionally unstable and is not suffering from mood changes, she has learnt to control her emotions and clearly manage herself.

The path to victory in Abu Dhabi was not strewn with roses for Sobolenko (all her rivals were from the top category), but the Belarusian's game today reminds us of young Serena Williams — a hurricane in a skirt. She walked through all the opponents like a tank, defeating Polona Hercog — 7:6, 6:2, Ajla Tomljanović — 7:5, 6:4, Ons Jabeur — 6:2, 6:4 and Yelena Rybakina — 6:4, 4:6, 6:3. In the semi-finals,

she literally trampled the 'little terminator' from Greece, Maria Sakkari, into the ground. For a confident victory, our tennis player took less than an hour — 6:3, 6:2, and she completed the decisive game in her favour with great skill, 'nailing' her opponent to the court with three amazing aces. Sakkari was impressed, "Arina is very confident now. We know each other well, we often train together. Her career is going well, and she is very young. Sobolenko is now one of the toughest opponents on the tour." There is no doubt that this opinion is shared by other tennis players of the elite tennis pool — a real tigress has appeared on the courts.

The Australian series of tournaments, scheduled for late January and early February is next on the agenda. The entire pool of world tennis will smoothly, under strict anti-COVID controls, relocate to the 'green' continent, where it will have a two-week quarantine. Then there will be two events the WTA 500 series (prize fund of \$565,000), and then (from February 8th to 21st — shifted by almost a month!) the Australian Open. Arina Sobolenko has not yet won the Grand Slam tournaments...

CONGRATULATIONS FROM THE PRESIDENT

President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko congratulated a member of the national tennis team, Arina Sobolenko, on her victory at the tournament in Abu Dhabi.

'This triumph in Abu Dhabi is a real gift for all Belarusians for the New Year. We are proudly following an impressive series of victories and believe that dedication, hard work and unbending character will definitely lead you to the peak — the title of the number one in the world', reads the congratulatory message.

Aleksandr Lukashenko wished Arina Sobolenko good health and new achievements for the glory of Belarus.



The Dakar Rally has ended in Saudi Arabia. This year, it took place for the 43rd time. The length of the entire route was 7,646km, of which 4,767km were the special stages. One of the features of this year's event was the contactless transfer of the route to the participants' tablets on the eve of the opening day.

Conquerors of sand quarries

By Arina Novikova

The dominance of the Russian team in the overall rankings was undeniable, even though none of the KAMAZ-master crews managed to win the last stage. It was the Russians who took the first three places: Dmitry Sotnikov won, with a total time of 48 hours 23 minutes and 21 seconds while Anton Shibalov finished second, followed by Airat Mardeev.

The race included canyons

which were difficult to navigate, rocks, dunes, and, of course, a large number of punctures and breakdowns. As far as the Belarusians are concerned, the opening of their race was not without its challenges. The first stages found Sergei Vyazovich with a broken finger on the steering wheel, a windshield knocked out by a tree branch, cuts and bruises, punctured wheels and a leading place in the Dakar Rally.

Our MAZ completed the

third stage on the first line of the final standings. Then a catastrophe happened: the Belarusian MAZ-SPORTauto crew headed by Sergei Vyazovich dropped out of the race after the fifth stage due to a transmission breakdown, which could not be eliminated on the field. Aleksei Vishnevsky's crew remained the only hope of the Belarusian fans for a prize in the race. However, his crew in the general classification are only in sixth final position.

ARENA

● Belarus' national team placed second in women's relay at Biathlon World Cup stage in Oberhof (Germany)

Irina Krivko, Dinara Alimbekova, Anna Sola and Yelena Kruchinkina were 17.4 seconds behind the German who completed the stage in 1 hour 14 minutes and 31 seconds to win. The German sportswomen didn't incur any penalty rounds, using 5 extra bullets. The Belarusians also did without penalty rounds but used 9



extra bullets. Third place went to Sweden's shooting skiers (they were 35.7 seconds behind, with 0 misses and 5 extra bullets).

● Belarusian freestyle skier Alla Tsuper takes silver at FIS Aerials World Cup in Yaroslavl, Russia

The 2014 Sochi Olympic champion scored a total of 89.82 points. Only American Megan Nick managed to overtake her with 89.88 points. Bronze also went to American Kaila Kuhn with 87.25 points.



