

December 1-8, 2004

Edited by Sanwaree Sethi
International League for Human Rights

Table of Contents

I. Domestic

1. Belarusian Helsinki Committee Official Charged with Slander (*Interfax*)
2. 6,000 AIDS-infected People Registered in Belarus (*Iter-Tass*)
3. The Ministry of Information Foresees Information War Against Belarus (*Belarussian Association of Journalists*)

II. Regional

4. Ukraine: Attempt to Bribe Belarus Election Observer (*Prima-News*)
5. Russia-Belarus Trade Volume to Exceed \$15bn in 2004 (*RosBusinessConsulting*)
6. Demonstration Staged in Front of Belarusian Embassy in Kiev (*Charter97*)
7. Belarus-Russia Border Cooperation Contributing to Russian Security (*Itar-Tass*)

III. International

8. IMF Exits Belarus (*RFE/RL*)
9. Belarusian President Dismisses US Complaints About His Country (*Itar-Tass*)

IV. Human Rights & Independent Media

10. Prosecutor's Office Continues to Pressure Journalists (*Charter97*)
11. Belarusian Activist Faces 5 Years in Prison for Talking About Political Disappearances (*MosNews*)

V. Business

12. Belarus Posts Highest CIS Industrial Growth in 10 Months (*Interfax*)

DOMESTIC

1. Belarusian Helsinki Committee Official Charged with Slander

The Belarusian prosecutor's office has opened a criminal case against Harry Pahanayla, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

Pahanayla told Interfax that he has been charged with slandering the Belarusian state. He received a copy of the charges on November 30.

The charges were filed over an interview Pahanayla gave to Swedish TV 4 television this past summer, in which he described "the situation in the republic, including the situation involving the disappearance of political opponents of the current administration."

Source: *Interfax; December 1, 2004; www.interfax.ru*

2. 6,000 AIDS-infected People Registered in Belarus

More than 6,000 AIDS-infected people are registered in Belarus that was not AIDS-affected for a long time, Belarusian chief state sanitary doctor Mikhail Rimzha told a news conference devoted to World Anti-AIDS Day on Wednesday.

"The upsurge of the AIDS incidence occurred in the early nineties. Eighty percent of AIDS-infected people are young people under 29," Rimzha emphasized.

Belarusian doctors are seriously concerned over the rapid growth of AIDS-infected women in the republic. If they made less than eight percent from the total number of AIDS-infected people in 1997, their number exceeded 35 percent now.

The considerable aid of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria promotes the solution to the AIDS problem in Belarus. Around 6.8 million dollars are allocated under the project for the fight with the AIDS spread in Belarus for the next two years.

Source; Itar-Tass; December 1, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

3. Belarusian Activist Faces 5 Years in Prison for Talking About Political Disappearances

A Belarusian rights activist is facing five years in prison for alleging in an interview that political opponents of President Alexander Lukashenko's regime were disappearing.

The Soviet-style leader, whom the West has repeatedly labeled a "tyrant", won a referendum this fall approving a constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for a third term next year.

Belarusian law enforcement authorities Tuesday filed a criminal case on libel charges against Garri Pogonyailo, the Interfax news agency reported. Pogonyailo, who is a chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Commission, gave an interview to the nation's Channel 4 television, in which he "described the situation in the republic", the news agency quoted the prosecution statement as saying.

His interview also "concerned the disappearance of political opponents of the current regime," the statement says.

If convicted, Pogonyailo could face up to five years in prison.

Random attacks and persecution against journalists is common in the former Soviet republic, which has forged the closest ties with Russia among all the other CIS states.

Source: MosNews; December 1, 2004; www.mosnews.com

4. The Ministry of Information Foresees Information War Against Belarus

"It wasn't a surprise for us to learn the declarations from the west regarding the information war against Belarus", - stated the Minister of Information Ul. Rusakievich to the "Interfax" News Agency on December 6, 2004. According to him, "the Belarusian authorities know about the grants, appropriated in support of the non-governmental press as well as about the coming installation of wireless transmitters in the neighboring states directed at broadcasting various radio stations to Belarus."

The Minister noted he didn't find it possible to sale the state-supported periodicals to the private owners in order to develop the newspaper market in the country.

"Why should we? We don't aim at raising money. Therefore, we shouldn't foster privatization, anyway," - stressed Ul. Rusakievich. "The private capital can found new enterprises at the Mass-Media market. I know there have been made certain proposals of the kind by the Russian side. Still, I am quite aware of the steps, which are going to follow these projects".

According to the Minister, the budget financing of the state newspapers "tends to decrease". "Believe me, they don't get some fantastic sums", - assured Ul. Rusakievich. "Three billion rubles,

allocated in support of the whole press are a mere drop. It doesn't mean the state doesn't have money to assist the periodicals. Thus, we direct the Mass Media management towards making money themselves."

