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DOMESTIC

1. Belarus Marks Chernobyl Disaster

Nineteen years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine, Belarus is still suffering the consequences. In Minsk, opposition activists will join residents of the contaminated regions in a march to mark the anniversary.

President Alexander Lukashenko is marking the Chernobyl anniversary according to tradition. He is heading to the south of Belarus, to one of the areas worst affected by radiation from the Ukrainian plant.

Belarus suffered the worst of the radioactive fall-out, but the toxic cloud also spread across a large swathe of Europe. State television has been trailing the trip as yet another sign that life in the Chernobyl disaster zone is returning to normal. The authorities here are promoting the development of the area, investing in agriculture in particular. As more than 1.5 million people still live there, that is largely a product of necessity. But opposition activists and local scientists are

concerned about the safety of such a policy. They point to high levels of child sickness in the region as proof it is still far from safe. As the president demonstrates the opposite, they will use a protest meeting in Minsk to deliver a petition to his office. They are calling for an honest approach. They will also protest against new regulations that make it more difficult for children from the contaminated zones to travel abroad. Last year President Lukashenko declared such trips were corrupting Belarussian children by exposing them to capitalism.

Source: Sarah Rainsford; BBC News; April 28, 2005; news.bbc.co.uk

2. Belarus Opposition's Rally Marks Chernobyl Blast Anniversary

Belarus' opposition said it would set up a public movement Chernobyl Self-Defense. The rally marking the 19th anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant, said the authorities were not taking effective measures to overcome its consequences, and that they were concealing the real situation in irradiated areas.

Taking part in the meeting on Tuesday evening, sanctioned by the city administration, were several hundred people.

Also on Tuesday, police in Minsk broke up a separate protest by the radical wing of the opposition. Several dozen youngsters from unregistered Belarussian youth movements, together with representatives of rightist youth organizations of Russia and Ukraine tried to stage an unsanctioned rally and a march in central Minsk.

They carried Russian and Ukrainian flags, chanting slogans: "For our and your freedom. Today -- Ukraine, Tomorrow -- Belarus!"

Reports said police had detained ten to 40 protesters, including Russian and Ukrainian citizens.

Source: Itar-Tass; April 27, 2005; www.itar-tass.com

3. Belarus Protesters Jailed for Anti-Lukashenko Rally

A Belarussian court on Wednesday convicted 30 people for taking part in a rally denouncing President Alexander Lukashenko this week and sentenced them to brief jail terms of up to 15 days.

Police dispersed 300 demonstrators on Tuesday who had gathered on the 19th anniversary of the world's largest civil nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine, which also contaminated about a quarter of Belarus.

"My feeling was that all the sentences had been prepared in advance," said protest organiser Marian Bogdanovich of the United Civic Party, who was given a fine of about \$1,500.

"In my case, there was not even an attempt to confer on proceedings."

Activists from Belarus's small opposition usually mark the anniversary of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster with their largest protests of the year against Lukashenko, who stands accused of human rights violations by Western countries and rights groups.

Some Western commentators have said demonstrations which helped overturn governments in ex-Soviet Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine last year could spread to Belarus.

But Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, has vowed no such upheaval will occur in the country of 10 million people wedged between Russia and frontier states of the European Union.

Those sentenced included 14 Russians and four Ukrainians, among them a town council member. Ukraine's foreign ministry expressed concern at the arrests.

Source: Reuters; April 27, 2005; www.alertnet.org

4. Belarusian Government Official Praises Last Subbotnik

Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Drazhyn said on 25 April that Belarus's "subbotnik" on 23 April, a day of voluntary unpaid work dating back to Soviet-era tradition, involved nearly 3.7 million people and provided 9.2 billion rubles (\$4.3 million) to the state treasury, Belapan reported. Under a directive by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, half of this sum will be used to renovate World War II memorials and graves, while the remainder will be transferred to the Finance Ministry and spent in the social sphere. Drazhyn especially praised industrial giants for their contribution to the subbotnik. In particular, he noted that the Minsk Tractor Works assembled 47 tractors, the Atlant factory manufactured 560 refrigerators, and the Kamunarka company produced 40 tons of candy on that day.

Source: RFE/RL; April 25, 2005; www.rferl.org

REGIONAL

5. Lukashenko Urges More Haste On Russia-Belarus Union

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko urged President Vladimir Putin on Friday to continue moving towards unifying their countries, stressing the need for military cooperation between the two former Soviet republics.

