



The country's woodworking industry is developing efficiently

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Sketching is a hobby which is gaining more and more fans around the world

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Kazakhstan's exposition at 28th Minsk International Book Trade Fair

Books without competition

The capital hosted 28th Minsk International Book Trade Fair, with the Commonwealth of Independent States its central exhibitor. The motto of this year's forum was also symbolic:

'Books Unite People and Countries'. Events of this kind strengthen friendships and mutual understanding between peoples. 281 participants from 20 countries presented their publications — including facsimile, Belarusian classics, comics and religious literature. → 6



We'll be able to do lots together

The futility of sanctions and a well-deserved award: results of the President's meeting with the State Secretary of the Union State, Grigory Rapota

By Yevgeny Kononovich,
Dmitry Umpirovich

During their meeting at the Palace of Independence, Aleksandr Lukashenko thanked the State Secretary for participating in the 6th Belarusian People's Congress. He said, "I was quite sincere in my report, so were other the speakers. We were sharing our thoughts. Consequently, the Congress gave us answers to all our questions. I think that Russia has heard us and so did the West. It's very important for the further development of our co-operation as part of the Union State of Belarus and Russia."

As Aleksandr Lukashenko stated at the People's Congress, Russia always has been and will be a key economic partner and strategic ally of Belarus.

Situation allows for opportunities

Sanctions are one of the major issues on the agenda, though Aleksandr Lukashenko believes it's given too much importance, "There have been continuous attempts to intimidate Russia, just like us, with some kind of sanction." The President believes our countries can successfully liaise in all areas, including space, biotechnology and

electric cars, "We can do everything. We can calculate everything and fully provide for ourselves, except for a few details. In reality, it'll take us just 3-5 years to produce these details in Belarus and Russia. We have an impressive scientific potential. If we could have done this, then Ukraine would have joined us, not to mention Kazakhstan and other neighbouring republics. Therefore, the main issue is to agree and provide our Fatherland with everything necessary."

The President believes it's necessary to discuss all these points at a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State, "We already need to start working and moving forward

in an offline format. We should use the situation to our advantage. The latter is not simple but this situation opens up opportunities. If we start quickly, then we'll work better."

Our country has shown a clear example of how to use these opportunities against the background of the pandemic. Unlike others, it didn't halt the economy and close down businesses.



Grigory Rapota

DIRECT SPEECH

Grigory Rapota told journalists about Belarusian-Russian relations:

I didn't have any doubt that integration is necessary for the well-being of our two nations. However, I'd like to see more major joint projects. These can be transport or scientific projects. For example, a group of enthusiasts have joined forces for the technological development of the Arctic. We've found out that there are many technological achievements in Belarus and Russia in the field of construction, environmental protection and mechanical engineering; these could be successfully used in the Arctic to ensure a more comfortable life for people. I also believe that Russia and Belarus aren't sufficiently connected by modern transport routes. These should be high-speed railways and the newest highways that not only connect Russia and Belarus but also go beyond the borders of our countries, making us a bridge between Asia and Europe.

As a result, in January, our industry demonstrated a 9 percent rise.

With love to Belarus

The meeting had also a symbolic subtext. In the near future, Grigory Rapota will finish his work as the State Secretary of the Union State due to the expiration of his term of office. Addressing the President, Mr. Rapota thanked him for many years of fruitful co-operation. "There has never been a case when you failed to respond to any request or wish. This creates a very good working environment. If, God willing, it will continue within the Standing Committee and our other structures, then this is a good system which should be used," he said.

Mr. Rapota confirmed his readiness to further promote the strengthening of Belarusian-Russian relations, "Wherever I go next, I will be committed to this."

Honorary award

There was also a pleasant moment at the meeting. Recently, the President signed a decree to award Grigory Rapota with the Order of Honor for his significant personal contribution to the development of integration co-operation, Union State construction, the enhancement of friendly relations and the unity of the peoples of Belarus and Russia. Aleksandr Lukashenko personally presented Grigory Rapota with the Order.

Our brands: to maintain and multiply

The problems and prospects of Motovelo Plant were the focus of attention at the Palace of Independence: here, the President held a meeting on the development of domestic two-wheeled vehicles. Aleksandr Lukashenko set out a range of measures during the meeting. Among them was the request to reduce debts and outline a clear business plan aimed at consumers.

Demand is in place and products are needed

Motovelo Plant can rightly be called one of the most famous Belarusian brands: its 'Aist' and 'Orlyonok' bicycles, and 'Minsk' motorcycles were used by millions of consumers in the former USSR. At present, although the global market of bicycles is growing, Belarusians often fail to turn to domestically produced vehicles. Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed the importance of the topic under discussion, "When I speak about MAZ, BelAZ, MTZ, Gomselmash and other enterprises, I mean that these plants are the face of the Belarusian manufacturing industry, they are the brands of Belarus. Motovelo Plant is on this list. Therefore, we can't lose it."

The Head of State stressed, "Healthy lifestyles have been in great demand all over the world in recent years, and sports activities are more popular than ever. The global market for bicycles is increasingly vibrant and, in spite of the pandemic, forecasts indicate that it is growing annually by 9 percent. Therefore, conditions for the development of this industry are currently very good."

The President reminded those present that production of such Belarusian bicycle brands as 'Minsk' and 'Aist' has been preserved in the country; the product range includes more than 100 bicycles and dozens of two-wheeled motor vehicles. Sadly, the financial and economic indicators could be much better. Aleksandr Lukashenko commented,

"The share of Belarusian bicycles on the domestic market has been decreasing every year. They account for about 20 percent of the market today. Exports are low and don't solve the problem."

The President explained the reason, "It is not surprising if the key link of the production chain, which is a local design and engineering department, is lost. It doesn't make much sense to establish the assembly of vehicles. An assembly facility will not help solve the company's problems — especially financial and economic ones."

Plan must be profitable

Aleksandr Lukashenko raised a number of urgent issues at the meeting. First of all, he asked about the development strategy of the enterprise and recalled the decision to develop promising industries accepted at the Belarusian People's Con-

gress. "We have many specialists who can make good bicycles. Let's develop this industry," he said.

The Head of State focused on the conditions necessary to ensure the project is promising. "I want to see a comprehensive and well-developed business plan which takes the interests of consumers into account. Having such a plan, we can consider and discuss financing," he said.

At the same time, the main point is that products must be of high quality and competitive, since competition in this area is very high, the Belarusian leader stressed.

Later, the Deputy Prime Minister, Yuri Nazarov, clarified: though our machinery is sold abroad — in Russia and Africa, among others, but supplies to the EU are most effective from an economic point of view, since this market is marginal, growing and geographically close.

With benefits for the state and people

The President noted that the existing production site is 'a prime spot — a wonderful area in the city centre — but its size exceeds the needs of the enterprise'. "Therefore, the city should join the Government and think about how to use this site, so that it brings benefit for the state and people," he said.

In his talk to journalists, Yuri Nazarov focused on this issue and explained the details announced during the meeting: it's not possible to make a modern high-quality product at the existing premises and with the available technologies. However, the location of a suitable production plant will be decided on after the President's visit to the Motovelo Plant. Aleksandr Lukashenko plans to visit the enterprise in the near future.



From Yuri Nazarov's report to the President about the situation at the Motovelo Plant:

Over 120 models of bicycles and more than nine models of two-wheeled motor vehicles are produced, although — when the Motovelo Plant was established — the figures were 20 and 4 respectively. In 2020, the company produced 69,000 bicycles and 3,000 two-wheeled motor vehicles. In 2019, a new product was launched: an electric bicycle; 236 of which were produced last year. The range has completely changed and, of the Soviet bicycles with a steel frame, there are four models left. All the others are new: mountain, children's, and so on. The number of employees has increased to 120 and the revenue growth in 2020 was 135 percent against the 2019 figures. The net profit increased 4-fold. Foreign sales brought in almost \$6.3m and, for the first time last year, exports equalled imports.