According to Ul. Rusakievich, "currently, there are 32 periodical editions, financed by the state" in the country.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; December 6, 2004; www.baj.ru

REGIONAL

5. Ukraine: Attempt to Bribe Belarus Election Observer

An employee of the Belarusian Human Rights Center "Vesna," Tatyana Revyako, who was present as an international observer during the second round of presidential elections in Ukraine, was the target of an attempted bribe in Makeyevka (the Donetsk area) when she discovered falsifications during elections.

Tatyana Revyako told a correspondent of PRIMA News that on November 21st, at 19.30 she arrived at Site 45 of Constituency 53 in the city of Makeyevka. 10 minutes prior to the termination of voting, all the lights in the building went out. The conclusion of voting, calculation of votes, and the drawing up of reports were all carried out with emergency lights. Revyako noted, that on the tables where the counting of ballots was taking place, there was no indication where figures were coming from, and it was impossible to verify calculations.

The lights came back on at 23.30. Tatyana Revyako asked the chairman of the local commission to make a copy of the report and took her staff of observers to Donetsk. Later, she returned to Makeyevka and visited the territorial selective commission which had not yet finished its work. It had not yet received the results from the site at which Revyako was present.

At two o'clock in the morning the Chairman, Vice-President, and Secretary of the local commission declared that their figures differed from those specified in the copy of the report the observers received. The number of votes for presidential candidate Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich, had increased by 100.

The Chairman of the commission and the secretary followed Tatyana Revyako onto the street and asked her not to reveal the difference in the figures. According to them, there had been a mistake due to the light failure and they counted the results after her departure. Revyako responded that all the counted ballots had been sealed in her presence, therefore it would be left to the Ukrainian courts to determine why the sealed packets of ballots were opened after they were tabulated. Two hours later, Tatyana Revyako was approached by a man who claimed to be the commission chairman's cousin. He asked her to give him her copy of the report, declaring that his cousin was hospitalized with a stroke as a result of the proceedings. When Revyako responded that her copy was already with her staff in Donetsk, the man offered her a bribe of one thousand US dollars if she would help remove it, and thrust the envelope of money at her. The observer refused and left quickly. In the morning, the man was in her hotel, where he stopped Revyanko, bearing gifts. According to him, the chairman of the commission was already in a coma, and the only thing that could save him was a copy of the report. However Revyako was unable to help in any way.

According to Revyanko, "The same thing could have occurred at other sites. Nobody, except for me, has gone to the territorial commission. If they went they would probably see something similar."

Source: *Prima-News; December 2, 2004; www.prima-news.ru*

6. Russia-Belarus Trade Volume to Exceed \$15bn in 2004

The volume of trade between Russia and Belarus will exceed \$15bn in 2004, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Razov declared at a round-table meeting on integration in the former USSR in the State Duma.

According to Razov, the highest level of cooperation in the ex-USSR has so far been achieved in the Union State of Russia and Belarus. Cooperation is developing in many sectors, especially with regard to defense, economy, security and migration policies, the deputy minister pointed out. "What is a short-term target for cooperation of Russia with other countries, has either been started or is being prepared in the Union State," Razov said.

According to the official, the Union of Russia and Belarus "is an important testing ground and an integration model," which can be used by other republics of the former USSR. Razov added that a regular meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Union State would be held before the end of 2004. As reported earlier, the volume of trade between Russia and Belarus reached \$12.5bn in 2003.

Source: *RosBusinessConsulting; December 6, 2004; www.rbcnews.com*

7. Demonstration Staged in Front of Belarusian Embassy in Kiev

Members of Belarusian and Ukrainian non-governmental organizations picketed the Belarusian embassy in Kiev on December 1 to protest against the Belarusian leader's support of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, who was officially declared the winner in the November 21 presidential runoff, according to the web site of the *Nasha Ukraina* opposition movement.

Demonstrators handed Ambassador Valentin Velichko a statement for the Belarusian authorities, in which they condemned Mr. Lukashenko's move to congratulate Mr. Yanukovich on his election victory before the results of the election was officially announced.

The electoral authorities say that Mr. Yanukovich beat opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, but the United States and the European Union said the runoff fell short of democratic standards, and Ukraine's Supreme Court delayed the publication of the results to consider ballot-rigging allegations.

"We are convinced that the Ukrainians and the Belarusians have the right to elect their government," the statement said. "The Ukrainian people have made their choice, that is why Viktor Yushchenko will soon become president of Ukraine. The orange revolution has showed that changes will soon come to Belarus, as the Belarusian people are looking forward to them." The demonstrators accused the Belarusian authorities of intimidating those who have an active civic position.

"We protest against the information blockade in Belarus, the Belarusian state media's biased coverage of events in both Belarus and Ukraine and demand freedom of speech," the statement said.

Source: *Charter 97; December 3, 2004; www.charter97.org*

8. Belarus-Russia Border Cooperation Contributing to Russian Security

Over 20 facilities of the border infrastructure have been built in Belarus since 1996 within the framework of the program of equipping the external border of the Belarusian-Russian Union state, Itar-Tass learnt at the Operational Border Group of the Russian Federal Security Service in the Republic of Belarus on Friday.

