



Gomel restorer couple, restoring works of art, returning our history to its original colours and forms



A new campaign held at the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture



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New Year ball for talented children. Maryana Gubskaya. Bobruisk, Mogilev Region

## Ordinary miracle

Few days are left until the New Year holidays. Children are anticipating them with anxiety since, at this time, their most cherished dreams are realised. For many years, participants of the New Year all-Belarusian charity event *Our Children* — held under the patronage of the President — help to present a fairy tale and offer those who need it warmth and care. The new season of the marathon of good has been launched already — to last for exactly a month.

The New Year ball for talented children in Bobruisk has become one of the first events dedicated to the Republican *Our Children* campaign. This year, it has gathered over 130 schoolchildren who've achieved great success in their studies, creativity and sports. → **6**





By Dmitry Umpirovich, Polina Konoga

**Cautious optimism**

Coronavirus statistics — released by the Healthcare Ministry — are cautiously optimistic. Healthcare Minister Dmitry Pinevich, talking to journalists, said that the incidence in some regions of the country has not been growing for several weeks. Aleksandr Lukashenko noted, **“Let’s hope that we have reached this plateau after all.”**

The Head of State saw how patients with coronavirus are treated and rehabilitated. As usual, during the last few trips (recently, the President has visited the 6th City Clinical Hospital in Minsk and the Vitebsk Regional Maternity Hospital), he also looked into the so-called red zone — intensive care. Before that, he asked in detail about the organisation of work in the admissions department and the local clinic.

However, the current state of affairs in the field of regional healthcare will not escape Aleksandr Lukashenko’s control. First, Healthcare Minister Dmitry Pinevich told journalists about the situation on the spot. He explained that the treatment of patients with coronavirus in district medical institutions is carried out according to the same standards as in the capital or regional centres, **“I cannot say that all other institutions in the Minsk Region are totally different from the Stolbtsy hospital. The fact is that the first Presidential programmes dealing with the reconstruction of operating units and intensive care units are still having their effect.”**

**The Stolbtsy Central District Hospital looks really great, as good as in large cities. Actually, according to the Head**

# Doctors have done well!

The situation with COVID-19, the modernisation of the Belarusian People’s Congress and our response to the committed position of the IOC: subject of the President’s speech at the Stolbtsy Central Regional Hospital

**The President has paid a visit to Stolbtsy — a town located 70km from the Belarusian capital — which, during the spring wave of the coronavirus pandemic, suddenly appeared in the sight of journalists — ‘fake newsmongers’, who wrote over and over again about an unprecedented outbreak of infection and numerous deaths. The situation was really difficult; moreover, work had to be done under tremendous information pressure. Local doctors coped with both problems with dignity then, and they continue to do so now, for which Aleksandr Lukashenko thanked them very much, “I just want to thank you. It wasn’t easy, but you did it. You have done well.”**

*of State, only a couple of central district hospitals in the country need to be refurbished. They will be revamped and, most importantly, have new equipment installed during the five-year period.*

Special attention, however, will be paid to the ‘support’ of inter-district centres. There are four of them in the Minsk Region: in Borisov, Molodechno, Soligorsk and Slutsk. The President stressed, **“We need to provide high-tech assistance there. Nobody says that we will abandon the district hospitals — this**

*is not an option. On the contrary, we want to transfer many operations from the scientific and practical centres of Minsk and from the regional hospitals to the basic hospitals while also ‘boosting’ district hospitals.”*

**Our response to Bach**

On the eve of the working trip of the Head of State to Stolbtsy, it became known that the International Olympic Committee has decided to exclude members of the Executive Committee of the National

Olympic Committee of Belarus from participating in the Olympic Games and other events of the organisation. The reasoning behind this decision sounds rather strange: ‘The IOC has come to the conclusion that it appears that the current NOC leadership has not appropriately protected the Belarusian athletes from political discrimination within the NOC’. The participants of the meeting — knowing the concerned attitude of the Head of State towards sports — could not help but ask about his reaction to the sanctions from the IOC. Aleksandr Lukashenko put it this way, **“We need to take legal action. Let Bach [IOC President Thomas Bach] and his supporters tell me how we are at fault. Is it about me protecting my country?! The overwhelming majority of you support me in this policy, and I protect my country. I protect you. Why punish me by banning me from some events?... I have not attended these events for 25 years. I guess I can live with that. Why do they do this? Have they convened the entire International Olympic Committee, all the member states, more than a hundred of them, to discuss the matter? They are afraid of sticking their neck out because of COVID-19?”**

The President recalled the decision of the IOC, adopted in 2016, to temporarily suspend the Russian Paralympic Committee from participating in the Paralympics in Brazil. Today it is our turn to see if Russia will support us.

**“What a ‘just’ world we are living in!... Remember: there is no justice in the world. If you pursue a fair policy, you will be rejected by everybody. You will be the enemy,”** summed up Aleksandr Lukashenko.



**The people need to decide**

Doctors were also interested in the affairs of the country. One of the questions raised related to the preparation for the Belarusian People’s Congress: what important topics will be brought up for discussion and what should Belarusians expect from it? The country is currently preparing for this large-scale forum, the sixth in a row. At one time, the format was created as a special form of democracy, allowing Belarusians to be more widely involved in state affairs. The event is traditionally attended by representatives of all branches of power, production spheres, business, science, education, and culture, alongside delegates from every region of the country, authoritative public figures and student activists. The first Belarusian People’s Congress was convened in 1996, the previous one — in

June 2016. Aleksandr Lukashenko shared his position on this current consolidated decision-making format, **“To be frank, I think (I do not know if you will support it or not) the Belarusian People’s Congress should become a constitutional body. We need to have such a body of people’s representation (this is 2,500 delegates) that would supervise the main areas of our development — such as sovereignty and independence.”**

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, the agenda of the Belarusian People’s Congress will be finalised after the Christmas holidays. The event is expected to take place in late January — early February. As far as the issues that will be discussed are concerned, these are, primarily, the programme of socio-economic development for 2021-2025.

**“We need to approve the plans for the next five years, the way we’ll be moving forward in social and economic development. The main thing is economic development, and we’ll be working on this. People need to know the goals for five years ahead,”** explained the President. **“The second issue is politics. You suggested it yourselves: the Constitution and so on...”**

The main thing that the Head of State is paying attention to is that the role of the Belarusian People’s Congress will be strengthened. He explained why such an upgrade is needed, **“If we remove some Presidential responsibilities, we have to transfer them elsewhere. These powers are not suitable for the Government and Parliament. Who do we invest them with? We have to look for such a body. We have the Belarusian People’s Congress. Therefore, some pow-**

**ers will have to be transferred.”**

Aleksandr Lukashenko added that he will propose to elect delegates for five years, while their role and status will be much higher; the heads of Parliament, ministers and governors will be accountable to the delegates, **“If we ‘dilute’ the powers of the President and invest them with Parliament, the Government, ministers and governors, we will face complete chaos, like the one we experienced in the mid-1990s. Therefore, we need a stabilising authority. This is not a duplicate of the deputy corps: as they were elected. Once again, I want to underline that I’m in favour of you making decisions on everything. The people need to decide.”**

The President stressed: no one will pay any money to the delegates, this work is purely ‘on a voluntary basis’.

## Security in the Union State format

The President approved the deployment plan of the Belarusian-Russian regional battle group

**The Head of State received a report by Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin and the Chief of the General Staff, Aleksandr Volfovich. The generals came to the Palace of Independence with proposals on revising the deployment plan of the Belarusian-Russian regional battle group.**

The topic is now being discussed in connection with the military-political situation near the Union State borders. The situation is aggravated primarily by the strengthening of the military potential of NATO and the United States in Poland and the Baltic States. In particular, the presence of Alliance troops is expanding, the number and intensity of military exercises has increased significantly, and combat and reconnaissance flights along our border have become more frequent.

Aleksandr Lukashenko recalled that agreements had been previously reached

on updating the plan of deployment of the joint battle group taking into account the situation on our western borders and in the world as a whole, **“I’d like to hear about new things concerning the revised documents and what else we may have to do (if necessary) because the situation is being aggravated. We are being placated. The US leadership and now the NATO leadership make excuses, saying it is nothing of the kind, they say it is a simple military exercise. However, we are military people. Even if it is only an exercise, it means it is for something.**

**This is why we must not back down — even if we have a truly powerful army behind us, the world’s second strongest army, as they say.”**

As the Chief of the General Staff, Aleksandr Volfovich, told reporters, after careful study, the Commander-in-Chief approved the deployment plan of the Belarusian-Russian regional battle group. Similar work has been done by the General Staff of the Russian Federation.