Meeting of good friends and reliable partners

The presidents of Belarus and Russia met in Sochi. Vladimir Putin welcomed the Belarusian Head of State in Krasnaya Polyana noting that personal meetings are rare in our present times. Therefore, according to the Russian President, they are of a special value. Aleksandr Lukashenko responded, "We are simply close people; our nations and countries are close to each other. We can discuss our serious problems in any form."

A wide range of issues

As Vladimir Putin noted, the agenda involves 'a wide range of issues'. "The mechanisms of our interaction have been fine-tuned, they work well. Our colleagues communicate with each other every day, addressing certain issues that we face. I'm pleased to assert that we remain committed to a high level of co-operation, strategic partnership and allied relations," the President of Russia said.

He added that Russia is the major trade and economic partner of Belarus. "We are implementing major energy projects. It's enough to mention the Belarusian nuclear power plant which is running successfully — as we know. We also work in our traditional markets, I mean agriculture. In Russia, products from Belarus enjoy great demand: they are always of high-quality and reasonably priced," Vladimir Putin said.

The President of Russia also highlighted close humanitarian ties between the countries. According to him, we don't need reminding of our co-operation in this field,

"We are very close people. We share a common culture, language, religion and history — based not only on the heroic recent past but also going back centuries. We are all united by these. Of course, it's good that we follow this trend in modern times as well."

Russia's Head of State paid special attention to regional co-operation between the two countries and stressed that liaisons are very important. "A significant volume of our relations is taking shape at the level of regional co-operation. These are economic ties and human relations," Vladimir Putin said.

Maximum efficiency format

Aleksandr Lukashenko noted to a phrase from Vladimir Putin's opening speech that it is now rare for heads of state to meet face-to-face, saying, "I think we'll continue this format of communication."

According to the Belarusian leader, there is no need to overstate anything, as the parties have done a great deal of work at governmental level. The President recalled that about 30 areas for the development of co-operation and roadmaps were previously outlined. When the heads of state had met in Sochi, they agreed that the two states' governments would work further on them — renewing and modernising.

"True, the governments have done much — both in Belarus and Russia. They have updated the format. Today, Ambassador Semashko has reported to me that there may be 6–7 plans left (these are now called different names as they have been rebranded) which our governments are working on. All the others are virtually ready to be signed. Therefore, there is a plan of action," Aleksandr Lukashenko said.

He thanked Vladimir Putin for the support that the Russian side is rendering to the Belarusian economy. "I must inform you that this is not in vain. The money is not wasted," Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed.



In this regard, he noted that at least a half of Belarus' trade turnover is tied to Russia, while relatively small Belarus is the fourth most important trade partner of Russia. The country consumes many Russian components and raw materials. Belarus' Head of State stressed,

"We invest in the final production, while buying a huge amount of raw materials and components in Russia. This volume is increasing all the time and if we implement the planned projects — that we have approved for 5 years — then imports from Russia will significantly increase."

Aleksandr Lukashenko explained that the full commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power plant will save about 5bn cubic metres of natural gas. Nevertheless, the demand for this raw material will not actually fall taking into account the plans for the construction of a new nitrogen plant in Grodno, "This is natural gas. Therefore, we'll still consume natural gas in ever-increasing volumes. The project is worth 1.2–1.3bn," the President said. "It will be a new plant. We have experience. A similar one already operates there. Therefore, we want to increase the volume of nitrogen fertilisers. If you ask us to work on this issue, Gazprom and I are ready to implement this project."

Open to each other

Aleksandr Lukashenko also expressed gratitude for co-operation in the field of education, in particular, training of Belarusian students in Russian universities. "Although we have a decent level of education, young people actively use the universities of the Russian Federation to get a further education," he told Vladimir Putin.

In this regard, the President of Belarus also touched on the current topic of the fight against coronavirus and the production of vaccines, appreciating the achievements of Russian scientists in this area, "You already have three registered vaccines and some are under development. We are also moving along this path. By autumn, we'll have our own vaccine; we have specialists developing this. Meanwhile, we are actively buying from you. This vaccine-related topic indicates the highest level of science in the Russian Federation. There is no science without education. This has greatly influenced our students in terms of training in the Russian Federation. Young people, in turn, also come to us. Happily, we have no barriers here."

Belarus' Head of State also drew attention to the issues of restoring transport links between our countries, "Thank you for listening to my request and opening railway traffic between our two countries — increasing the capacity and the possibility for our citizens to move back and forth. I think that automobile traffic will also be reopened in the near future. We are not closed here."

The President of Belarus noted that

Russia had sent specialists to Belarus who determined that the countries are at approximately the same level of morbidity. "Fortunately, the incidence of the disease has started to decline sharply. God forbid, by autumn or maybe even by summer, we'll approach zero level," Aleksandr Lukashenko added.

Vladimir Putin, in turn, speaking about co-operation between the two countries, stressed that the issues of financial support, of course, are important, but this is far from being the key, "The main thing is our joint work and co-operation in the real sector of the economy. Indeed, our trade turnover fell slightly during the epidemic, by about 15 percent. However, it still amounted to \$28.5bn. This is a very significant figure."

In the context of liaisons in the fight against coronavirus infection, Vladimir Putin noted that the Russian side has transferred to our specialists the technology for production of a vaccine against COVID. Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that the corresponding production in our country is planned to start in March.

...As the 'Pool of the First' telegram channel announced before the event, the meeting of the leaders of the two states followed no regulation format. A wide range of issues was planned for discussion — including the bilateral agenda and international topics. Issues of joint response to emerging challenges, including in the field of military security and combating the pandemic, interaction in integration structures were to be in the focus of attention.

The main part of the talks between the two leaders lasted about an hour. After the tete-a-tete meeting, Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin continued their conversation while skiing. The heads of state also went snowmobiling and then met for lunch.

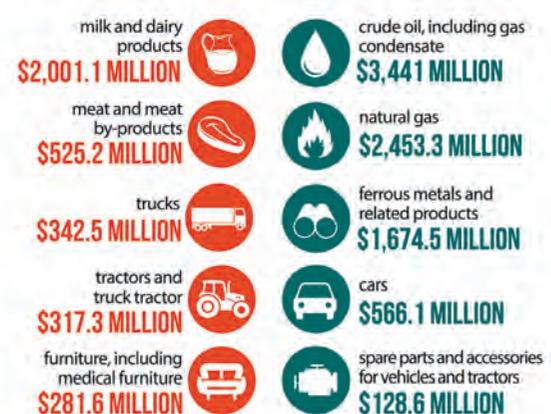
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BELARUS - RUSSIA: Trade and Economic Co-operation

Russia is Belarus' main trading partner. In 2020, Belarus-Russia merchandise trade soared almost 4.5 times over 1996.



BELARUS EXPORTED BELARUS IMPORTED



Source: National Statistic Committee

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With maximum efficiency

Logs and lumber, top level furniture, processing of our unique resources and waste-free production with an eye to exportation... Mikhail Kasko, the Chairman of Bellesbumprom Concern, spoke at a press conference, commenting on how the country's woodworking industry is developing and what results we have achieved over the past year.



Mikhail Kasko

“The Concern’s organisations closed 2020 with positive movement in all areas of socio-economic development. Last year was quite a success for us. We met the main tasks set by the Head of State and Government. We were steadily increasing the capacity for utilisation and sales. In 2020, consumption of wood rose by almost 600,000 cubic metres to 6.3m cubic metres, while the volume of production, against 2019, increased by 4 percent, to reach almost Br2bn (more than \$0.8bn equivalent). We sold everything we produced. The profitability of sales from the Concern was at 9 percent,” Mikhail Kasko informed the press.