Putin pledged that their meeting at the Kremlin would be constructive and would build on a wide range of issues related to the development of a union, such as military-technical cooperation. Earlier last week, military officials tentatively agreed to set up a joint military communications and control system.

"We have to give further impetus to the development of the union," Lukashenko said. The session came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called for a leadership change in Belarus, which the United States has called an "outpost of tyranny."

Rice met Thursday with a group of Belarusian opposition leaders in Lithuania, which borders on Belarus, and expressed admiration for their work to end what she has called "the last dictatorship in the center of Europe." She later said that the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus offered "an excellent opportunity" for voters to express their will.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov interpreted Rice's call for change as a recommendation of outside intervention to oust Lukashenko and said, "You cannot impose democracy from the outside."

Lukashenko did nothing to hide his displeasure at her remarks, sarcastically telling reporters upon his arrival in Moscow on Friday that they should be examined philosophically.

"It's good that she knows that there is such a country as Belarus. There's a lot of positive things in that respect," Interfax quoted him as saying. "She was recently flying above us, and she must have seen that there are no terrorists there."

In his decade in power, Lukashenko has stifled dissent, persecuted independent media and opposition parties and prolonged his power through rigged elections. He also has made no secret of his desire to reunite his country with Russia.

Lukashenko and then president Boris Yeltsin, signed a union treaty in 1996. Ties between the two mostly Slavic nations have been more tense under Putin, who angered Lukashenko in 2002 by floating a plan under which Belarus would essentially be subsumed into Russia. But recent meetings have brought improvements.

Source: Henry Meyer; St. Petersburg Times; April 25, 2005; www.sptimes.ru

6. Lukashenko: Belarus Will Harmonize Laws with Russia, Won't Copy its Way

Belarus will harmonize its laws with Russian ones but will not copy the Russian model of development, said Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko.

"We will not follow any of the Russian ways but will synchronize our laws to set up equal conditions for businesses," Lukashenko told journalists on Tuesday while visiting regions affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

Source: Interfax; April 26, 2005; www.interfax.ru

7. PORA Proposes to Ban Entry to Ukraine for Lukashenka

Ukrainian civil campaign PORA proposes ban entry into Ukraine for Aleksandr Lukashenk and high officials of his administration. The reason for that are the statements of the head of Belarus, who called the Orange Revolution "banditry, under a disguise of democracy".

"We ask Aleksandr Lukashenko, how he would name the disbanding of peaceful demonstrations, violence against his own citizens, suppression of the freedom of speech, and assassinations of opposition leaders, masked as "disappearances", the statement by "PORA" on its internet-site reads.

Source: Zubr; April 23, 2005: www.zubr-belarus.com

8. Russian Liberal Oppositioners Hold Protest Rally Near Belarus Embassy in Moscow

Members of youth branches of Russian liberal parties Yabloko, Union of Right Forces and the newly formed coalition Oborona (Defense) have held a unauthorized rally near the embassy of Belarus in Moscow, demanding that Lukashenko's regime frees their leaders and Russian journalists.

About 30 people led by Yabloko deputy head Sergey Mitrokhin gathered near the embassy's building in downtown Moscow on Thursday afternoon. The protesters carried posters with slogans like "Freedom!" and sealed the plaque of the embassy with the "Jail" sign.

Russian policemen dissolved the rally and detained Mitrokhin, who was taken to local police station. His allies said that they would come to the embassy every day until the detainees were freed.

On April 26, 22 members of Oborona and the Marching Without Putin movement took part in the opposition rally in Minsk that marked the 19th anniversary of Chernobyl disaster. Belarus policemen detained about thirty persons, 14 of them Russian political activists and journalists. On Thursday the Minsk City Court ordered that the detained must stay in prison for periods from 8 to 10 days.

Source: *MosNews*; April 28, 2005; www.mosnews.com

9. Azerbaijani Youth Organizations Ready to Help Belarus Opposition

"We intend to help the friendly Belarusian people in the struggle for democracy. We are already planning to go to Belarus in the nearest future, in order to offer a helping hand to our Belarusian colleagues."

This was announced by Ruslan Bashirli, head of the Azerbaijani youth organization *Eni Fikir* (New Idea) during a conversation with a correspondent from *Kavkazsky Uzel*.