**“The deployment plan will now be submitted to the meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State —**

scheduled for December. After consideration and approval of this document at the Supreme State Council, it will be put into effect,” said Aleksandr Volfovich.

According to him, the document was prepared taking into account the forecast of the strategic and military-political situation. In this regard, the joint battle group is considered primarily as a mechanism for strategic deterrence and repelling large-scale aggression against the Union State.

**Based on materials of sb.by**

# EAEU: we are stronger together



Integration strategy to 2025, formation of common markets and expansion of the observer-states' list: these are the results of the summit of Eurasian Economic Union's leaders

By Yevgeny Kononovich,  
Polina Konoga,  
Dmitry Umpirovich

The President of Belarus took part in the session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council held in online format. The summit was the final note of Belarus' presidency in the EAEU bodies. The Republic set ambitious goals in its programme in the very beginning: these are the strengthening of the Union on all sides, the harmonious development of its countries' economies and enhancement of citizens' welfare. These goals are especially important in this difficult year — as underlined by Aleksandr Lukashenko,



“The pandemic — as a litmus — has revealed the essence of economic unions and integration associations. It has in practice convinced even the most ardent sceptics that only together can we be stronger.”

Due to the complicated epidemiological situation, the leaders of Belarus, Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were once again forced to communicate via videoconference. This time, they were joined by the Honorary Chairman of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, the First President of Kazakhstan — Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Moldova — Igor Dodon, as well as the presidents of Uzbekistan and Cuba — Shavkat

Mirziyoyev and Miguel Diaz-Canel.

The agenda had 28 issues and, apart from economic topics, it also focused on EAEU international co-operation.

### Positive steps

There are already positive results within the EAEU. This year, work on removing barriers and reducing exemptions and restrictions on the Union's

internal market has significantly intensified. Steps have been taken to move to a unified policy in agriculture, energy and transport, and to the expansion of the use of national currencies in mutual settlements. Decisions have been made in the field of technical regulation. The digital agenda is being promoted, a system of appropriate transport corridors is being formed, and

employment of citizens of the EAEU member states is being promoted.

Everything looks promising externally. Trade agreements with China, Vietnam and Iran are in place and negotiations on trade agreement signing with Egypt, Israel and India are continuing. Preparations are underway to start negotiations on trade liberalisation with Indonesia and Mongolia.

However, this is not enough. Aleksandr Lukashenko believes that the EAEU's potential should be used not only for the development of the domestic market, but also for the promotion of agricultural products to the markets of third countries. The President of Belarus also outlined another issue that has not been solved for many years. “We lack results in resolving the issue of methods for controlling the content of medicines in food products of animal origin, including processed products. I believe that the Commission should resolve this issue in principle within the next year,” he said.

## MAIN RESULTS OF THE MEETING

- The Supreme Council and the heads of the EAEU states have approved Strategic Directions for Developing Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025.
- The Eurasian Economic Commission has been ordered to join the parties in studying the issue of pricing and tariffs for services in gas transportation on the common EAEU gas market within the framework of an

international treaty on the EAEU common gas market which should be developed in 2021.

- Cuba and Uzbekistan have been granted observer status at the EAEU.
- The heads of state have approved the main areas for the EAEU's international activities for 2021.
- The heads of state have signed agreements on the exchange of information in the field of

countering the legalisation of laundering of proceeds from crime and the financing of terrorism when moving cash and monetary instruments across the customs border of the Union.

- A decision was made to move to the second stage of forming a common gas market. The heads of state have also issued instructions to complete the activities

of the first stage in the near future. In particular, this applies to finalising the document on common rules for access to gas transmission systems located on the territory of the EAEU states.

- The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council has approved an action plan to harmonise the legislation of the Union countries in the oil sector.
- The common market in the fields of property

valuation and accounting will start operating in the Eurasian Economic Union as from January 1st, 2025, as agreed by the heads of state. By January 1st, 2022, the Commission — jointly with the member states — will outline the main approaches to valuation activities.

- In 2021, the Republic of Kazakhstan will become the presiding party in the Union's bodies.

## Giving honours

On the day of the BNTU centenary, Aleksandr Lukashenko visited the country's leading higher technical educational establishment. Addressing the University staff, the President said, “This event is a tribute to those who not only created this University, in a small way, but also to those who've made it widely recognisable by their deeds.”

### Professionalism and patriotism

A thematic exposition welcomes all those entering the main building of the Belarusian National Technical University. To mark the 100th anniversary of the University, numerous samples of Belarusian automobile equipment created by BNTU graduates are displayed here — such as a modern electric bus and the latest model of the MAZ-303 passenger bus... The leading Belarusian higher technical educational establishment has something to be proud of. Aleksandr

Lukashenko noted that BNTU has become the ‘father’ of engineering thought and creativity in the country, while Belarusian engineers are able to create true miracles despite fierce global competition. He said, “Everything that we've seen here is produced in huge quantities worldwide. The fact that you've withstood this competition and manufacture products that are in need on the global market is worth a lot.”

The Head of State values BNTU alumni not only for their professionalism — but

also for their patriotism. “As a politician who has been in power in Belarus for a quarter of a century, I have always been inclined to comparison. I compared the behaviour of certain students and graduates... You have always been the foundation of our statehood. When appointing people to some positions — the highest ones — if I saw that they were engineers, I always said: these are state people. I really want you to honour the University, to appreciate it, to be a real pillar of our state.”

### Well-deserved award

In truth, the awards on the occasion of such a grand anniversary should be no less significant. Aleksandr Lukashenko awarded the Order of Labour Glory to the Belarusian National Technical University. Interestingly, this is the first time in the history of independent Belarus. The Head of State stressed with a smile that the Order would be worn not by the University Rector on his chest but it would be placed on the BNTU banner. Officially

speaking, the educational institution was awarded for its significant contribution to the development of engineering and technical education, research in the field of mechanical engineering, energy, construction and architecture, the introduction of new modern technologies, training of scientific personnel and in connection with its 100th jubilee.

Individual awards were also presented. “These go to those who, figuratively speaking, have made this University, who maintain its image at the highest level, who brought it to the elite of world universities,” emphasised the President.



Based on materials of sb.by

# Belarus: the taste of nature

Belarus' exposition will go on display at the world's largest annual food and beverage trade expo *Gulfood* due in Dubai, the UAE on February 21st-25th



The Belinterexpo exhibition operator of the Belarusian Chamber of Industry and Commerce has announced that *Gulfood* annually draws around 100,000 specialists from 192 countries, which makes participation in the event a good opportunity to launch supplies of goods to all continents. *Gulfood* is known as the main event of the year for the world's food industry.

The United Arab Emirates is the world's third largest re-export market behind Hong Kong and Singapore. Its demand for food products increases by 30 percent every year. More than 90 percent of food products in the Persian Gulf region, which includes Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, is imported through the UAE. "The UAE market is a premium market and has a high import capacity for such products as poul-



try and beef, which offers good prospects for Belarusian exporters," Belinterexpo quoted Aleksei Bogdanov, the Head of the Main Depart-

"We signed contracts with four companies as we participated in the *Belarus. The Taste of Nature* exposition and thus secured our foothold on the Middle Eastern market," the Director General of Primemilk, Anatoly Belyavsky, said.



ment for Foreign Economic Activities of the Belarusian Agriculture and Food Ministry, as saying.

The Belarusian exposition at *Gulfood* has become traditional: Belarus will participate in the event for the sixth time. The expo benefits Belarusian enterprises. For example, Belarusian exhibitors concluded contracts worth a total of \$13m in 2019 and over \$3m in 2020. Belarus' exposition is titled as *Belarus. The Taste of Nature*.

The participants of the Belarusian exposition will also take part in the business programme that includes seminars, conferences, and B2B meetings that will help them find new business partners.

"The expo will be an offline event. The organisers are keen to meet all the safety requirements and recommendations of the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI): taking visitors' temperatures, imposing mandatory use of face masks, limiting the number of visitors, and so on. Apart from that, the *Gulfood* organisers launched a special mobile application to help the participants search for potential business partners and schedule meetings, which will make it easier to organise talks," Belinterexpo said.