Exports, despite the difficult market situation due to quarantine measures, increased by 5 percent for the company, to exceed \$608m. In 2020, Bellesbumprom’s enterprises expanded their supply area to 70 countries. In exports, the optimal balance of market distribution between the EAEU, the European Union and the Far Arc is 36, 35 and about 30 percent, respectively.

Mr. Kasko called it a historic achievement that three-quarters of the Concern’s products were exported last year. “This indicates that the products are of high quality, in demand and sold at good prices,” he commented.

Among the major sales markets are Russia (over 30 percent of total sales), Poland, Ukraine, China and Lithuania. Exports to non-CIS markets are steadily increasing, by almost 11.5 percent in 2020.



At FanDOK JSC in Bobruisk

The Concern mainly exports highly processed products: furniture, wooden boards, cellulose, paper, cardboard and plywood.

“Svetlogorsk Pulp and Board Plant has commissioned businesses to make bleached sulphated pulp and viscose pulp. On the whole, in 2020, the company doubled its pulp output in comparison with 2019 and became a growth driver for the entire industry,” Mikhail Kasko said, adding that the company is now operating confidently. “In 2020, its output was close to 65–70 percent of the planned capacity and, this year, the plant aims to reach 100 percent of its designed output capacity. All the products are in demand and sell in various export markets

(China, Europe). Quite a lot of the output is still sold domestically. There are no problems with sales at present. The quality is very high. The colour is sufficient to encourage European consumers to buy Belarusian pulp,” the official noted.



A pulp production workshop at Svetlogorsk Pulp and Board Plant

He pointed out that cellulose is an intermediate product for making other kinds of merchandise, first of all, paper, including wrapping paper and paper for sanitary needs and

hygiene. “So, we shouldn’t think only about exports. Since we can make this kind of product in Svetlogorsk, we can offer paper of a higher quality to domestic consumers. For instance, the Newsprint Mill in Shklov uses cellulose to make wrapping paper which Bellesbumprom enterprises can use to make paper bags and sacks and sell them on the domestic market, including to producers of flour and other bulk products,” Mr. Kasko added.

Various kinds of cardboard are also needed to make paper packaging. “Our enterprises also make uncoated cardboard. Once facilities for the Dobrush-based Geroy Truda Paper Mill are commissioned, we will be able to make coated cardboard [cardboard production is planned to be launched there in April],” said Mr. Kasko. “Quite

packaging materials by the end of 2021 and, in early 2022, in order to satisfy domestic demand as much as possible,” the official concluded.

The Concern expects that the commissioning of the cardboard facility will significantly increase production and export volumes, also creating possibilities for liaising with small and medium-sized businesses. Cardboard will be used not only in printing activities for the production of stationery, but also for the production of paper tableware (cups, plates), as well as packaging.

The Chairman of Bellesbumprom also spoke about other major investment projects. In addition to commissioning the bleached kraft pulp mill on the site of Svetlogorsk Pulp and Board Plant JSC, two production facilities are being put into operation in Shklov: a new line for the production of base paper for decorating wood laminate at Newsprint Mill Republican Unitary Enterprise and an upgraded line for recycling paper into commercial products on the basis of Spartak Paper Mill JSC.

This year, a new woodworking facility is to open in Vitebsk: the pellet plant will produce about 150,000 tonnes of fuel pellets per year. The project aims to process low-quality and waste produce from other woodworking industries’ raw hardwoods. “The project has already been launched, the construction and purchase of appropriate equipment are underway,” Mikhail Kasko informed the press.

Taste Belarus

Belinterexpo of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the organiser of the exposition, comments, “The national pavilion of Belarus is open at the exhibition in Dubai for the sixth year in a row under the ‘Belarus — Taste of Nature’ slogan. In 2021, the area of the Belarusian exposition has increased by half, including the stands of 25 companies: exporters of meat and dairy products, poultry and egg products, grocery and confectionery.”

The enterprises presented at the show have international certificates of conformity to

ISO requirements for quality management systems and food safety, and products on display have Halal certificates. Some already operate in the Gulf markets, while others come to the UAE in search of reliable partners.

According to the organisers of the exposition, this year’s innovation is a hybrid format of the Belarusian national pavilion. An online platform, a kind of virtual mirror of the exposition, is available for the convenience of visitors. The platform will feature the stands with all the products on display, contacts of company

Belarus’ exposition presented at world’s major annual exhibition of food products and beverages — Gulfood — in Dubai, the UAE, from February 21st–25th



representatives and the latest news of the event.

The business programme of the Belarusian delegation includes participation in the business briefing organised by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Dubai, consultations with the Dubai Exports Agency, participation in the Gulfood

Innovation Summit, negotiations with the UAE Standardisation and Metrology Agency, presentations and negotiations with representatives of trading networks and importers from dozens of countries. The range of events is extremely wide.

The Belarusian delegation features Vladimir Ulakhovich — the Chairman of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Igor Brylo — the Deputy Agriculture and Food Minister, Aleksandr Yakovchits — the Deputy Chairman of Belgospishcheprom Concern, and representatives of Belarusian company heads.

Gulfood is among the most representative reviews of achievements of the global food industry. It annually gathers about 5,000 companies from 85 countries, while the number of visitors from all over the world approaches 100,000.

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Green light for ‘green’ tyres

Belarusian State Technological University (BSTU) scientists have developed a technology for the production of reinforcing filler for ‘green’ tyres which make it possible to save fuel

Electric cars are definitely a good idea but not everyone can afford a Tesla. What should be done for those who’ve already purchased a car with an ordinary engine? Drivers are seriously concerned about consumption of petrol or diesel: some because of the desire to save money, others, for environmental reasons. Not only ordinary car owners but also tyre manufacturers have joined the pursuit of fuel economy. As a result, another miracle has emerged: energy-saving tyres. BSTU has made its own contribution to the technology of ‘green’ tyre production.



By Inna Gorbatenko

How does it work?

In the wake of the general enthusiasm for ecology, the concept of a ‘green’ tyre, invented in the mid-90s, is becoming particularly relevant. “Michelin are pioneers in this sector,” explains Igor Tereshchenko, a Candidate of Technical Sciences, an Associate Professor of the Department of Glass and Ceramics Technology at BSTU. “In 1995, the company released the first generation of low-energy truck tyres but the study into the impact of tyres on fuel consumption had begun much earlier, at the beginning of the 20th century. Since then, tyres have evolved significantly.”

In the 1920s, almost all tyres were made of natural rubber; carbon powder was added for strength. It was found out that the finest dust, consisting of almost pure carbon, significantly increases the wear resistance of tyres.

Black and white

The main advantage of energy-saving tyres is the reduced emission of pollutants into the atmosphere. Developers have achieved this effect by reducing the resistance of the rubber tread during rocking and lateral loads. How does it work? A reduced rolling resistance means that less energy is required to move the car. Accordingly, the load on the engine is reduced. It consumes less fuel, which means that the car, using energy-saving tyres, is less polluting.

There are several ways to reduce rolling resistance, for example, by optimising the mixture’s composition. The rubber



Igor Tereshchenko

compound, used for energy-saving tyre production, has a reduced volume of carbon, up to complete withdrawal. Instead, nano-dispersed silicon dioxide is added. This composition provides stable rubber characteristics and reduces rolling friction.

BSTU scientists have proposed their own ideas for the production of energy-efficient tyres; it consists of almost pure silica with a particle size of 9-11 nano-metres; it is also known as white soot. This is not an oxymoron but the real name of the substance that has literally turned the world of tyres upside down.

“We started synthesising white carbon with black with students 4 years ago. We had an agreement with the Gomel Chemical Plant and used their waste product, silica gel, as the basis. It was our first attempt. Later, we developed a technology for the production of white carbon for the Domanovsky Production-Trade Factory from sodium silicate, or liquid glass. In fact, this is a well-known stationery glue,” continues Mr. Tereshchenko.