Activists from another youth organization, *lokh* (No), is also ready to help Belarusian youth. According to Razi Nurullaev, a representative from this organization, democratic structures should help each other in any way possible. Razi stated that, in this context, it is very logical for *lokh* to extend their assistance to the Belarusian youth. The representative of this movement noted that its activists are ready to join demonstrations in Minsk, "and not only that."

Russian, Ukrainian and Georgian youth organizations are also intend to support Belarusian organizations.

[Translated by the editor]

Source: *BelaPan*; May 3, 2005; www.naviny.by

10. Belarus' Lukashenko Praises Economic Ties with Armenia

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko expressed satisfaction with the development of economic relations with Armenia, noting the steadily increasing trade turnover.

"The two countries succeeded in finding ways to engage in mutual trade in the present-day difficult conditions," Lukashenko noted at a meeting with visiting Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan on Tuesday.

"Thank you for visiting us on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War," the president said during the talks.

He noted that many Armenians fought against the enemy in Belarus during the war, including top military commanders.

"We know and appreciate it," Lukashenko said, "you can always find support with Belarusians. We remember the good turn."

He called Armenia the country with which it is possible to build very good relations.

"Armenia, perhaps as no other nation in the former Soviet Union, remains loyal to the friendship which we once developed," the head of state said.

Margaryan gave a positive valuation to the dynamics of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. At the same time, he noted untapped reserves.

"A meeting of the intergovernmental economic cooperation commission will take place in Yerevan this year, to map out ways of stepping up bilateral interaction," the prime minister said.

Margaryan's program envisions talks with Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky, and visits to the Belarusian and Minsk automobile plants.

The two sides plan to sign several documents, including an inter-governmental protocol abolishing exclusions from the free trade regime, as well as agreements on cooperation between the health ministries and between major television channels.

The two countries will also sign a contract for the supply of Belarusian mining equipment to Armenia.

Relations between Belarus and Armenia have been steadily growing in recent years. Their leaders meet on a regular basis. The two countries have signed more than 40 agreements, and their foreign and other ministries have established closer relationships.

Last year, bilateral trade turnover increased 12.4 percent to 10.8 million U.S. dollars.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 3, 2005; www.itar-tass.com

INTERNATIONAL

11. 'White Revolution' Stirring in Belarus

The winds of change are about to sweep across the plains of Belarus. Since 1994, the former Soviet republic has been ruled by Stalinist strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

This proud nation has the dubious distinction of being Europe's last dictatorship. Mr. Lukashenko has stifled dissent, curbed opposition parties, imposed state control over the media and rigged elections to ensure his grip on power.

Anti-Lukashenko journalists face constant harassment from the secret police, and several high-profile critics have gone "missing" -- most likely murdered by former KGB thugs.

Belarus' capital, Minsk, once the cradle of a brilliant, Slavic medieval kingdom and a major center of resistance to Adolf Hitler's invading armies, is now often derided by Western diplomats as resembling "East Berlin, without the charm."

Yet Mr. Lukashenko's days in office are now numbered. During a recent meeting with Belarusian opposition leaders at the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced administration support for regime change.

"The Belarusian government should know that they are being watched by the international community, that this is not a dark corner in which they can [go] unobserved, uncommented on, as if Belarus is not a part of the European Continent," she told reporters.

Washington is hoping Belarus will follow the recent successes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, where pro-democracy forces toppled autocratic, Soviet-style governments. President Bush's policy of spreading democracy is slowly working not only in the Middle East, but also in the former Soviet empire.

The administration provides financial assistance and other resources to Belarusian democrats in preparation for next year's presidential elections. Opposition leaders, however, warn that Mr. Lukashenko will seek to maintain his hold on power at all costs. The Murderer of Minsk will either rig the vote or refuse to accept a defeat.

This is why Belarus' brave democrats plan massive street demonstrations this fall in hopes of forcing Mr. Lukashenko's resignation. With strong American support, they may well unleash a "White Revolution" similar to the Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine.

But the White revolutionaries face one major hurdle: Russia. The Kremlin increasingly views the new democracies along its borders as pro-American satellites, which threaten Moscow's regional strategic predominance.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to not let Minsk go the way of Kiev and Tbilisi. His Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Russia will oppose any effort by the United States to undermine Mr. Lukashenko's government.