*Belarus. The Taste of Nature* is organised by Belinterexpo of the BelCCI, with the support of the Belarusian Embassy in the UAE, the Belarusian Agriculture and Food Ministry, and the Belgospishcheprom Concern.

## Business alliance platform

**The Great Stone Industrial Park continues to improve comfortable working conditions for its participants. Recently, the Industrial Park Development Company and the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange have agreed to consider the possibility of participating in exchange auctions for residents of the Park and attracting Chinese companies interested in entering the market of Belarus and neighbouring countries to the exchange platform.**



Kirill Koroteyev, the First Deputy General Director of the Industrial Park Development Company, announced the readiness to support the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange in attracting new players from China. He noted that Chinese who work in diverse businesses regularly visit the Great Stone; among them are representatives of woodworking, construction, light industry and food production. The official recalled the results of last year when more than 400 such delegations visited the Industrial Park.

"I'm convinced that many Chinese businessmen would be interested to get acquainted with the opportunities of the Belarusian universal commodity exchange. Therefore, we are ready to recommend participation in exchange trading as one of the most effective forms of work on the Belarusian market," Mr. Koroteyev said.

In turn, the First Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange Board, Andrei Novikov, speaking about export potential, noted that domestic lumber and dairy products have promising positions. These products are in high demand in China. In addition, all major domestic producers are accredited on the exchange, ready to offer Chinese partners reasonable prices and convenient logistics. "At the same time, we would like to attract Chinese suppliers of amino acids and other feed additives to the auction. This will enable Belarusian agricultural enterprises to save significantly on purchases," he added.

According to the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange, framework agreements were concluded following the meeting, while a specific action plan is currently being developed. It is expected that the first steps to implement the latter will begin in Q1 2021.



## Record-setting heavy class

Gomel's Seismotekhnika has established production of a heavy class drilling unit. Jointly with Italian Drillmec, it has launched industrial manufacturing of a mobile drilling unit with a lifting capacity of 225 tonnes (APC-225).

Gomel's machine builders have accordingly expanded the model range of heavy mobile drilling units. Production of drilling equipment with a capacity of 225 tonnes has been for the first time established among manufacturers of drilling equipment in the post-USSR territory. The company notes that the APC-225 aims to perform technological operations during drilling of oil and gas wells up to 4km deep, development, repair work, lowering and lifting of pumping and drilling pipes, installation of operational equipment at the shaft head and elimination of technological accidents.

Among the main features of the APC-225 is the high location of its working platform, a reinforced mast with a height of 42m. The drilling unit is equipped with an upper power drive Drillmec HTD-250CR-LT. The six-axle

chassis was also designed and manufactured by Seismotekhnika JSC.

One of the systems has already been sent to Belorusneft's department for enhanced oil recovery and well repair. The unit is planned to be used by side-hole drilling teams. Technical specifications make it possible to use the equipment at gas wells in the Novy Urengoy area.

The company is completing the production of a batch of APC-225 under an agreement with Rosneft. For the export version, Gomel's machine builders have taken into account the special requirements of the Russian customer: they switched the unit from diesel to electric traction and lowered the height of the mast. In total, five mobile heavy class drilling units are expected to be forwarded to the Russians.

Based on materials of belta.by

# Looking down on the Earth from above

Belarusian State University scientists develop a unique complex for remote sensing of the Earth

The implementation of the national space programme and the development of the Belarusian space system for remote sensing of the Earth are among the priority areas for the development of scientific and technical activities in the country. Scientists of the BSU A.N. Sevchenko Institute of Applied Physical Problems are working in these areas systematically and one of their new products is a modular multispectral survey system which can be used for remote sensing of the Earth, installed on aircraft, including drones. The development has no direct analogues in the world and has already successfully passed the first flight tests. It's now being prepared for operation.

By Inna Gorbatenko

## An idea has arrived

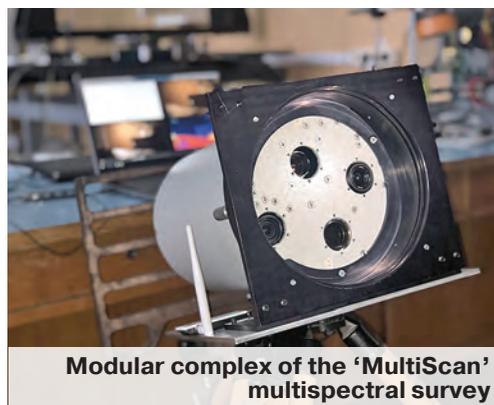
Work is in full swing at the laboratories of the A.N. Sevchenko Institute of Applied Physical Problems as scientists here are simultaneously overseeing several major projects for space and aviation. Scientists are actively discussing technical issues.

Aleksei Chumakov, a senior research associate at the Aerospace Research Department, has worked in this laboratory for over 30 years and, with his direct participation, the 'MultiScan' multispectral survey module is being developed under the *Research and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes* sub-programme of the *Science-Driven Technologies and Equipment* state programme running in 2016-2020.

"The complex aims to solve applied problems in various sectors of the economy," Mr. Chumakov explains. "For example, we tested it on an aeroplane in autumn — taking pictures of forests. The results of 'MultiScan' aerial surveys can also be used to monitor fires or smoke, floods, pollution of watercourses with oil products, as well as to assess the consequences of

emergencies... Thanks to a Polaroid camera and a thermal imager, this is much easier to do."

The scientist adds that each development is the result of a collective brainstorm and the team's well-co-ordinated work. Unlike its predecessor, which weighed 140 kilograms, the 'MultiScan' unit weighs about



Modular complex of the 'MultiScan' multispectral survey

four kilograms which makes it possible to operate it even on small aircraft — thus significantly reducing costs and removing many issues related to the payback of remote monitoring.

"From a flying carrier, we can cover large areas and — with the help of special devices — see in these areas what is impossible to distinguish with the naked eye. We can give estimates and make scientific forecasts. This is a glob-



The light weight of the 'MultiScan' makes it possible to install it on drones

al trend," said Mr. Chumakov, speaking of the advantages of aerospace monitoring. "If we talk about peatlands, this device helps see any temperature rises in advance and warn foresters and fire-fighters about the threat of fire."

In addition, 'MultiScan' helps monitor the state of agricultural land, reclaimed territories in Polesie, search for lost mushroom pickers, identify unauthorised quarries and landfills. Space photography in the thermal range was once even used when counting aurochs in Belovezhskaya

try to implement modern technical solutions," the expert says. "One of the key differences between 'MultiScan' and the previous model is the possibility of wireless control."

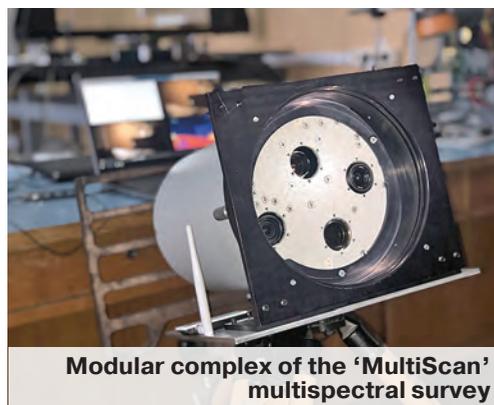
The Head of the Aerospace Research Department, Boris Belyaev, adds that 'MultiScan' is structurally made in the form of separate optical modules combined in a sensor block. They are connected via Wi-Fi to the electronics unit. It's impossible to work in the air and, moreover, in space without protection

unit via wireless communication," Mr. Chumakov explains.

Simply speaking, 'MultiScan' aims to control and record remote sensing data from aircraft carriers. It combines several software modules, including thermal imager control software, cameras and geo-linking software. The latter records the GPS track of the device's flight and displays its location on the land, which is especially important for the accuracy of measurements and notification of specialised services.

In flight conditions, the modules are controlled by an operator from an ordinary laptop via Wi-Fi. Multi-screen technology is used to control and display module signals. It increases the efficiency of management and visibility of multiple modules where data is simultaneously and clearly displayed on a single screen. The operator can visually control the work of all sensors on a single screen or interfere with controls by switching to the full-screen mode of any of the windows.

Scientists won't stop there. They plan to develop an even smaller version: 'MultiScan' for the Emergencies Ministry which is interested in equipping its drone with this system. An UAV flies at an altitude of 100 or 150 metres and, unlike a satellite, the clouds create no problems for it — which is especially important under our climatic conditions.



Other projects for space and aviation are also being developed

Pushcha: since these are quite large animals, they are visible on a processed thermal image.