Scientists detected that white carbon makes the rubber mixture more homogeneous. Igor explains, “If you add it instead of the usual mix, you can improve the grip characteristics on wet roads, increase winter performance and reduce rolling resistance at the same time. The use of white carbon as a filler for rubber composition also increases the wear resistance of rubber. The strength of products based on synthetic rubber increases almost 10 times, and based on natural rubber, almost doubles.”

The use of white carbon in tyres is also important for Belarus because it’s used in production of winter tyres: the silica tread doesn’t harden even in severe frost. As a result, the frost resistance of the rubber increases.

Belarus annually imports about 4,000-8,000 tonnes of white carbon. The BSTU technology makes it possible to solve the problem of import substitution and will enable our enterprises to compete with foreign manufacturing companies.

An issue to think about

Many motorists think that the reduction in fuel consumption and increase in environmental friendliness is a result of the reduction in the grip of these

tyres with the road surface. However, this is untrue, tyre manufacturers have repeatedly conducted comparative tests to find no deterioration in the properties of energy-saving tyres compared to conventional ones. They provide the same level of grip on both dry and wet surfaces.

Modern energy-saving tyres are more expensive than conventional car tyres, so many ask a reasonable question: is it economical to use ‘green’ tyres? Let’s do the maths. On average, energy-saving tyres used by a conventional passenger car, according to estimates, save about 200ml of fuel per 100km of mileage. At the same time, good quality tyres last for at least 50,000km. Therefore, during this time, they will save you about 100 litres of fuel, or two full tanks.

In addition to saving fuel, tyres of this type help reduce the emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere. This is undoubtedly great news for those who care about the environmental situation of the planet.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Agreement on trans-shipping Belarusian oil products via Russian ports signed



On February 19th, the Minister of Transport and Communications of Belarus, Aleksei Avramenko, and the Minister of Transport of Russia, Vitaly Savelyev, signed an intergovernmental agreement in Moscow on organising co-operation in the area of transportation and trans-shipment of Belarusian oil products, which are intended for export to third countries, via Russian sea ports. Earlier, the draft of this intergovernmental agreement was approved by Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The document envisages the trans-shipment of over 9.8m tonnes of cargo by Belarusian enterprises in the Russian ports at the Baltic Sea in 2021-2023. These are such cargoes as fuel oil, gasoline and oil. The price for services for Belarusian suppliers in Russian ports is lower than it was for trans-shipment through the ports of the Baltic countries.

Borisov solemnly received the status of Belarus’ Capital of Culture 2021

The ceremony began with the launch of the state postal mark ‘Borisov — Capital of Culture’, then the Deputy Culture Minister, Valery Gromada, handed the Chairman of the Borisov District Executive Committee, Gennady Dengalev, a



certificate granting Borisov the status of Belarus’ Capital of Culture 2021. “This place is one of the oldest in the country. It has huge cultural potential. There are historical sites that are worth seeing, and the town is rich in creative people,” emphasised Mr. Gromada.

About 80 events are planned to be held in Borisov during the year, including concerts and theatrical performances. All of them are aimed at showing the creative achievements of the country and the area in musical, theatrical, choreographic and other forms of art, as well as professional and amateur creative activities.

Minsk Automobile Plant presented a new electric bus in Kiev

The newest electric bus MAZ 303E10 is being produced based on the third-generation bus, the MAZ 303. It is equipped with a German ZF CeTrax 300kW electric motor with low electricity consumption. The power reserve of 280–320km is provided by batteries with a capacity of 412A/h (285kW/h), and recharging takes 4–6 hours.

The passenger compartment of the electric bus can accommodate 72 passen-



gers, of which 30 are seated. The electric bus has a low floor, and one of the entrances is equipped with a folding ramp. All seats are equipped with USB ports. MAZ 303E10 has an increased area of panoramic glazing while a comfortable microclimate is maintained in the cabin due to the presence of an air conditioner and heaters. Electronic control provides automatic diagnostics of all onboard systems.

China sends plane to Belarus with 100,000 doses of coronavirus vaccine

As part of the agreements reached between Belarus’ President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a telephone conversation, China has donated to Belarus 100,000 vaccines against the new coronavirus infection produced by Sinopharm. The vaccine was delivered by Air China on a free-of-charge basis.

The vaccine produced by Sinopharm is the first vaccine approved in China to enter the market by the State Pharmaceutical Administration of the PRC and is already actively being used within the country. Moreover, it has been approved for use in more



than ten countries around the world. During trials, the vaccine showed 79.34 percent effectiveness. Co-operation with the Chinese side on vaccine issues will continue.



By Yuliana Leonovich

Literature unites

Aleksandr Lukashenko sent his greetings to the participants of the 28th Minsk International Book Trade Fair. The Head of State noted that, over the years of its existence, the Minsk forum has become a significant discussion platform not only for authors and book publishers, but also for a wide range of intellectuals. “It is symbolic that the central exhibitor of this forum is the Commonwealth of Independent States. In the year of the 30th anniversary of this authoritative international organisation, Belarus holds the presidency of the Commonwealth. Minsk has always been and remains a principled supporter of creative co-operation and comprehensive integration in the post-Soviet space,” he said.

Among the honoured guests at the exhibition was the State Secretary of the Union State, Grigory Rapota. He delivered a welcoming speech at the fair’s opening and then took part in the *Books and Words. A Look into the Future* round table discussion, organised by the Standing Committee of the Union State.

Opening the book forum, the First Deputy Head of the President Administration, Maksim Ryzhenkov, once again drew attention to the fact that books have always been the closest friends of people, “We have learned all our most important ideas in life from books: starting with the ABC and ending with the folios that we’re reading now. What makes our book forum different from all the others? Over the years of its existence, it has never been interrupted. This is not an exception, though it was quite a stressful year from the point of view of the pandemic. However, we couldn’t let our readers go without their celebration.”

The motto of the show, ‘Books Unite People and Countries’, was also symbolic. Such events strengthen friendships and mutual understanding between nations, believes the Acting Deputy Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee, Beketzhan Zhumakhanov. “This forum confirms the desire of the CIS member states to develop co-operation in the field of periodicals and book publishing. It’s gratifying that, thanks to efforts of the forum’s organisers, the fair is being held this year, with participation of the Commonwealth countries,” he noted.

Books without competition

28th International Book Trade Fair held in Minsk

The capital has a nice tradition: to see out the winter in the company of a good book. This year, the main February book review has also been held. After all, who knows when writers will have the opportunity to exchange opinions, readers — to buy books, and publishers — to strengthen international co-operations. The fair featured all possible publications, including Belarusian classics, facsimile editions, comics and religious literature from publishers from 20 countries.



During the opening ceremony



Vitaly Pivovarchik



At Venezuela’s exposition



Mikhail Shvydkoi, the Special Representative of the President of Russia for International Cultural Co-operation, also visited the Minsk forum. He said, “The past year demonstrated that COVID knows no borders: neither international nor ethnic. However, books also know no boundaries. I think we were reading just as much in 2020, during the lockdown and quarantine period, as

we have ever done. The humble book has once again proved its necessity in these difficult, dramatic and sometimes tragic times. Therefore, for many years now, the book business and literature in general have existed on top of any complex political conflicts.”

To meet the authors

With 281 exhibitors from 20 participating countries,



literature from all genres and trends, round tables and discussions, aspiring writers and already recognised stars on paper: over three dozen events took place over the four days of the exhibition. The stands with children’s literature saw the greatest number of new publications. Here, the truth was clear: those who help children aren’t wasting their time.