Not only Russian pride is at stake. Mr. Lukashenko has transformed Belarus into an economic and political vassal of Moscow. Russia supplies Belarus with nearly all its oil and gas, and more than half of Belarus' exports are sent to Russia.

More ominously, Mr. Lukashenko is a strong believer in Mr. Putin's dream of a Great Russian empire. The Belarusian strongman has made no secret of his desire for a formal union between Belarus and Russia.

Throughout the 1990s, Belarus emerged as an important departure point for Russia's weapons sales and missile-technology transfers to Libya and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Mr. Lukashenko is not only a menace to his own people, but to American security interests as well.

That is why the Bush administration is right to isolate Mr. Lukashenko's regime, while helping to bolster the country's growing opposition movement. Yet Washington should be under no illusions: there is a real possibility of violence and bloodshed.

In his recent address to parliament, Mr. Lukashenko denounced any peaceful efforts toward democracy as "plain banditry." He vowed they would not occur under any circumstances.

If Mr. Lukashenko orders a military crackdown, it probably would be supported by the Kremlin. The West has turned a blind eye to Moscow's genocidal campaign in Chechnya. It must not allow the same thing to occur in Belarus.

Washington must make it clear to Mr. Putin that the United States and its allies will not tolerate the Kremlin's interference in Belarus' internal affairs. There cannot be a repeat of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968, when Russian tanks crushed democratic uprisings.

Mr. Lukashenko also must be told any attempt to quell the demonstrations by force will trigger severe diplomatic, economic and -- if necessary -- military consequences. His regime would become an international pariah, similar to Kim Jong-il's North Korea. Yet unlike Pyongyang, Minsk is firmly rooted in Europe and, with the exception of Russia, surrounded by liberal democracies. Its neighbors -- Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania -- along with the European Union and NATO can exercise a decisive influence in helping Belarus embrace its pro-Western, pro-European civilizational destiny.

It is time for Belarus' White revolutionaries to follow the path blazed by their Ukrainian brethren. America stands with you.

Source: Jeffrey T. Kuhner; *Washington Times*; May 4, 2005; www.washingtontimes.com

12. Belarusian President Says West Failed to Help Deal with Chornobyl Aftermath

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka told journalists on 26 April in Vetka Raion of Homel Oblast, an area seriously contaminated by fallout from the 1986 Chornobyl accident, that Belarus has always dealt with post-Chornobyl problems on its own, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. "The opposition was insisting that the West would help us, but the West helped no one. We knew that we would not get humanitarian aid, just like Russia and Ukraine," Lukashenka said. He added that the few people from abroad who offered help in health care and other areas were rewarded by the Belarusian government. "They [the West] promised then to give us money when the Chornobyl power plant is shut down. They have given us nothing so far. We rejected old rags and clothes, we do not need them," Lukashenka noted. "There is not a single clinic or hospital in Belarus that has not received humanitarian aid from abroad," Henadz Hrushavy, head of the For Children of Chornobyl humanitarian fund, commented to RFE/RL. "It is simply dishonest to hurl such an invective -- we don't need your old rags and clothes -- on behalf of the Belarusian people at all those who have helped Belarusians."

Source: RFE/RL; April 27, 2005; www.rferl.org

13. Belarus Parliament Denounces Foreign Pressure

The Belarusian Parliament today adopted a statement denouncing what it called "political pressure" being directed at Minsk from foreign countries.

Legislator Vadim Popov says the statement was adopted in response to what he described as "the heaviest political, diplomatic and media pressure" against Belarus by several foreign states.

The adopted statement comes about a week after U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's government as "the last dictatorship in Europe."

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili recently said he believes Belarus will be the next ex-Soviet state to see the kind of democratic revolutions that happened in Georgia and Ukraine.

Source: RFE/RL; April 29, 2005; www.rferl.org

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

14. Belarus - 2005 Annual Report

President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime tightened its grip in 2004, substantially reducing freedom of all kinds and including a systematic crackdown on the independent press. The information minister used bogus bureaucratic reasons to suspend a dozen newspapers in the run-up to parliamentary elections and a referendum on 17 October. The independent press is fighting to survive and is overshadowed by government media that mostly spouts propaganda.