According to joint programs, several frontier posts were erected, the garrison of the Lidsky border detachment was equipped and a cynologist centre of Belarus' border troops was set up.

Funds of the Union budget have been also channelled for engineer equipping of the border, laying of communication lines, purchase of technical means of border control, joint scientific researches, as well as training and retraining of cadres. The program of equipping the external border for 2002-2005 is being implemented at present.

Deputy chief of the Operational Border Group Colonel Dmitry Ponomarev pointed to great importance of the decision regarding the two countries' joint participation in equipping the external border of the Union state, in particular its Belarusian section, which was adopted several years ago.

The matter is that there are no frontier-guards on the Belarusian-Russian border. Herewith, "money allocated for equipping the border are used very rationally in Belarus," Colonel Ponomarev stressed.

However, border equipping is only one side of the matter. Ponomarev also pointed to the fact that the two union countries' border departments coordinate their actions and work out a single border policy.

The Border Committee of the Union State has been effectively working for several years. Every year a joint decision is taken and a joint instruction is signed to guard the external border of the Union state. And the Operational Border Group of the Russian Security Service in Belarus fulfils tasks of everyday interaction.

According to estimates of officers of the Russian Operational Group, close coordination of actions with Belarusian frontier-guards directly contributes to ensuring Russia's national security.

Source: Itar-Tass; December 1, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

INTERNATIONAL

9. IMF Exits Belarus

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced today that it would close its office in Belarus.

The IMF said in a statement that it was shutting down the office because it has no active projects in Belarus and expects none in the future.

The last time the IMF extended credit to Belarus was in 1990, and Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said earlier this year that his government has no need for IMF assistance.

The IMF is an international financial institution that allies 184 countries.

Source: RFE/RL; December 3, 2004; www.rferl.org

10. Belarusian President Dismisses US Complaints About His Country

President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus believes that the U.S. carping of his country should be viewed in the light of its genuinely independent foreign and domestic policy.

"If we were sticking to American policies, they wouldn't make any claims against us," he said in an interview with Al-Arabiya satellite channel Monday.

"Belarus was audacious enough to carry out independent policy in practice, not only verbally," Lukashenko said.

"It appears this kind of audacity is punishable," he indicated. "To punish the disobedient ones, the Americans will grasp at any occasion and will always use their soiled trump card – human rights."

"I wish people's fundamental human rights were controlled and guaranteed at the top state level in every country," Lukashenko said. "Belarus does not know ethnic strife, its streets are quiet, all the people get duly earnings, and the right to life is guaranteed to every person."

"U.S., unemployment is several times greater than in Belarus, which means we guarantee the right to having a job," Lukashenko said.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: Itar-Tass; December 6, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

11. Prosecutor's Office Continues to Pressure Journalists

Assistant editor of the *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, Irina Khalip was again summoned to the Belarusian General Prosecutor's Office for publishing her articles in the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. Sviataslov Golik, Deputy head of the Department on Supervision over Human Rights and Freedoms of the Belarusian Prosecutor's office and senior prosecutor Sergei Novikov, were especially interested in the "Drunken Executioners" article. The article was on the topic of the death penalty in Belarus. Khalip claimed that the prosecutors say that capital punishment is the choice of the Belarusian people, and questioned its morality, as it violates one of the state's values.

Officials were interested in the reporter's sources of information, as the Belarusian death penalty procedure was described in detail in the article, and only a limited number of people know about it. Khalip refused to speak about her sources, citing to the Article 34 of the Law on Press.

Typically the investigators had been interested in the style of Khalip's articles. This time they have asked Khalip whether or not she considers calling law-enforcement officers "hell-raisers" offensive.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: Charter 97; December 7, 2004; www.charter97.org

BUSINESS

12. Belarus Posts Highest CIS Industrial Growth in 10 Months

Belarus posted the highest industrial growth, up 16.1% year-on-year, among CIS nations in January-October, the CIS Interstate Statistical Committee said.

Growth was 15.2% in Tajikistan, 13.6% in Ukraine, 7.1% in Kyrgyzstan, 10% in Kazakhstan, 6.3% in Moldova, 4.6% in Georgia, 6.2% in Russia, 5.5% in Azerbaijan and 1.5% in Armenia. The committee did not give figures for Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan.

CIS industrial growth was 8% year-on-year. GDP grew 7.5% in the Commonwealth as a whole. Retail turnover was up 12%.

GDP grew 12.7% in Ukraine, 11% in Tajikistan, 11.1% in Belarus, 9.7% in Armenia, 9.9% in Azerbaijan, 6.8% in Kyrgyzstan and 6.6% in Russia.

Source: Interfax; December 6, 2004; www.interfax.ru

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights, www.ilhr.org. The League, now in its 62nd year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Sanwaree Sethi at sanwaree_ilhr.org.

For current and back issues, list of events, and more information about the League's advocacy activities in Belarus, please visit the Belarus Update website at: www.belarusupdate.org.

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.