## Plans for the future

It has been 2.5 years since the birth of the idea to the first test flight. "This is a one-off product. These are not made in batches — but produced for a specific customer to solve a certain range of tasks. Moreover, in each subsequent device, we

from external influences of dust, moisture and wind. Therefore, the device has a protective cover for all its modules; it works using an internal autonomous power source and can be charged both on land and during flight.

"This structure is due to the fact that optical modules for image acquisition are usually installed outside the cockpit or on a special window. The sensor unit is connected to the control

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Aleksandr Lukashenko signs law on ratification of agreement on mutual visa recognition with Russia



The law was passed by the House of Representatives on October 28th 2020, and by the Council of the Republic — on November 20th 2020. The document aims to regulate migration processes in Union State member states. It defines that foreign citizens and stateless persons will have the right to enter, leave, stay and transit through the territory of Belarus and Russia if they have a visa for one of the two states as well as identity documents. As a result, Belarus gets the right to issue visas valid in Russian territory. The agreement should enter into force 30 days after ratification by the two states. Belarus will be the first to ratify the agreement. At the same time, the document does not extend to foreigners who come to Belarus as part of the visa-free programme.

### Three stores of Belarusian products open in Tbilisi on New Year's Eve

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Georgia, Mikhail Myatlikov, has taken part in the opening of a new retail



store of Belarusian goods in Tbilisi — stressing that this will further strengthen trade and economic co-operation between Belarus and Georgia, as well as make Belarus even closer to Georgians.

The first Belarusian store in Georgia opened in 2016, while now a chain of 11 stores operates in Tbilisi. By the end of the year, there will be 14 of them. Belarusian products are delivered directly from the manufacturer. In the future, the network of Belarusian goods stores will expand by opening retail outlets in other cities around Georgia.

### WHO supplies Minsk National Airport with thermal imagers and protective gear

The equipment worth a total of \$47,000 meets all the WHO requirements. It was bought and handed over as part of the project designed to bolster the WHO's preparedness and response measures against the COVID-19 pandemic — financed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).



The two new heat imagers the airport has received can detect passengers with a fever. It is of critical importance for screening travellers and can help prevent or slow down the spread of COVID-19. A batch of protective gear and diagnostic tools includes 305 disposable protective suits, 20 full-face masks with filters, 216 respirators, 1,000 disposable face masks, 30 protective face shields, vinyl gloves, boot covers and flasks of disinfectant.

### New models of fire engines based on MAZ chassis planned to be produced for Serbia

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to the Republic of Serbia, Valery Brylev, has met with the Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, to discuss prospects for developing Belarusian-Serbian co-operation in law enforcement and prevention of emergencies.

In 2018-2019, the first project for joint production in Belgrade of 33 fire engines on MAZ chassis for the needs of the Emergency Management sector of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of



Serbia was successfully implemented. The Belarusian side has proposed to organise joint production of two new models of fire engines on MAZ chassis, specially designed for use in Serbian cities.

# Ordinary miracle

New Year charity events have started countrywide — to bring warmth, care and attention to children who especially need it during the holidays. Heads of state bodies, volunteers, representatives of public organisations congratulate children from orphanages and boarding schools, as well as those in rehabilitation centres and hospitals.

By Ilya Krasovsky

## A holiday for each heart

The festive events of the *Christmas Miracles* charity campaign will last until January 8th. Red mittens are its symbol — standing for the desire of volunteers to embrace children and the elderly with care and attention at this holiday time.

“This year, we are following the sanitary and epidemiological measures and plan to organise over 500 different events countywide for children in boarding schools, family homes, social and educational centres, as well as those with disabilities,” explains the Chair of the Central Council of the Belarusian Republican Pioneer Organisation, Aleksandra Goncharova.

Recently, the Mogilev regional organisation of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) held the *Christmas Tree of Wishes* event in the Tsentralny department store. Volunteers decorated the fir tree with red mittens with dreams written on them by pupils of the Klimovichi, Krichev and Cherikov centres for correctional and developmental training and rehabilitation. Any visitor to the shopping centre can become a good wizard, by realising one of the cherished dreams of the youngsters.

For pupils of the Baranovichi cen-



BELTA

tre for correctional and developmental training and rehabilitation, volunteers held a master class on making decorative Christmas trees and decorations, and also presented children with sweet gifts. The young pioneers prepared a theatrical puppet show, souvenirs and gifts for pupils of the Zhitkovichi social and pedagogical centre. On December 27th, volunteers of the Novopolotsk City Committee of the BRSM will organise a children’s charity programme with horseback riding in the city park of culture and recreation. On December 28th, volunteers of the Nes-



## All the best for children

The ‘box’ of New Year miracles will be supplemented by *Our Children* all-Belarusian campaign which started on December 10th and will last for exactly one month. Its organising committee in Minsk is headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Igor Petrishenko.

During the campaign, heads of Republican state bodies, local executive and administrative agencies will visit children’s boarding schools and family homes, hospitals and foster families — congratulating children on the New Year and bringing presents, also rendering assistance in solving their problems. Public associations and organisations also join the charity event.

The New Year events are held in the traditional format but in strict compliance with sanitary and epidemiological measures and social distance. The central events of the *Our Children* campaign are the festivities at the Palace of the Republic and the New Year ball in the Palace of Independence in Minsk. About four thousand children from all over the country are invited to attend.

vizh District will present their *Time for Miracles* programme to children from the Gorodeya auxiliary boarding school.

Christmas miracles will also benefit lonely elderly people. On December 24th, activists of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union of the Novogrudok State Agrarian College will send a video greeting with their creative performances and sweet treats to elderly patients of the Lyubcha nursing hospital.

# An end to painful wounds

**Sooner or later, diabetes can result in amputation of the lower extremities, as many patients know. Neighbours, relatives and even some doctors set patients up for an inevitable operation, during which they will forever lose their whole or part of their foot. A senior lecturer of the Surgery Department at the Belarusian Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education, surgeon Haji-Ismail Ismail Abbas, has introduced to Belarus his own experimental vacuum system for the treatment of diabetic foot syndrome using low pressure. The development enables patients with trophic ulcers to save their lower extremities.**

By Olga Kosyakova

Treatment of diabetic foot syndrome is difficult and prolonged. Patients, due to lack of moral support and professional medical care, sometimes give up — deciding that amputation is unavoidable.

## Ismail Abbas, what happens to feet in diabetic foot syndrome?

There are pathological changes in the skin, the subcutaneous layer, tendons, ligaments and bones of the feet in the form of wounds of various depths that don’t heal for four weeks or more, purulent-inflammatory processes or aseptic destruction of bones and joints — against the background of diabetic distal sensorimotor polyneuropathy and diabetic angiopathy of the vessels of the lower extremities.

## As far as I know, you believe the extremities can be saved...

Yes, of course. I don’t just simply think so: I’m convinced that it is necessary to fight to the end together with the patient in order to save all parts of the foot. The foot consists of many elements: bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves and vessels that create a single structure for performing various

tasks. If you lose any element, the structure fails and endless problems begin.

Back in the 19th century, outstanding scientists — including Pirogov, Billroth, Rogovich, Bier — theoretically and practically justified and proved the effectiveness of wound treatment using negative pressure. A prototype of the modern vacuum system was developed. Subsequently, in the process of its development, this treatment method became widespread.

While I was working in the diabetic foot office of the Minsk Endocrinological Dispensary, I came up with the idea of using vacuum therapy to help my patients. There were attempts to purchase such a device, but sadly they failed since it and its consumables are expensive. Moreover, they are not very convenient to use. I decided to develop my own experimental system for creating negative pressure on wounds in the treatment of diabetic foot syndrome which would meet certain requirements — being cost-effective, easy to use in any surgical office and as effective as expensive ready-made models. After



Dr. Haji-Ismail Abbas treats patients in line with the author’s method

Photo courtesy of the speaker

working on this project and developing several ideas, I decided on one of them. My system is operated manually and consists of a large medical syringe, an IV system, silicone suckers of different diameters, a medical sterile dressing sponge and a sterile medical glove. A special formula is used to calculate the required pressure created in the wound.