The Russian exhibition

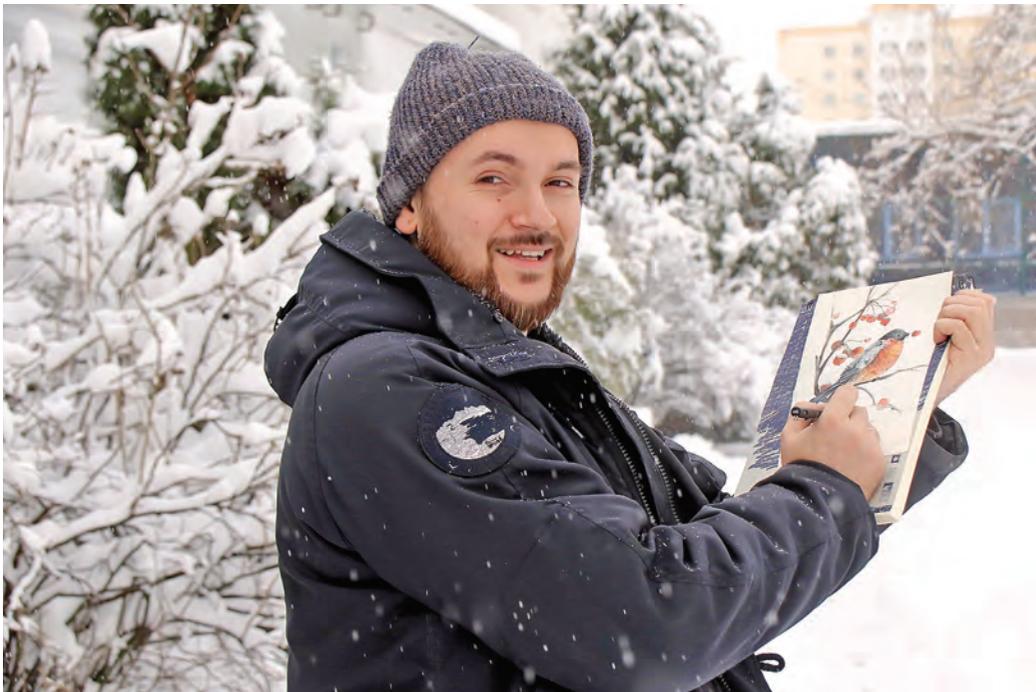
here is traditionally one of the largest. Writers, poets and translators presented not only new novels, but also discussed the commonality of the literary process in the two countries. Though mostly online, it’s safer from the point of view of the epidemiological recommendations and produced the chance to see all the key literary figures, our contemporaries.

To make friends with everyone

Works by a classic in Kazakh literature, Abay, were translated into Belarusian: this novelty was specially prepared for the Minsk exhibition by a delegation from Nur-Sultan. Iranians also represented their national book business; their stand is always one of the most colourful. Book publishers from China prepared seriously for the exhibition and their educational literature was in particular demand. Chinese is now among the most relevant and popular languages in Belarus.

It was no less lively on the Belarusian stand and on the main stage. The Petrus Brovka Belarusian Encyclopaedia Publishing House was among the first to present its long-awaited book to the public: a 532-page encyclopaedia about Vladimir Korotkevich. It took several years to compile it with literary critics, philologists, teachers of the BSU Faculty of Philology, as well as authors from different Belarusians regions. The Director of the Publishing House, Olga Vanina, commented, “We didn’t aim to cover absolutely all the writer’s work, only the most significant moments. Therefore, the book contains all the interesting facts that relate to the creation of his major famous pieces: novels, novellas and essays.”

It’s always been known that Belarusians have a special attitude to the written word. Even now, in the age of technology, our country, as experts admit, remains one of the most literate in the post-Soviet space. The printed book is still without competition in Belarus.



Stop, capture the moment!

Sketching is quick drawing, a hobby which is gaining more and more fans around the world. With the help of sketches, people share what they see while travelling, 'write down' recipes, make plans for tomorrow, take notes on lectures and simply illustrate their own thoughts. Why are sketches on paper so popular in our age of high technologies? Maksim Khrapovitsky, 30, who teaches sketching courses in Minsk, is sure that the whole point is that everyone can learn to do it.



By Nadezhda Dekola

Drawing an idea

“Contrary to popular belief, sketching is not a new area at all,” notes Maksim as we meet in the class of one of the Minsk drawing schools for children and adults. There are easels with oil paintings near the walls, and my conversation partner lays out dozens of small sketches in watercolours and black fineliner on the table. “The technique of creating quick sketches exists in both academic drawing and painting. For example, when the task is to convey the mood of nature at a certain time of the day, the artist makes a sketch, and then he creates a picture based on it. At the same time, the popular sketches at the moment have a number of features, enabling us to create them anytime and anywhere. Most importantly it’s not necessary to become an artist and spend years studying the construction of composition, proportions and perspective. It is enough just to learn about the basic methods and techniques.”

This technique was prominent in the last century thanks to interior designers who needed to quickly illustrate their ideas for customers. For maximum clarity, watercolours and ink were used, which not only gave the drawing the necessary shades, but also made it more detailed and expressive than the usual pencil sketch. Today such specialists are assisted by professional programmes on computers, laptops, and tablets. Nevertheless, the ability to draw by hand is still an important point in a successful CV. At the same time, other types of sketching are gaining increasing popularity. Engineering sketching, for example, helps present the visual concept of a future product to the board of directors or investors. When looking at food sketches, the mouth



waters which is very useful, for example, for decorating cookbooks. Fashion illustrations — popular with fashion designers, image makers and stylists — are used for advertising purposes by many world brands. Meanwhile, sketches of architecture, which are in demand in architectural bureaus and design workshops, have received a second life in the travel sketching genre — a peculiar way to preserve memories of travel e.g., by sketching local attractions or by creating one’s own city maps with sketches of must-see places.

“You can even keep a visual diary, adding illustrations of the best views, local cuisine, national characteristics, unusual moments... like, for example, Katya Gushchina, who once got on the Moscow-Vladivostok train, made a sketch story about it and... became famous,” emphasises Maksim, adding that the ubiquitous passion for sketching fell in the heyday of social networks, when users began to massively share highlights from their lives: at first — photographs, and when there are too many of them — hand-drawn sketches. The latter are spectacular, with a special style and mood. It is not surprising that in many art stores, there are entire departments with equipment for sketching: pencils, fineliners, brush-pens, sketchbooks with different textures of paper for markers and watercolours.



A complex of ‘non-artist’

“But how do you learn to create sketches if you don’t have the ability to draw?” I ask Maksim.

“This is a common misconception. Talent is secondary here. The main thing is desire,” he assures me, saying that everyone can learn how to draw sketches. “When drawing is a hobby, you need a maximum of practice and a minimum of theory. As, for example, with cooking. You can train a person for the profession of a cook for a long time, or you can just give him a recipe. It’s the same here, as we’re not talking about the creation of complex multi-faceted compositions; it’s enough to highlight and sketch the main thing to convey the mood. The more you work on developing a skill, the better you will get. The emphasis is placed on the development of visual thinking, simple ways of drawing objects and people, and overcoming the ‘non-artist’ complex.

Maksim recalls the first



Yury Mozolevsky

Every touch is interesting

During the conversation, Maksim draws something on a piece of paper now and then. He shows how to use the pen by drawing lines of different thickness (depending on the pressure) or how to explain proportions to beginners. I wonder what sort of people enjoy the sketching courses.

“Among my students there are mainly economists, accountants, programmers and school teachers. For many, this is just a hobby or an interesting past-time. Furniture manufacturers and graphic designers, for whom the ability to quickly capture an idea is still relevant, also attend my courses.”

At the same time, sketching can become the main source of income today, being encouraged by one’s own initiative and word of mouth marketing...

“... as well as online exchanges of freelance specialists, where hourly payments are made,” continues Maksim. “You post your portfolio and look for clients. Orders are very different: from creating postcards to stylised sketches from photographs and even illustrations of children’s fairy tales. Don’t be surprised: a new fashion trend today is when young parents write fairy tales for their children, then look for illustrators on the Internet and publish these books in just a few copies: for themselves and their friends.”