● Belarusian hockey player Yegor Sharangovich scores his first goal in the NHL

Yegor Sharangovich's first goal in the NHL helped his team, the New Jersey Devils, to win over the Boston Bruins in overtime, 2:1 (1:0, 0:1, 0:0, 1:0).

"This is the best moment in my hockey career," the player from Minsk told reporters after the victory. "I'm very happy since we won and scored two points, while I scored my first goal in the NHL." In total, Yegor spent 17 minutes on the ice and took three shots at the opponents' goal.



● Belarusian Viktoria Kebikova (75kg) wins silver at the Cup of Nations boxing tournament

The athlete from Gomel had two fights at prestigious competitions in Serbia. In the semi-finals, she defeated her opponent from Kazakhstan, Marina Volnova, who previously won bronze at the 2012 Games. In the final match, Turkish Demir Sennur proved stronger than the bronze medallist of the 2018 World Championship.

Belarusians Yulia Apanasovich (51kg) and Ulyana Yesipenko (57kg) lost in the semi-final matches and, in line with the tournament rules, were placed third.

In addition, in the youth event, Daria Letsko (60kg) took the silver.



Photo of the week

Frosty winter on the Stracha River at the Republican Blue Lakes Landscape Reserve

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.



On January 21st, 2001, the 'star' of the Belarusian state ensemble *Pesnyary*, People's Artist of Belarus and the USSR, Vladimir Mulyavin, was commissioned on the Avenue of Stars in Moscow.

January 21st is the Day of Engineering Troops in the Republic of Belarus. On this day in 1701, Peter the Great signed a decree on the creation of the first engineering school in Russia. This day was included in a number of holidays of the Republic of Belarus by the Decree of the President in January 1999.



On January 22nd, 1951, Vitaly Semenchenko was born, a Belarusian scientist in the field of hydrobiology and ecology of freshwater ecosystems, a corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (2004) and Doctor of Biological Sciences (1992). He is an author of over 150 scientific papers. He has also developed a concept for monitoring the natural world and its elements.



January 24th is World Snow Day, celebrated since 2012 and initiated by the International Ski Federation (FIS). Its other name is International Winter Sports Day. The purpose of the holiday is to increase interest in winter sports and get young people involved in an active lifestyle. The holiday is celebrated with folk festivities, sporting events, winter carnivals, snowball fights and ice skating or snowboarding.



January 24th is International Day of Education. By its resolution on December 3rd, 2018, the UN General Assembly proclaimed January 24th as the International Day of Education, recognising its role in achieving peace and sustainable development. Education is a human right, as is stipulated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



On January 25th, 1896, the first World Figure Skating Championship took place, an international tournament organised by



the International Skating Union. Athletes only competed in men's single skating, and only four participants took to the ice. The championship was held in St. Petersburg, in the Yusupov Garden.

January 26th is International Customs Day, a professional holiday for all employees of the customs services in the world. On January 26th, 1953, the founding session of the Customs Co-operation Council (now the World Customs Organisation) was held in Brussels. Currently, the World Customs Organisation unites 182 member states, which manage more than 98 percent of all international trade. More than 800,000 people celebrate their professional holiday, this being the total number of customs officers around the world.



On January 27th, 1756, Mozart Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-1791) was born, an Austrian composer and a representative of the Viennese classical school. He was a musician of universal talent, which developed in early childhood. He modified



the traditional operatic forms: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*. He is an author of over 20 operas and 50 symphonies, concertos for flute and violin and orchestra, alongside chamber instrumental and piano works, Requiem, choral compositions and songs.

January 27th is International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, proclaimed by a resolution of the UN General Assembly on November 1st, 2005. A special meeting of the UN General Assembly, timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the liberation of prisoners from the Nazi concentration camp in Auschwitz by Soviet troops on January 27th, 1945, began with a minute of silence. During the existence of Auschwitz, according to some estimates, between 1.5 to 4 million people died. The meeting was opened by the 7th UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, who called on the present and future generations not to let the horrors of fascism repeat themselves.