## What successes do your patients show as a result of this method?

The system has been used in the diabetic foot office of the Minsk Endocrinological Dispensary since 2018. In early 2020, we began using it in the diabetic foot office of the Minsk Regional Clinical Hospital’s Consultative Polyclinic. Over this time, good results have been achieved — taking into consideration that the final indicator of treatment effectiveness is wound healing. Moreover, many doctors who attended

our courses have also started actively using this method. I’d like to recall two cases from our clinical practice. One patient treated her trophic ulcer unsuccessfully for three years. After we started using our method, complete healing was seen in four months. Another patient was critically ill in the intensive care unit with large bedsores on his heels. The man was treated in a hospital and in a polyclinic at the place of his residence for about six months. After being referred to us, his wounds healed in six weeks.

We partner with the Department of Engineering and Computer Graphics of the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radio-electronics to perfect and automate our system — already enjoying our first results. The cost of the automated device has been significantly cut.



1917 Belarusian Congress united representatives of different parties, groups and nationalities into a single concerted ensemble

By Vadim Gigin, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor

**National consent platform**

On December 5th (old style), 1917, the first delegates of the Belarusian Congress gathered in Minsk. It was this forum that laid the foundations of modern Belarusian statehood. The adopted resolution read: 'The 1st Belarusian Congress rules to immediately form the authorities from its composition acting through the Belarusian Council of Peasants', Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies which temporarily becomes the head of the regional administration — entering into business relations with the central authorities responsible to the Council of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies'.

It would be no great exaggeration to say that the programme announced by the Congress set the shape and design of the modern Republic of Belarus. Its delegates supported self-determination of Belarus but stressed the importance of close ties with federative and democratic Russia. There is a difference, after all, time marches on. Our ancestors saw the future of Belarus as an autonomous part of Russia but we are now building an independent state that is in allied relations with another equally independent state: the Russian Federation. However, these are our close historical ties that determine the special nature of such relations in the form of the Union State.

In its activities, the Belarusian Congress largely followed the ideas formulated long before it. In 1884, a group of Belarusians who studied in St. Petersburg released the *Gomon* magazine, which was the first to mention Belarus' self-determination. The publishers wrote of their nation: 'It cherishes the foundations of its life in anticipation of the appearance of its own intelligentsia who would not break these foundations but develop and improve them...'. In 1917, the young Belarusian intelligentsia took up the challenging task of national-state building.

The Congress was dispersed by Minsk's Bolsheviks: the Myasnikov-Knorin-Lander group viewed the forum as superfluous — believing it was a threat to their power. However, the central leadership of the ruling party and the Council of People's Commissars strongly disagreed. Immediately after the dispersal, Stalin personally contacted Minsk — demanding they release all those arrested and urgently begin work on convening the 2nd Congress. Recently uncovered documents confirm that such work actually began, but the German occupation of the region prevented the holding of a new

# Two congresses

Now, on the eve of the Belarusian People's Congress' convocation, it's the right time to turn to historical events — to find possible analogies with modern political processes in the past. Of course, any parallels are always conditional but the temptation is too great. Moreover, December is a suitable month in this regard. In the early 20th century, in turbulent revolutionary times, several large-scale forums were held — later becoming fateful for our country.



Soviet power returned to Minsk in July 1920

Congress. However, already in January 1918, the Belarusian National Commissariat was established in Petrograd with the primary aim of creating the conditions for the proclamation of the Belarusian Soviet Republic.

*In the Belarusian Congress' history, it's important that it brought together representatives of different political parties, groups and nationalities who lived in Belarus. Despite the heated discussions and even provocations, the Congress worked quite smoothly — becoming an example of the art of negotiation and the ability to sacrifice the interests of one's own political party for the common good.*

When the Belarusian public was widely celebrating the centenary of the Congress three years ago, the President wrote in his greeting to the participants of an international scientific conference:

*'The events of 1917 contributed to the desire of Belarusians to live in their own home. The idea of Belarus' self-determination — which came from below, being initiated by ordinary people — resulted in the convocation of the 1st Belarusian Congress'.*

**The compromise that failed**

For several months after the second proclamation of the BSSR in July 1920, under the conditions of the Soviet system and the ongoing war, a multi-party system operated in our Republic. Several Jewish socialist parties legally existed in Belarus but Bolsheviks and Belarusian socialist-revolutionaries were actually the key players. A paradoxical relationship was established between them. On the one hand, they had a common enemy: Polish interventionists and Russian white guards. On the other, each party wanted to achieve a leading role in the Soviet political system. At the same time, they had a considerable amount of distrust for each other.

The 2nd Belarusian Congress of Soviets — scheduled for December 1920 (exactly one hundred years ago) — aimed to become a forum for reaching a compromise. A real competitive struggle developed between the two Soviet parties. The socialist-revolutionaries' leaders — Poluta Bodunova and Yezep Mamonko — tried to prove to the Bolshevik leaders, Aleksandr Chervyakov and Vilgelm Knorin — that they also stood for the building of a prosperous Soviet Belarus, though seeing that path somewhat differently. It seemed that the long-awaited compromise was just around the corner.

Nothing can be done without considering the issue of the flag. Belarusian socialist-revolutionaries used simultaneously the red flag — the symbol of the revolution — and the white-red-white flag. Actually, symbols were not as significant then as they are now. There was a struggle between ideas and political programmes, and heated debates were common in connection with them.

After all, although the discussions were sometimes fierce, they were still held in a friendly atmosphere. The parties even made some concessions to each other.

However, in November 1920, certain events occurred in Slutsk: a significant group of Belarusian socialist-revolutionaries openly supported armed action against the Soviet power. Bolsheviks put the question bluntly: either the others were with them or against them. As a result, at the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Belarus held on November 22nd-25th, 1920, the party of Belarusian socialist-revolutionaries was characterised as 'an organisation that sought to carry out the principle of petty-bourgeois national statehood under the flag of the Soviet power'. The 2nd Belarusian Congress of Soviets, which opened in Minsk on December 13th, elected 185 communists, 18 sympathisers, 23 non-party members, five members of the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia (known as the Bund) and only one Belarusian socialist-revolutionary.

*The Congress became a landmark event in our history. After all, on July 31st, the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed in Minsk, at a joint meeting of representatives of political parties and public organisations. The Congress of Soviets was a legal body provided for by the Constitution of 1919. The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic became a fully-fledged state from then on.*

The experience of the above-mentioned two congresses is quite revealing. The compromise reached by various political forces in December 1917 made it possible to lay the foundation of our statehood in the 20th century. We are still standing on it. In 1920, such a compromise failed.

*The attempt itself is, in fact, demonstrative. It's an important feature of Belarusian political culture. We often repeat the word 'pamyarkounast' [translated from Belarusian as tolerance] but don't always think of its meaning. However, it has a deep sense, including the ability to negotiate — often (if not always) at the expense of mutual concessions. A national dialogue is not a momentary need of the political moment. The ability to lead it is rooted in our history. We simply need to know it and draw conclusions. Otherwise, as the great Klyuchevsky said, 'history teaches us nothing but only punishes for not learning its lessons'.*



# New height of Everest

After more than a decade of dispute and controversy, China and Nepal have finally agreed on how tall Mount Everest is

The world's highest peak, which sits at Nepal's border with Tibet in the Himalayas, stands at 8,848.86 metres (about 29,032 feet), officials from both countries announced. This is less than a metre higher than the previously recognised height.

The agreement marked the end to a long-running debate over the precise dimensions of the mountain, known as Sagarmatha in Nepal and Qomolangma in Tibet. Over the years, the two countries — as well as other governments around the world — have offered up differing estimates of the mountain's height.

"The project was a matter of national pride for Nepal and a prestigious undertaking for the Nepali

Government. I feel very proud that we were able to complete it successfully," Susheel Dangol, the Deputy Director General at Nepal's Department of Survey, said. "Nepal and China jointly processed the surveyed data and came up with the result."

The virtual press conference was attended by Nepal's Foreign Minister, Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

In 2005, a Chinese survey of the mountain estimated that it stood at around 8,844 metres. However, since the research was not authorised by Nepal, the country did not recognise it as the official height. At the time, they were using a figure of 8,848m, in line with the findings of

a 1955 Indian survey.

Then in 2015, multiple scientific studies suggested the mountain's elevation may have changed after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Nepal. Two years later, the Nepali Government for the first time kicked off its own long and arduous mission of re-measuring the height.

The new height was calculated using a combination of geodetic data received from three mechanisms: levelling instrument, gravity meter and GPS. The team placed a signal receiver at every station, and measured how much time it took for signals to travel between the receiver and satellites — then converted that measurement into height.