Digital sketches are also popular today since technologies enable you to draw directly on the tablet screen. However, they won’t replace paper ones, where you can examine with interest every stroke and every detail. Moreover, Maksim is convinced that it is better when you have a ‘live’ instrument in your hands in order to train yourself in the skill of working with lines.

REUTERS

Etna puts on new spectacle



Italy's Mount Etna spews smoke and ashes in spectacular new eruption

Mount Etna — one of the world's most active volcanoes — belched smoke and ashes in a new eruption last week, but Italian authorities said it posed no danger to the surrounding villages.

"We've seen worse," the Head of the INGV National Institute for Geophysics and Vulcanology in the nearby city of Catania, Stefano Branco, said.

Estimating that the eruption from

Etna's south-eastern crater began late afternoon, Mr. Branco insisted that the latest burst of activity was 'not at all worrying'.

Nevertheless, with small stones and ashes raining down, authorities decided to close Catania's international airport.

The emergency authorities said on their Twitter account that they were monitoring the situation closely in the

three villages at the foot of the volcano — Linguaglossa, Fornazzo and Milo.

Images showed a spectacular rose-coloured plume of ashes above the snow-capped summit, but the cloud had largely dissipated by nightfall, while lava flows continued to glow.

At 3,324 metres, Etna is the tallest active volcano in Europe and has erupted frequently in the past 500,000 years.



Wochenblick: Lukashenko was right to refrain from coronavirus lockdown

Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko chose not to put in place a coronavirus lockdown and the figures proved him right — much to chagrin of ardent supporters of lockdowns, writes the Austrian newspaper *Wochenblick*

The introduction of a strict quarantine as the only possible way to counter the spread of the coronavirus infection goes hand in hand with 'a game of statistics', writes the Austrian edition. Confining people to their homes is expected to reduce the number of infections and thus protect the population. To make people observe the self-isolation regime, the media keep updating them on the coronavirus death count. However, Belarus is not like any other country in this respect, as life there looks completely different.

'The coronavirus death toll is much lower in Belarus than in other countries, although Belarus didn't implement mass quarantines. Allegations that the country is underreporting coronavirus cases and deaths are too superficial', says *Wochenblick*. The newspaper cites the COVID-19 morbidity and mortality statistics for Belarus for the first three weeks of January: week 1 — 14,031 positive tests and 75 deaths, week 2 — 13,367 positive tests and 65 deaths, week 3 — 10,251 positive tests and 58 deaths. The country has a population of 9.5m.

Journalists cited the morbidity data for Austria for the same time period: week 1 — 15,133 positive tests and 378 deaths, week 2 — 11,406 tests with 383 deaths, week 3 — 10,421 tests and 348 deaths. Austria has a population of 8.8m.

The statistics for the two countries show a striking difference in mortality rates, although the incidence rate was about the same. According to *Wochenblick*, the reasons for low mortality from coronavirus in Belarus may be due to the large number of hospital beds and a high-quality infectious disease prevention system inherited from the Soviet Union.

It's also worth mentioning the difference in the methodology used to calculate mortality from coronavirus. In Belarus, specialists make a distinction between deaths from coronavirus and deaths from a disease aggravated by a coronavirus infection, which is not done in other countries.

Austrian journalists point out another important thing that may explain low mortality from COVID-19 in Belarus. The country hasn't introduced any quarantines. In this regard, the article cites the opinion of John Ioannidis, an American epidemiologist of Greek origin. In his research, he drew the conclusion that strict quarantine and restrictive measures have no significant effect on the spread of infection. On the contrary, they cause enormous collateral damage.

'The fact that mortality in Belarus during 2020, the peak year for the coronavirus, was slightly lower than in the previous years may well be due to the fact that the population was not 'tortured' by strict quarantine measures', *Wochenblick* writes.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



New head

World Trade Organisation appoints first woman and African head, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The World Trade Organisation has appointed Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as its new Director-General — making her the first woman and first African to hold the role. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala served as Nigeria's Finance Minister and worked for 25 years as a specialist in development economics at the World Bank.

She said during an online news conference that she was taking over at a time when the WTO was 'facing so many challenges'.

"It's clear to me that deep and wide-ranging reforms are needed ... it cannot be business as usual," she said.

Advantage of closure

The pandemic has led to the closure of many cultural venues, including the famed Louvre Museum in Paris

It's a nightmare for frustrated art-lovers, but a golden opportunity for an army of curators and restorers who are making the most of the opportunity to clean artworks and make necessary repairs. Artworks are cleaned, galleries spruced up, repairs made, all without millions of visitors getting in the way.

The *Mona Lisa* has good reason to smile, enigmatically of course, over her empty gallery — when the museum eventually reopens, it will be looking better than ever.

Around the corner, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* floats quietly above a marble staircase, majestic in the absence of selfie-sticks and tour groups. In the basement, the *Great Sphinx of Tanis* looms in the dark like a granite ghost from behind bars.

Sébastien Allard, the General Curator and Director of the Paintings Department, says, "For some projects, the lockdown has allowed us to do in five days what would have previously taken five weeks."



It's good to dream

Belarusian animators finished work on the first full-length musical, entitled *Stars of the Seventh Sky*

It took Yelena Turova four years for the Doll Elya and the Cat Murmot to complete their journey across the seven heavens. The famous director started to film the fairy tale by Gennady Davydko *Stars of the Seventh Sky* back in 2017. First of all, she abandoned complex computer effects and focused on the music. This is how the one-of-a-kind Belarusian full-length musical turned out, the drawn characters played by famous voice artists from Belarus. Many roles were voiced by Yelena Turova.



Yelena Turova

By Yuliana Leonovich

The famous bard Anatoly Dlussky as Bayushka, actor Dmitry Pustilnik as Fear and the Astrologer, and Teo sang for the Cat Murmot. The audience has never seen our artists like this, they laugh at Belarusfilm.

“There was a motive: to recruit not only popular performers, but also those who are able to perform, who are able to transform into the characters we need,” said the director of the animated cartoon, Yelena Turova. “So, we have a super team, some artists have played three or four roles, which are each very different. Teo got into the role of Murmot so well that today I can’t imagine anyone else who would speak in the same purring voice.”

The singer and poet, Olga Ryzhikova, gave her voice to the mythical fairies. “When you have

been an adult for a long time, it is very nice to be able to return to the characters of your youth. The experience is new for me but has been interesting from the start.”

Making cartoons is not quick, but painstaking. Yelena Turova could have started a full-length film earlier, but Belarusfilm’s animation studio was limited in labour and resources.

“The cartoon was completed in stages, in series, because our workshop is not that big. If we all worked only on the *Stars...*, other projects would have been left without their specialists. There are several cartoons in production at the same time, including those made for festivals. In turn, we plan to screen *Stars...* in cinemas. This is a very audience-driven movie.”

According to Ms. Turova, the idea to create not just a cartoon, but a musical was born out

of long debates and discussions.

“I’m from a generation of children who grew up on the *Bremen Town Musicians*, *The Flying Ship*, the wonderful cartoon *How the Lion Cub and the Turtle Sang a Song*. Therefore, we immediately decided to focus not on western ideas, but on the films of our childhood.”

The author of the book, Gennady Davydko, liked the idea of sending his creative imagination into the musical direction. Furthermore, at the first stage of the work, he personally took part in the development of the script.

“But then I realised that Lena is my absolute double, we exist in the same world, so I stopped directing her. There is my idea and then there is the book, and I completely entrusted the directorial ideas to the animation team.”

In 2009, Gennady Davydko’s book ‘Stars of the Seventh Sky’ was made into a theatrical adaptation. The production is still on the stage at the Gorky Theatre. Hurry to go and compare it: in February, the performance is shown six times.