"The state media's job is to promote the government's ideas," said electoral commission president Lidia Ermoshina about the role of the media in backing the regime's appeal for a "yes" vote in the 17 October 2004 referendum to amend the national constitution to allow President Alexander Lukashenko to run for a third term. The broadcast media enthusiastically backed the amendment and gave no voice to opposition views. Information minister Vladimir Rusakevich also

silenced what little open dissidence there was by suspending the few independent papers as the referendum and parliamentary elections approached.

At least 11 independent or pro-opposition newspapers were suspended between June and October for between one and three months, with a peak during the six weeks before the October elections. They included Allo ! Kuplyu, Lyuboi Kapriz, Menyayu, Narodni Predprinimatel, Navinki, Novaya Gazeta Smorgoni, Prodam, Rabochaya Solidarnost, Regionalnaya Gazeta, Regionalniye Vedomosti and Vremia, all of them accused of trumped-up bureaucratic irregularities, such as failure to keep to regular publication dates, language rules and lack of a registration certificate.

The country's most popular independent paper, Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta (BDG), was systematically obstructed from January on. The post office, which delivered copies to subscribers nationwide, and the government distribution firm Belsayuzdruk cancelled their contracts with the paper for 2004. Irina Makovetskaya, its correspondent in the southern town of Gomel, received night-time death threats on 10 January.

The independent weekly Den paper was forced to move its printing operation to neighbouring Russia after a string of sudden confiscations, searches by the secret police, eviction from its premises and the refusal of printers around the country to handle it. Its editor, Mikolai Markevich, former editor of the weekly Pagonya (closed in 2001), was sentenced to 18 months forced labour in 2002 for allegedly insulting Lukashenko.

The authorities also moved against foreign media and Ukrainian freelance journalist Mikhail Podoliak was deported on 21 June and banned from the country for five years after being accused of trying to "destabilise" the country in what he wrote. Officials announced the closure of the Minsk office of the Russian TV station Rossia on 23 July for broadcasting "biased reports" about an opposition demonstration two days earlier.

Pressure on the independent media did not let up after Lukashenko's election victory on 17 October. Police arrested and beat several journalists on election day and during later opposition protests. Some foreign TV journalists said they were prevented from transmitting their film. Pavel Cheremet, of the Russian station Perviy Kanal, was beaten up by two strangers on election day and then arrested.

The courts, controlled by the government, imposed heavy fines that threatened media with bankruptcy and closure and led journalists to strictly censor themselves. The supreme court confirmed in June a 20,000 euros damages award against on the independent paper Narodnaya Volya for libelling former state TV head Yahor Rybakov.

Elena Rovbetskaya, editor of the weekly Birzha Novostei, was fined 500 euros (the equivalent of six months salary) on 30 September for "offending the honour and dignity" of the president. Dmitri Zavadski has been missing since 2000 Those responsible for the disappearance in 2000 of cameraman Dmitri Zavadski were still unpunished. The investigation into it was closed in early April 2004 shortly before the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly said very senior officials may have been personally involved and that this had been covered up. Christos Pourgourides, the Council's special rapporteur on missing people in Belarus, said in a report in January that three top officials were suspected in the disappearance of Zavadski and several other people. The officials were Viktor Sheyman, the prosecutor-general and former head of national security, the then interior minister, Yuri Sivakov (currently sports and tourism minister) and Dmitri Pavlichenko, head of a special police unit.

Zavadski vanished in Minsk on 7 July 2000. He was Lukashenko's personal cameraman until 1996, when he resigned from the government-run TV station and joined the Russian station ORT. He was imprisoned for two months with an ORT colleague in 1997 after reporting gaps in Belarus security along the country's border with Lithuania. His body has never been found. After a secret trial, the Belarus supreme court upheld a life sentence on the former head of the

interior ministry's special police force, Valery Ignatovich, on 16 July 2002 and on one of his subordinates, Maxim Malik, for Zavadski's kidnapping and presumed murder and for killing five other people in 2000.

The authorities claimed Ignatovich decided to kill Zavadski because he felt targeted by an interview the journalist gave the daily Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta in 2002 saying he had met Belarusians fighting with independence fighters in Chechnya. The trial did not establish details of the kidnapping or who ordered it.

In 2004...

- ▶ 1 journalist was still missing
- ▶ 9 were arrested
- ▶ 7 physically attacked or threatened
- ▶ 1 expelled
- ▶ and 26 media outlets censored

Personal account

"My paper disturbs people"

Andrei Shentorovich edits the weekly Mestnaya Gazeta in the town of Volkovysk. It is one of the few independent and privately-owned publications in Belarus. He staged a 21-day hunger-strike in October 2004 after the paper was suspended by the authorities.