# Slow global recovery

**World Bank Chief sees slow global recovery from COVID-19 slump. David Malpass says it will take two to three years to return to pre-pandemic levels of output as many developing nations struggle.**

While advanced economies are recovering more quickly than projected, many developing economies have lagged behind as tourism declined and remittances from their workers based in rich countries dried up.

And even in the developing world, the recovery has been uneven.

"China is in recovery, and that helps its neighbours, so in Southeast Asia, there has been more of a recovery underway that extends to Japan," Mr. Malpass said. "For other developing countries, advanced economies are the most important variable because that's often where their markets are."

The pandemic has caused the global economy to collapse this year, throwing nearly 100 million people into extreme poverty in many poor countries.



The International Monetary Fund projected in October that the world economy would contract by 4.4 percent this year, not as much as the 5.2 percent drop it had forecast in June but still the most severe downturn since the Great Depression. World output will grow 5.2 percent in 2021, down from an earlier estimate of 5.4 percent. China will be the only major economy to grow this year, the IMF has projected.



# Giant moving robot

**A life-sized Gundam robot has been unveiled in Japan ahead of its opening on December 19th at the Gundam Factory Yokohama**

dam Factory Yokohama has several other experiences, such as the Gundam Lab. Spread over two floors, visitors can learn more about the technology that was used to build the robot.

There will also be an augmented reality (AR) experience called Gundam Pilot View. This allows visitors to look out of the robot's cockpit as it moves around.

There is a Gundam cafe and gift shop that sells exclusive merchandise. From the Gundam Dock Tower, visitors will be able to see the head and body of the robot up close.

Tickets are now on sale online. The attraction will be open from December 19th, 2020 to March 31st, 2022.

Disney is currently working on new functions for robots. These include robots that can chat with emotion, sculpt clay and even fabricate complex metal frames.

The moving robot was originally scheduled to open in October, but this was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic. The finished robot has been unveiled for previews, ahead of the official opening.

The 25 tonne, 18 metre tall Gundam robot is modelled on a robot from the 1970s anime series *Mobile Suit Gundam*. It has an impressive range of movements due to its 24 articulating joints.

As well as the large robot, the Gun-

# Earth Photo 2020 winners

*Earth Photo*, an international competition and exhibition created by Forestry England and the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), rewards photographs and videos that document the natural world, its breath-taking beauty and its ever-growing fragility

Out of over 2,600 entries, 54 photographs and videos by 35 artists were short-listed for *Earth Photo 2020* by a judging panel made up of experts from the fields of photography, film, geography and ecology, and chaired by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Marissa Roth. Viewers are invited to discover them in an online exhibition.

Now in its third year, *Earth Photo* is proud to announce its 2020 winners, who represent the very best in nature, environ-

mental and geographical photography.

Photographer Jonk wins the Place Category and is named the overall winner of *Earth Photo 2020* with a series of four images representing buildings that have been abandoned by civilisation and re-conquered by nature. According to Joe Smith, Director of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), this body of work gathers fragments of stories of human environments 'taken back by nature'.



Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

# Fairy family

Gomel restorer couple, restoring works of art, return our history to its original colours and forms

A monument to Peter the Great in Kronstadt looks out from a large time-worn canvas, with figures of Soviet naval officers standing around. "Artist Georgy Nisky is a landscape and marine painter — one of the founders of the austere style in Soviet painting in the 1950s and 1960s," says Yevgenia Fei, an employee of the restoration workshop of the museum at the Gomel Palace and Park Estate. "For his contribution to art he was awarded the Stalin Prize of 2nd degree. He is still popular nowadays, and recently one of his works was sold in Moscow for £3m. We have his only painting in the museum, now we are restoring it."



Ivan Yaranovich



By Stanislav Galkovsky

## Only watercolours are used

The method of restoring old canvases is traditional. First, the paintings are glued and the dirt that covered the painting is removed from the surface. Then the canvas is strengthened, and the colours are restored. Yevgenia explains, "The restorers don't use oil paints, only watercolours are used, which — if necessary — can be easily removed after years by another craftsman. The final touch is the coating of the canvas with restoration varnish."

Separate work is being done

## TO THE POINT

Sometimes there are real pearls among the rarities brought to the workshop of the museum at the Gomel Palace and Park Estate, for example, in 2010, four paintings from a private donor were received. Studying them, the Fei partners found that these are the canvases of the famous Polish artist, Antoni Kwiatkowski — a friend and contemporary of Chopin.



young people chose not just one profession, but also one path in life, along which they have been walking hand in hand for many years. Yevgenia admits that one business unites them, "We argue about topics that are important to both of us. Everyone makes their own creative contribution, both to work and to the family. This is our world — a huge world of art history."

Thanks to their work, many rarities have already returned to the exposition of the Gomel palace while dozens of relics are on the way. Those already restored include many personal belongings of the former owners of the Gomel estate, for example, the travel box of His Serene Prince of Warsaw, Count Ivan Paskevich.

The Fei family is a good example of teamwork. She works on the canvas while he is restoring the frame. When the conversation comes onto significant objects of restoration, they only smile. They say that these ancient things are used to study the past and the peculiarities of its development. It's impossible to say which is more important on this list: a carved wardrobe without a leg or a darkened landscape. However, if we recall the masterpieces of world culture that they brought back to life, then Yevgenia and Nikolai are unanimous, "Of all the objects with which we've worked, I especially want to highlight the painting by Jan Damel *The Holy Family* (1811). There are only two of his works in Belarus: *The Holy Family* and *Holy Constantia*. Believe me, they can really be considered the heritage of world culture. The painting was brought to us from the village of Vishnevo, in the Smorgon District of the Grodno Region, where it has been decorating one of the churches for many decades. It was delivered in a very poor condition. Today, all connoisseurs of painting can once again fully admire it."



with icons because most of them are painted on boards. It has its own specificity of lightening and restoration of paints. For example, in 2011, the Varuev family presented the Gomel palace with a unique image — *The Yearly Menaion with Holidays* — from the mid-19th century. All Orthodox celebrations are collected here — this is a kind of Christian calendar. The Fei family has returned the brightness to the shrine.

## Combining oak and copper

Nikolai Fei has restored dozens of rare icon cases, frames, tables, chairs and cabinets. For almost forty years he has been reviving rare wooden objects. One of the significant works is the table at which Duke Paskevich used to sit. In general, the master

admits that working with wood is very difficult, "The first task is conservation. Special solutions are being prepared to impregnate wood which stops it biodegrading. In order to reliably restore an old chair or watch case, you have to search for photos or drawings of the original for weeks in catalogues and Internet sites. Here my wife Yevgenia gives me invaluable help."

Antique pianos, carved wardrobes with curved legs, an unsightly chair with shabby upholstery — the workshop breathes history. Previously they used to enjoy combining materials: oak, beech, copper, gilding. However, the most difficult thing is the technique, which has been lost over the centuries. After all, there was no mass production at that time. Nikolai Fei explains, "The dif-

## THE MT REFERENCE

There are over 150 museums in Belarus while there are about 30 in the Gomel Region. Only the Palace and Park Estate and the Vetka Museum of Old Believers and Belarusian Traditions named after Fiodor Shklyarov have their own master restorers in the south-eastern region of the country.

ficulty is that it is impossible to speculate. I can't invent a missing item in this wardrobe. I can only find it in catalogues, looking at analogues. This is always manual work, the old masters didn't work any other way. Have a look at the sketches of how a chair was restored from the furniture collection of the Rummyantsev and Paskevich pal-

ace. I have to work a lot on the disassembly of materials, the study of historical data for techniques, the selection of varnish and wood formulations. Each subject is a whole study."

Sometimes, however, he has to use his imagination. One of the pieces of furniture being restored was inlaid with shells, and the Fei family went to the Sozh River to look for them. The shells of river molluscs came in handy. The craftsman also has his own dream: to bring back to life the old sideboard of 1731 from the estate of the Khaletsky dukes (the agricultural town of Khalch in the Gomel Region), but this may take years.