Mr. Davydko has not yet watched the finished cartoon; he has only seen a few clips. Nevertheless, he says he was very pleased even with them. “In general, I’m pleased with the very fact that this film will come out, and soon all the fans will see it.”

Yelena Turova recalls that one of the main tasks at the initial stage of production was to find a composer. Four musicians were offered the opportunity to write the music for the

future cartoon. The creators of the *Stars...* liked the melodies of Leonid Shirin most of all. The lyricist for the score was the director Turova herself.

“On the one hand, we wanted the songs to be moderately childish. On the other hand, they are bright and memorable.”

Composer Leonid Shirin performed one of the roles in the ‘Stars of the Seventh Sky’ himself, it was his acting debut. A hero named Naglyuk sings the voice of Shirin.

The film consists of 5 parts, each 13 minutes long. This includes 9 musical numbers, as well as instrumental interludes: a colossal amount of music! Another interesting fact is that the main character, the boy Sasha, sings with the voice of ... Diana Krasutskaya. She was among the pupils from the music schools who were brought to the audition. Her talent and crystal-clear voice were noted by many, including Ms. Turova.

“We knew that if we chose a boy, in a couple of years, while the cartoon was being made, his voice would break, and he would no longer be able to sing the role. Therefore, we chose Diana, who immediately sang very well. Every year she came to the pre-voice acting rehearsals, but last year was barely recognisable: she was not a girl, but a young woman. She had to work seriously on her voice to adjust it to those childish inflections that were present in the first episodes of the project.”

If everything goes well, then young viewers and their parents will see an animated story about friendship, dreams and their most cherished desires during the school spring break.



Belarusian factories ready to surprise



BELTA

By Sofia Arsenyeva

To assemble a tractor

On any working day, it's possible to take a look behind the scenes of a Belarusian industrial giant: here, the BELARUS tractors are manufactured. Those coming to the Minsk Tractor Plant can see the first plough with caterpillar tracks from the early 1950s, walk through numerous modern workshops, eat soup in the factory canteen and inhale the atmosphere of Minsk's working district. It is true that the full power of the domestic tractor industry, which accounts for a tenth of the global

market, can be experienced here. Furthermore, at the end of the tour, visitors must take a ride in the cabin of a giant BELARUS-3522. The vehicle is incredible!

Entertainment is also available for the most daring and agile: they can participate in production of this 'iron horse'. You just need to put on a uniform, grab some tools and start assembling a tractor at the conveyor belt, which will then make its way to the fields for work. No fake parts are used as everything is real, and a certificate is also issued showing for whom this vehicle has been produced.



Alekssey Stolyarov

Blow glass

Boxes containing valuable and fragile cargo from the village of Berezovka are sent around the world every day. Even before the revolution, the Neman Glass Works was one of the most famous in Europe; in Soviet times, it only strengthened its position in the market and now remains quite successful, competing with cheap crockery from China.

However, the process of making the famous Neman crystal has not changed much over the past 150 years: in hot workshops, skilled craftsmen blow it out of sand and lead. The process is dangerous, but fascinating. Everything is ablaze, hissing, columns of smoke, and suddenly a luxurious vase or decanter is

created. Therefore, there is no end to the number of tourists who wish to enjoy the spectacle.

After getting to know the glassblowers, tourists should then visit the factory museum. Contrary to the stereotypes, it doesn't resemble a grandmother's sideboard from the Soviet period, but a serious art gallery. Unique exhibits from the early 20th century, rare noble items from international exhibitions and luxurious milky-smoky glass with the brand 'Neman thread' creates a dazzling sight.



BELTA

Belarus is famous not only for its nature and architectural monuments but also production facilities

Return to your childhood

Every child dreams of finding themselves amongst millions of cars and dolls. Many adults are also not averse to being there. We're keen to tell you about the best place for this: in Kobrin (Brest Region), one of the world's largest toy factories can be found.

At the Polesie factory, real collector items are blown out of liquid plastic (everything is available, including a BELAZ or Volvo model and small electric cars), Soyuzmultfilm, Disney, Marvel characters and hundreds of thousands of other educational toys. All day long, several thousand workers and the most modern machines sculpt children's toys, which then make their way to the shops.

Kids from all over the world, from Japan and Australia to the USA and Canada, play with Kobrin-made bikes, animals and building blocks. Our children also have the opportunity to see how all these toys are created. Admission for children is always free, while adults pay a small fee to visit the production site.



polesie-toys.com



belaz.by

Meet the owners of the mountain

There is a 'Grand Canyon' in the south of Belarus: a business which extracts valuable stone. The depth of granite in the quarry is about 140 metres and the perimeter stretches more than three kilometres.

The landscape is truly cosmic: rocks, mountain waterfalls and everywhere granite of various shapes and

shades. There are giant yellow BelAZ cars which look like tiny toy cars against the background of the quarries.

Blockbuster films are often filmed here, and the place is also quite popular among tourists from different countries. Those wanting to take a selfie against the background of the abyss or climb into the huge bucket of an old dump truck, are welcome to visit Granite.

Eat airy creamy clouds of cheese

The name 'Belarusian' is synonymous with high quality and delicious products. This is true of our dairy products. They are so popular in Russia that their quality is often imitated. Master classes on how to distinguish counterfeit milk and butter from the originals in Molochny Mir are a great help. Tourists here face countless cheeses, milk kefir, and mountains of glazed cheese curds. All these wonders are hidden behind glass.

Sanitary practices are strictly regulated, and the production is reliably protected from bacteria. Therefore, people work all the way from raw materials to



vgit.by

packaging following the same product.

Tasting is at the end: local 'Krones with Truffle' cheese is a gourmet delight, chocolate milk for kids, or light cheeses for those who want to remain slim. After all, the best souvenir is the one that you can put on a plate after your trip and share with your friends.



Tokyo — in focus

The Ministry of Sports and Tourism discussed the results of the previous year and outlined tasks for the current year

There are only a few months left before the Tokyo Olympics. Seventy-four of our athletes have already managed to qualify for the main event of the four-year period but, by the end of the qualifying period, the Belarusian representation at the Games should significantly expand. This was discussed at a collegium in the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, where they summed up the results of last year and outlined tasks for the current one. The meeting was attended by the First Vice President of the National Olympic Committee — Viktor Lukashenko — and the Deputy Prime Minister, Igor Petrishenko.

By Tatiana Pastushenko

Belarus' Sports and Tourism Minister, Sergei Kovalchuk, emphasised that the past year was quite difficult in all respects. The coronavirus pandemic, the closure of borders, and the cancellation of international competitions affected Belarusian sports. The main task of the Ministry, at a time when COVID-19 began to spread rapidly around the world, was to preserve the health of our athletes. Back in March, they made a decision on early termination of foreign training camps and organised prompt return of about 1,500 athletes from different continents. A working group was

established, which developed a system of measures, enabling them to continue training without interruption. Experts identified clean bases where athletes were under constant supervision... The efficiency of the work done is best evidenced by the figures: since the coronavirus pandemic was announced and to this day, the disease rate of our athletes is only four percent. At the same time, not a single outbreak of COVID-19 was seen in the national teams.

"Now we have come to the final stage of preparation for the Olympic Games in Tokyo," Mr. Kovalchuk continued. "All the necessary conditions have been created for our athletes. About 260 ath-

letes across 26 sports are preparing for the Games. 74 Belarusian athletes in 16 sports fulfilled the qualification requirements and standards for participation in the Olympic Games. After the cancellation of most international events in November last year, the selection for the Tokyo Games has resumed. By the end of the qualifying period, we expect to win 110-120 places."