Why did you go on hunger-strike ?

I wanted to protest against the paper's suspension, which I was told about by the information ministry on 14 October. It came just three days before the referendum allowing President Alexander Lukashenko to stay in power. So I began the hunger-strike.

The worst of it was that I was fined about \$500 on 25 November for supposedly organising a demonstration without permission from the Volkovysk regional authorities. But all I'd done was go on hunger-strike. My lawyer argued in vain that I hadn't provoked the public, hadn't roamed the streets proclaiming my opinion and that it was just a personal gesture. The fine was to scare me and make me shut down the paper for good.

Why did they suspend the paper ?

The information ministry cancelled my publication licence for a bogus reason, that the paper didn't have a legal address in Volkovysk. In fact it didn't because the authorities had refused to register it so it could have one. So the paper hasn't appeared for the past month. It clearly disturbs people. It has a circulation of more than 8,000, a lot for a town of only 140,000 people. It's a "dissident" paper than provides readers with reliable news about things the pro-government media just doesn't mention. No printer in Belarus will handle it, so I get it printed in Smolensk, which is 800 km away, in Russia.

Did the hunger-strike achieve anything ?

It was important for me to protest against the regime's deliberate destruction of press freedom. Independent papers are closing down all the time. Fines and bureaucratic harassment are all part of a plan to stifle dissent and stop it being published and spread. We now have a tame media that just says everything's fine in Belarus. It's Lukashenko's famous "vertical administration" system and it's worse than under Soviet rule. The authorities conjure up a new law every day to stifle independent voices.

December 2004

Personal account

"The regime's grip is tightening"

Zhanna Litvina is president of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), which won the European Parliament's 2004 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, encouraging it in the battle for press freedom.

What did being presented with the Sakharov Prize in December mean to you ?

Two Belarusian organisations, us and Zubr, were short-listed for it so it means we're recognised by all the European Union's democratic forces. It's big international publicity for the BAJ and a powerful support for all my colleagues who've been fighting for a free media over the past

decade. The prize reassures us we aren't alone in the battle in a country cut off from the outside world.

How are you going to use the 50,000 euros prize money ?

If we're allowed in the end to use it - it depends on various government bodies - we're going to set up independent facilities to print and distribute existing independent publications and also open a journalism school to teach worldwide journalistic principles. The next meeting of the BAJ board will make a final decision.

Is a media "revolution" possible any time soon in Belarus, like the one that happened between the two rounds of Ukraine's presidential election ?

Definitely not. The regime's grip on the media is tightening. All independent voices are systematically hounded by absurd bureaucratic devices. A score of publications have been suspended since the beginning of 2004. Several alternative papers, such as Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta and Solidarnost, are forced to print abroad, in Smolensk (Russia). So the independent press is shrinking.

Journalists have a big problem getting news. Those granted accreditation are mainly the ones who follow the official line and put out propaganda. The regime sees the media's job as simply to echo government views.

Is the mysterious murder of journalist Dmitri Zavadski in 2000 going to be forgotten ?

The BAJ is campaigning for a new investigation. The regime certainly isn't doing much to solve the case, to say the least.

Source: Reporters Without Borders; May 3, 2005; www.rsf.org

15. A New Tide of Notifications to Non-Governmental Newspapers

The Ministry of Information passed official notifications to the editorials of "Narodnaja Vola", "Borisovskije Novosti", and "Volnaje Hlybokaje" non-governmental newspapers in the middle of April. The documents were signed by the Minister of Information Uladzimir Rusakievich.

A notification to "Narodnaja Vola" was dated by April 13. It was grounded on 2 publications, which had been published in March 2005. The first article appeared on March 3. It was entitled "A Granddaughter against a Grandmother: the Virtual War". The Ministry of Information blamed the author of the article A. Sivy for publishing information about a non-finalized legal case without the judge's written permit. On March 31, the newspaper published "An Address to Warriors-Internationalists", signed by A. Volchak on behalf of "The Defendants of Motherland" Civil Movement named after Yury Zakharanka. The Ministry of Information considered this article to be illegally disseminated on the part of a non-registered association. The Ministry of Information accused both authors of violating article 5 of the Belarusian law "On the Press and Other Mass Communication Media".