## One road for both

They met in their youth. She is from Yaroslavl while he comes from Gomel. Nikolai and Yevgenia graduated from the Bogorodsk art vocational school in Sergiev Posad, being taught by the best art masters. The

# Belarusian open air museum

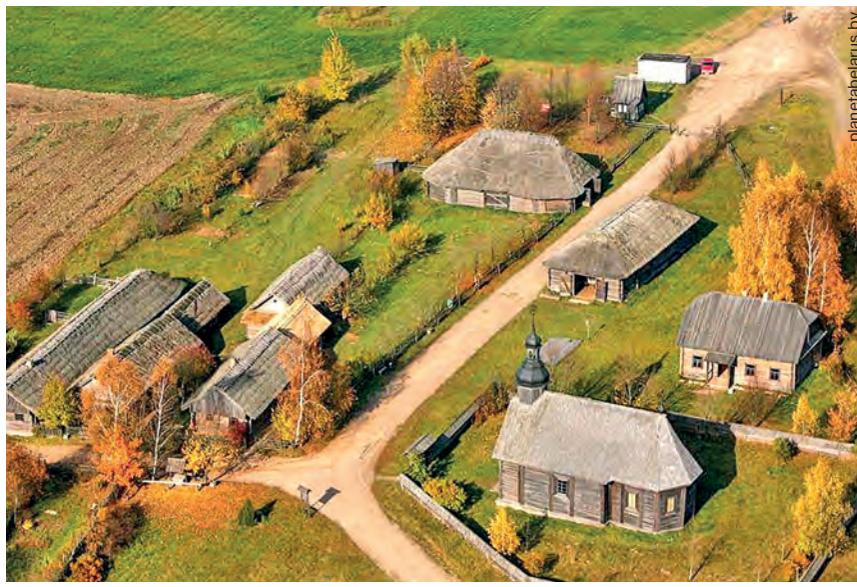
By Sergei Kulyagin

A new campaign is being held at the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle: *Absolutely Free*. It's been created to enable every visitor to learn more about this Skansen [an open air museum]. To do this, the staff are preparing exciting themed excursions for guests every weekend. Tourists — whether they are a family or a small group of friends — pay only entrance fees, while excursions are offered free of charge.

New working conditions in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on visiting large groups didn't stop the work of the museum but, on the contrary, forced it to quickly reconsider its approaches. Here, the main focus has been on family tourism, organisation of games programmes for children and the holding of local festivals, holidays and thematic events.

“Our advantage over other similar cultural institutions is that we are located in a picturesque place under the open sky. People come here simply to take a walk, relax away from the bustle of the city, enjoy the beautiful scenery and breathe the fresh air,” says Director Eduard Bogdanovich. “To expand the numbers of tourists, we are actively working on the introduction of various local thematic promotions, events and games programmes. We always have something going on — on weekdays and, definitely, at the weekends.”

Several days ago, guests of the museum participated in the ‘Vyachorki’ ritual event and then they were introduced to the secrets of local windmills. “The three mills on the site of the museum are one of the most interesting and unusual objects for modern visitors,” smiles guide Yana Potapenko. “After all, a hundred years ago, the village landscape was difficult to imagine without them. The mills were always clearly visible from afar, served as a kind of reference points for the traveller, gathered around them the inhabitants of neighbouring villages. Even today, the architecture of the mills is a real decoration, the pearl of our museum village. Visits to them are interesting to everyone who studies wooden architecture



In times of the pandemic, Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle focuses on family tourism, quests for schoolchildren, local festivals and holidays



rusians, including those from remote areas of the country, are coming here more often.

Visitors can also take advantage of another unique opportunity: to enjoy the local sights and take great photos from a bird's-eye view. Since recently, the Avia-Mensk Recreation Centre is based on one of the sites of the museum complex. Its experienced pilots offer exciting trike flying, sightseeing flights and aerial excursions.

“Actually, despite difficult times and certain problems with funding, we are constantly investing in our own development,” says Mr. Bogdanovich. “This is due to the accumulated extra-budgetary funds and serious support from the Culture Ministry. For example, in 2019, the museum introduced a modern video surveillance system. Now large-scale works on capital repairs for lightning protection necessary for cultural institutions are nearing completion. In addition, we've renovated 11 museum sites.”

It is planned to restore the old building of the Usha railway station. Jointly with the Muslim community of Belarus, funds are being sought to restore the original 18th century mosque from the village of Dovbuchki in the Smorgon District. A large-scale project aims at the revival of the late 18th — early 20th century Belarusian town, with workshops on traditional Belarusian folk crafts.

“We aren't stopping at what we've achieved, but trying to keep up with the times — offering popular tourist products and expanding the list of services. Several new projects are being prepared for implementation in 2021, so that the next tourist season will be as effective as possible. Our team has a desire to work for the future, which means the museum has a future and opportunities for development,” adds Eduard Bogdanovich.



and the ethnography of Belarus, and the life of past ages.”

This year, the museum has opened many new thematic exhibitions and expositions that deserve special attention. For example, the restored Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in the town of Baran, Orsha District, hosts the *Sacred Culture in the Folk Life of the Ostrovets Land* exhibition — featuring exhibits collected by the muse-

um staff during ethnographic expeditions to the Ostrovets District. Among them are ancient books, rare Catholic wooden tombs with lithographs made by local carpenters, as well as museum items related to the funeral tradition. A special place is devoted to works of a local folk artist and sculptor, Yulitsiya Karmaso — known for her iconographic works.

This year, the museum had to can-

cel major mass events, such as *The Veska*, *U-Letny Fest* and *The Age of Chivalry* festivals and reconstruction of WWI events. However, local events have been added: St. Martin's Day, the *Pokrovskaya Fair*, *Strochitsy Sword* and *Strochitsy Chimes* festivals. Thanks to this, the museum has not lost visitors and has even expanded their circle. True, the village is missing foreign tourists this season, but Bela-

Belarusian Paralympian, multiple world and European record holder, motivational speaker, father of many children and businessman Aleksei Talai tells us about vocation, family and achievements

# We design all our barriers ourselves

**Aleksei visits schools, universities, organisations, hospitals, care homes for the elderly and orphans, as well as sports schools and national teams with a humanitarian mission, talking about the meaning of life and giving hope to people with disabilities, those who suffer from addiction, and are in difficult situations. He is also actively training to compete at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2021, where for the first time in the history of our state he will travel with a personal qualification. The athlete will represent his native Belarus in swimming among six athletes with disabilities of the most severe, and rare, class. His example can shape the worldview of many about simple and complex things in life.**

By Tatiana Shimuk

## Between life and death

The story of Aleksei Talai cannot be called anything other than a miracle. He recalls the fateful day of May 8th, 1999 once again, which is incredibly difficult. As a teenager, he was blown up by a mine from the time of the Great Patriotic War and lost his arms and legs, but after many operations he survived, became a strong personality, created a family and continued his lineage. He has four children: three sons and a daughter.

I talk to Aleksei after his swimming training for participation in the Paralympics in the most difficult first class. He says that he was athletic and strong before the ill-fated day, “I was very strong so that probably helped me to be mentally prepared for a turning point in life. Where my grandparents lived — in the Orsha District — bloody battles took place during the war. The Germans left nasty surprises in the ground: high-quality mines from the military artillery of the last century. After so many years, one of these mines hit me — an ordinary kid. Now, years later, I think: ‘What was it: a tragedy or something else?’ Thank God I survived and was able to cope with it. I just turned what happened in a different direction and gave this event a positive effect. It all depends on the attitude to the situation...”

Recovering from pain and an endless series of rescue operations, Aleksei looked at life with different eyes, “I saw that life and death walk side by side. I understood — like Alice in Wonderland — how deep the hole I flew into is. I discovered the world around me more and more. I was an active young man, and suddenly fate put me in a wheelchair, as if saying: ‘Alesha, it is not always in this life that you wish and imagine. To survive and not go crazy, you need to accept the situation as it is’.”

## Overcoming oneself

Aleksei admits that he began to go in for swimming and participating in international competitions quite recently: from January 2017, after he professionally fulfilled the standard of the master of sports, after two months of exhausting training. Everything could have been different if

he had become desperate. “It was difficult after that explosion for everyone: parents, my loved ones and friends. But they accepted me and loved me for who I am. After moments of despondency and anger at myself, I began to think that no one would live my life for me, and began to act, take responsibility for

children are growing up, then the head of the family should try to give his wife an opportunity not to work, but to take care of the children while creating a comfortable house. The state-provided maternity leave for childcare creates conditions and opportunities for family support that are rare in the world,” Aleksei shares his views.



In the circle of beloved family members

myself and my family,” the man says.

It seems surprising, but Aleksei began to move forward step by step: he opened his own business, founded a charitable foundation, and a couple of years ago he graduated from the History Department of the Belarusian State University. Moreover, he is an exemplary family man.