Preparation for the Games is far from the only issue that was considered at the meeting. Financing sports, preparing a reserve, scientific, methodological and medical support of teams — there are many pressing issues for discussion. The Deputy Prime Minister, Igor Petr-

ishenko, completing the work of the collegium, also outlined the range of tasks for the branch specialists. These include the issues of reconstruction of our sports complexes, the commissioning of new sports facilities, the training of young coaches, the fight against doping and others. Mr. Petrishenko said regarding these tasks for the main events of the four-year period, "There are only five months left before the start of the Summer Olympic Games, and less than a year before the Winter Olympics. All conditions have been created to prepare for them and perform well. We must prove that the Republic of Belarus is a sporting country."

Only upwards



A photo from social media networks

Maksim Nedosekov has updated Belarus' winter high jump record, flying over the bar at around 2.34m and thus winning the Copernicus Cup international tournament

By Dmitry Komashko

The previous record of Belarus in high jump for indoor arenas was one of the longest-lived in our track-and-field. Oleg Zhukovsky has already crossed the 2.33m mark in 1995. Since then, no one has come closer than 3 centimetres to it. Nedosekov's personal record in the gyms was kept at 2.31m and held for quite a long time — since 2018. The beginning of this season didn't give him any reason to believe that the breakthrough will happen right now. At three tournaments in a row Maksim couldn't make above 2.20m, crossing 2.23m at the Belarusian championship... True, he said that experiments with spikes and loads were to blame, but his performance in Toruń was still a surprise. It seemed that even Nedosekov himself looked surprised, having easily climbed the heights that had previously become insurmountable for him this season. All intermediate marks and the final 2.34m — which has now become the new national record of Belarus — Maksim took from the first attempts, while his main rivals — Ukrainian Andrei Protsenko and Italian Gianmarco Tamberi — finished the tournament at the same point as the Belarusian, though experienced serious difficulties on the way. However, in this case, it's not only the height that's interesting.

The Copernicus Cup international tournament was held in the Polish Toruń at the very arena which will soon be hosting the first in the last fifteen years top event — the European Athletics Indoor

Championships. The current competitions are a kind of general rehearsal and an attempt to determine focus and priorities. All three prize winners of the Copernicus Cup in the men's high jump top the European and world rankings. It's highly likely that they'll fight for medals in early March at the European Championships. In the case of Nedosekov, psychological advantage — earned on the eve of the event — enables him to talk not only about victory but also about a new 'absolute' personal record. Before this, Maksim's greatest achievement was 2.35m, achieved by him in summer at the Belarus' Championship, held on the Dinamo Stadium. The next bar — 2.36m — equals the country's national record, set in 2018 by Dmitry Nabokov. The figures are significant but Nedosekov has already tried to 'attack' them in Toruń. Though he didn't achieve them he did show that they are a real possibility. Of course, this circumstance adds intrigue to the future tournament.

Moreover, Nedosekov's record could become not the only one to be broken this season. Triple jumper Violetta Skvortsova reached 14.39m at the Copernicus Cup. The figure is important, as it's the second best result in Europe and the fourth in the world, another personal record for the athlete and at the same time the result is higher than the Olympic norm. Violetta became the 18th Belarusian track-and-field athlete who will be able to perform in Tokyo. Yet it is even more interesting that Skvortsova has now less than 10cm to go to break Belarus' indoor record established by Ksenia Datsuk nine years ago.



REUTERS

From Melbourne with triumph

Arina Sobolenko and Elise Mertens have won this season's first Grand Slam tournament — the Australian Open. In the final match of the doubles tournament, the Belarusian and the Belgian defeated the Czech duo of Barbora Krejčíková and Katerina Siniáková — 6:2, 6:3.

By Tatiana Pastushenko

For Arina and Elise, this is their second title won together at the Grand Slam tournaments. Moreover, the young girls have also won three more major tournaments by the Women's Tennis Association. The success in Melbourne enabled both tennis players to seriously improve their positions in the WTA doubles ranking, with Sobolenko rising to the first position and Mertens claiming sixth.

Unfortunately, in the singles, both

Arina and Elise dropped out of the fight much earlier: Mertens lost to Czech Karolina Muchova in the fourth round while Sobolenko lost to American Serena Williams at the same stage, whom she had never met on the court before. The winner of the women's tournament was Naomi Osaka of Japan, who defeated US Jennifer Brady in the final in two sets — 6:4, 6:3. For 23-year-old Osaka, this is the fourth title won at Grand Slam tournaments. After the triumph in Melbourne, she became the second seed in the world, behind only Australian Ashleigh Barty.



Photo of the week

During the start of the *One Day of Safety* Republican campaign in Vitebsk

DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.

On February 25th, 1966, an order was signed for the creation in Gomel of the Belorusneft state oil and gas production association, now the State Production Association Belorusneft.



In the following year, the first million tonnes of oil and 2 million cubic metres of associated gas were extracted. Now the Belorusneft Association includes more than 40 oil-producing, oil-field services, engineering, design, gas processing and sales divisions and enterprises throughout Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Poland.



On February 26th, 1821, Aleksandr Kazimir Gintovt-Dzevaltovskiy was born (Kovno Province), a member of the national liberation movement of 1863–1864 in the Grodno Region and a religious leader. Since 1853, he was a priest at the Bernardine Catholic Church in Grodno and, since 1874, the administrator of the Polotsk diocese. After the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, Pope Leo XIII declared Gintovt-Dzevaltovskiy Archbishop-Metropolitan of Mogilev. At the same time, he became the Metropolitan of all Catholic

churches of the Russian Empire, Chairman of the Spiritual Catholic Collegium in St. Petersburg and administrator of the Minsk diocese. He died in 1889.

On February 26th, 1936, Emanuel Lasker, a chess legend, visited Minsk. He was the second world champion to take the crown in 1894 and held it for a record 27 years. Grandmaster Lasker gave simultaneous play on 25 boards in Minsk. The overall result of the game: the Minsk team claimed 3 victories, Lasker won 16 games and there were 6 draws.



On February 26th, 1976, a regional museum of local lore was opened in the town of Postavy, housed by the building that is an architectural monument from the 18th century. The museum has 7 small and 1 large exhibition halls. The exhibition of the nature department is made in the form of dioramas and represents small windows into the natural world of the Postavy area. The section dedicated to the Great Patriotic War contains materials on the activities of partisans and underground fighters in the region.



On February 27th, 1891, David Sarnov was born (in the village of Uzlyany, Pukhovichi District, Minsk Region), an American communications operator, businessman, and one of the founders of radio and television broadcasting in the United States.



In 1900, he moved to the United States with his father. Under his leadership, a colour television system was created, a television broadcast was recorded on a magnetic videotape, and the first television feature film was shot. He was advisor to ten US presidents. Furthermore, he took part in the creation of space communication systems and the computerisation of the United States. He is a founder of the National Broadcasting Company NBC. He is an honorary member of Columbia, New York and other universities. He died in 1971.



February 27th is International Polar Bear Day, founded on the initiative of Polar Bears International, an American non-profit organisation that fights to preserve the polar bear population. The polar bear is listed in the International Red Book. According to

scientists, there are approximately 20-25,000 polar bears in the world. Poaching, global warming and pollution of the Arctic environment could lead to a population decline of 30 percent by 2050.

On February 28th, 1916, Pavel Pogodin was born (Nizhny Novgorod Region, Russia), a Belarusian artist. In 1940, he graduated from the Gorky Art School and worked mainly in realism painting, as well as in graphics and posters. He is the creator of the paintings, entitled *A.P. Chekhov on Sakhalin Island*, *Winter Landscape*, *Minsk in the Evening*, a portrait of Piotr Klimuk, the *Brest Fortress* triptych, alongside the *Glory to the Heroes of Space!* poster. He died in 1983.



March 2nd is International Match Day. For many decades, matches have been irreplaceable and the most important elements of human life. However, even today they continue to play an important role in our everyday life, as a convenient and cheap way of making fire.