The editorial has a right to claim against the notification to the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus within a month's term.

In the Ministry's of Information opinion, the "Borisovskije Novosti" non-governmental newspaper violated a range of legal norms on mass-media at a time. First of all, the edition was blamed for sending no information on the periodical's area of distribution change (article 11). The Ministry noticed that there had been published commercial announcements in the newspaper without mentioning the numbers of licenses (article 30). Moreover, the Ministerial officials found some mistakes in the newspaper output data and accused the periodical of making use of non-standard fonts (article 26). The official notification was issued on April 15, 2005. It was signed by the first deputy Minister of Information Lilia Ananich.

The "Volnaje Hlybokaje" periodical was blamed for publishing materials in Russian and Belarusian (instead of Belarusian, as stated in the newspaper's Registration Certificate), placing commercial

announcements in the edition without mentioning the numbers of licenses, and making errors in the newspaper output data. The official notification got issued on April 15, 2005.

Reportedly, the notified periodical editions are intending to submit claims to the Minister of Information and to strive for canceling the issued notifications.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; April 25, 2005; www.baj.ru

16. Belarus Court Jails Russian Protester

A Belarus court has sentenced a Russian citizen to a brief term in jail for taking part in a street rally marking the anniversary of the Chernobyl

A court in Minsk Wednesday sentenced Vadim Rezvy, one of the Russian citizens detained Tuesday during a street rally in Minsk, to 10 days administrative detention, the Russian news agency Interfax-West reported.

Fourteen Russian citizens, five citizens of Ukraine and 13 Belarussians who participated in an unauthorized street rally marking the 19th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster were detained, the news agency said. All of them were brought to Minsk's Leninsky District Court Wednesday, and court hearings are continuing there.

Belarus, which is ruled by the authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, was heavily hit by radioactive fallout following the April 26, 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown in neighboring Ukraine, and thousands of Belarussians are believed to have died.

Source: Washington Times; April 28, 2005; www.washingtontimes.com

17. Minsk Frees 14 Russian Protesters

A Belarusian court on Saturday freed 14 Russians arrested with members of Belarus' opposition and Ukrainian activists at a rally against President Alexander Lukashenko.

"We reduced the punishment, given that the Russians were first-time offenders," Minsk City Court Judge Mikhail Ardyako said.

The 14 Russians, who included pro-democracy activists and two journalists, on Wednesday received jail terms ranging from five to 15 days for taking part in the rally in central Minsk a day earlier.

The Russian ambassador to Belarus, Alexander Blokhin, had appealed to President Alexander Lukashenko on Friday to show leniency toward the detained Russians. They left Belarus for Russia later in the day by train.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said the release was proof of Minsk's commitment to integration with Russia.

Five Ukrainian activists who were sentenced to jail terms ranging from nine to 15 days remained in custody. Their detention prompted an official note of protest from Ukraine last week. Twelve Belarussians were also still in jail.

The Russians were defiant as they boarded their train in Minsk, shouting: "Long live Belarus. Down with Lukashism." Ilya Yanin, from the youth wing of the liberal Yabloko party, denounced the "dictatorship in Belarus."

Russian Newsweek journalist Alexei Ametov said he would inform the Russians "about the unlawfulness that reigns in Belarus."

Source: Moscow Times; May 3, 2005; www.moscowtimes.com

BUSINESS

18. Belarus Ups Oil Product Export Duties to Over \$68 per Ton

The Belarusian government increased export duties on oil products from 45.4 U.S. dollars per ton to 68.2 U.S. dollars per ton, according to a resolution of the Council of Ministers. The document comes in effect as of the moment of its publication.

The government decided to keep the export duty on fuel oil at the current level of 45.5 U.S. dollars per ton.

Russia increased its export duties on light oil products from 68.2 U.S. dollars to 81.4 U.S. dollars per ton, and on fuel oil – from 36.7 U.S. dollars to 43.8 U.S. dollars per ton on April 24.

In accordance with the Belarusian-Russian inter-governmental agreement on unification and creation of a united system of tariff and non-tariff regulation in the Union State, Belarus should fix its export duty rates at the same level as Russia.

Source: Itar-Tass; April 26, 2005; ww.itar-tass.com

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 63rd 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@hotmail.com or Olga Tarasov at otarasov@ilhr.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.