“The motivation to enter the university was to prove to oneself and others that disability is not a sentence. The most important thing is passion. Do not indulge yourself with illusions. You have to work hard to achieve. If you don’t want to study at the institute then other talented students will take your place. Go play on your phone and scroll through social networks. Don’t you want to love your chosen one and be an example for your children? Go for a walk, and remember that you have a wonderful husband or wife and children. Aggressive feminism is imposed on us today from screens, as is a certain perception of traditional values. Women, by nature, should remain women, and a man should be a man: to love, protect and provide for the family. I believe that if two or three

## The path to one’s favourite occupation

“It is sometimes difficult for people with disabilities to move around the flat, how did you manage to organise a business?” I wonder.

“As soon as Mark was born, I understood that the disability pension wouldn’t be enough for me. And I have a family. I could not rely on anyone else because I was brought up to think: ‘If you’re a man, then be responsible. We started with friends with a minibus and a second-hand business... I didn’t force anyone to deal with me. My friends said that out of respect they helped me get around. They are my guardian angels,” responds Aleksei. “Charitable accounts were opened, and people collected money for rehabilitation and for prostheses. My family used the allocated funds wisely. My mother said, ‘We have collected a certain amount, maybe, we will go to the sea, buy a computer or something else?’ But that’s not what I wanted. As the eldest son grew up, I began to think about what serious business I could do.”



Aleksei Talai

A promising idea was found. Now Aleksei is a co-founder of a Belarusian-Chinese company, “I love only my Motherland, although I’ve been to many places... I was thinking about what I can give to my country. China is a huge market and a reliable partner for our state in the political and economic spheres. Just imagine: more than 40,000 children are born there every day. Of course, they need high-quality food, like many other countries, and quality and naturalness are synonyms for the word ‘Belarusian’. So I came up with the idea of promoting our goods abroad, I think that in some places my name also helps this.”

A young company with the participation of the Chinese side was established, developing the export of Belarusian goods and raw materials to the market of China and other countries. The main areas of activity include food, agricultural products and equipment, the production and implementation of large investment projects in the field of meat processing, storage and logistics.

Aleksei believes that only hard work and love can transform this world. He encourages people with disabilities to be more proactive, “We are few. Most people don’t think about our problems, maybe, they shouldn’t. But if you are in a wheelchair, then put forward ideas yourself, call and write to institutions, foundations. For example, my website is called wetogether.by. No one will think for us and know exactly where it is better to install a ramp or an elevator. Do you want to change something? Suggest where to create a barrier-free environment. Thus, we will also help mothers who take their children in wheelchairs to shops and to various organisations.”

“During one of our trips to a care home for the elderly and people with disabilities, we had an idea that we are actively developing now: people with disabilities need to direct part of their work to support those who are even worse. This fills life with meaning and distracts from their own problems, uniting everyone in love for another person,” stresses Aleksei Talai.

Let’s think not only about ourselves, but also those who are near us!

## ARENA

### ● Dinara Alimbekova climbed to second place in Biathlon World Cup overall standings



At the third stage, held in Austrian Hochfilzen, Belarusian Dinara Alimbekova climbed onto the podium twice — first winning

the sprint race, and then claiming silver in the pursuit. The leader of the Belarusian women’s team currently boasts 265 points. Dinara Alimbekova is only six points behind the leader in the general classification — Norwegian Marte Olsbu Roieseland — while Swedish Hanna Öberg is placed third with 259 points.

In the Nations Cup standings, the Belarusian national team is in 8th position, with 1,716 points. Ahead are the biathletes from Norway with 2,571 followed by the Swedish team (2,320 points) while third place is occupied by the German national team — 2,297 points.

Hochfilzen will also host the fourth stage of the Planet Cup. Its participants will take part in six races.

### ● Belarusian Yegor Shramkov won two medals at the European Men’s Artistic Gymnastics Championships in Mersin

The Belarusian athlete was declared in two types of the programme: vault and floor exercises and both took him to the medals podium. The pupil of the

Mogilev Bagima Children and Youth Olympic Reserve School achieved the greatest success in the first part of the programme, winning silver. Having made his way to the finals, Yegor Shramkov earned 14,700 points from the judges. In the floor exercise, the Belarusian sportsman took third place and scored 14,533 points. The Mogilev resident



was the best in qualification (15,033), but he could not repeat his success in the final stage of the competitions.

Belarusian gymnasts didn’t win any medals at the European championships.

### ● Kirill Maskevich of Belarus won gold at the Individual World Wrestling Cup in Belgrade

The resident of Borisov, competing in the 87kg weight category, defeated the Olympic champion, Davit Chakvetadze, ahead of schedule in the decisive match — 10:0. The Russian eventually won the silver in the tournament. Two more bronze medals in this weight category were earned by Serbian athlete Zurabi Datunashvili and Ukrainian Semen Novikov.





## Photo of the week

At Vitebsk Zoo

### DATES. EVENTS. PEOPLE.

**December 17th** is the Day of Belarusian Cinema in the Republic of Belarus. On December 17th, 1924, the State Administration for Cinematography and Photography — Belgoskino — was founded. The first Belarusian fictional film — *The Forest Truth* — was shot in 1926. Director Yuri Tarich, who created this adaptation of Mikhas Charot's *The Swineherd*, is known as the founder of Belarusian cinema. In total, over 500 feature films, several thousand documentaries and about 100 cartoons have been shot at Belarusfilm throughout its history. *Listapad* Minsk International Film Festival every year attracts more and more participants and viewers.



**On December 18th, 1940**, Directive №21 (Operation Barbarossa) was approved in Germany — a plan for Germany's aggressive war against the Soviet Union. The main task was to 'defeat Soviet Russia in one short-term campaign', using the experience of the so-called 'blitzkrieg' strategy — 'Blitzkrieg' in Europe ('Lightning War').



**On December 19th, 1915**, Kazimir Malevich first unveiled 39 non-objective works, including his famous *Black Square*, in Petrograd at the futuristic exhibition of paintings, entitled *O. 10*. The exhibition was accompanied by Malevich's catalogue *From Cubism to Suprematism*. Kazimir Malevich is the founder of a new direction in painting — Suprematism (from Latin 'supremus' — the highest, extreme). The artist considered any subject painting an anachronism and saw the task of the creator as the ability to capture the very essence of art on the canvas, without resorting to the help of specific images.



**On December 21st, 1890**, Nikolai Aladov was born — a composer, teacher, and People's Artist of Belarus (1955). He was one of the organisers and first teachers of the Belarusian Conservatory and the Belarusian Musical College. He laid the foundations of the genres of Belarusian professional music and created the first examples of dramatic and lyrical-psychological symphonies in Belarusian music. Moreover, he is the author of over

260 pieces of music of various genres, including *Andrei Kostenya* opera, *Taras on Parnassus* musical comedy and the *Over the Oressa River* vocal and symphonic poem. He also edited many pieces of music, collected and researched Belarusian, Mari, Chuvash and Yakut folklore while also composing folk songs. He died in 1972.

**On December 22nd, 1945**, the Belarusian Theatre Institute was opened in Minsk (since 1953 — the Theatre and Art Institute, since 1991 — the Belarusian Academy of Arts). It prepares specialists in the field of theatrical, visual, arts and crafts, film, television and other types of screen arts and design.



**On December 22nd, 2000**, the new building of the Central Railway Station was put into operation in Minsk (by architects Victor Kramarenko and Mikhail Vinogradov). The area of the modern complex, which we see today, is almost 36,000sq.m. The station building has 7 floors, of which 4 are above ground and 3 are underground.



**December 22nd** is Power Engineers' Day in the Republic of Belarus, established by Presidential Decree in 1995. This is a professional holiday for all workers in the industry, covering the generation, transmission and sale of electricity and heat to consumers. In Belarus, it is celebrated on one of the shortest days of the year.

**On December 23rd, 1875**, Daniil Tomashov was born (village of Poloshkovo, in the Klimovichi District, Mogilev Region) — a Belarusian master and restorer of bowed instruments. From 1901, he independently made bowed instruments, from 1906, he worked at the Bolshoi Theatre, the Conservatory and other musical institutions in Moscow. Instruments made by the master were awarded a gold medal at an exhibition in Rome (1911). 26 violins and 3 cellos made by him have been preserved. One of the instruments is kept in the collection of rare musical instruments at the National Museum of History and Culture of Belarus. He died in 1926.

