Over the last week scandalous arrest of the head of the Russian company “Uralkali” dominated the news on Belarusian state television.

The media reported also on the opinion of Russians and Belarusians on the arrest of the CEO of Uralkali.

The media also covered Alexander Lukashenka’s orders on combatting the African flu epidemic in Belarus and the very first visit of the head of Sri Lanka to Minsk.

**Domestic Politics**

**Director of Uralkali charged.** The General Prosecutor of Belarus opened a criminal case against the head of the Russian potash company, Uralkali. Belarusian law enforcement arrested Vladislav Baumgartner, one of the suspects, at Minsk international airport. The television took note that over the last few years the company’s management caused “losses to budgets of Belarus and Russia measured in hundreds of millions of USD”. It adds that “under international and Belarusian criminal law activities similar to this would be qualified as serious crimes”. Their activity brought about “large scale losses” for the Belarusian company Belaruskali.

The main state television channel justified the action against Uralkali officials, saying that “similar manipulations by modern Russian businesses are nothing new.” The top management of Uralkali still have warrants for their arrest at Interpol per Belarus’ request.

**Reaction of Russians to the Uralkali affair.** State TV
journalists commented that the majority of Russians still have a critical attitude towards the oligarchs. It presented a few commentaries by Russian internet users. One of them suggested that “the thieves should be punished”, and “it’s high time to imprison the new “Khodorkovsky’s” in reference to the arrested manager of Uralkali.

**Bitter-sweet taste of scandal with Uralkali.** Belarusian television commented the recent affair with arrest of the Russian company management got the “milk-oil taste”. The media added that the analysts called it the economic sanctions and revenge for the scandalous arrest of the head of Russian company. It further explains that the Russian company “Transnieft” announced that would decrease oil supply to Belarus in a quarter. “The official explanation – repair of the old pipes and alleged environmentalist concerns – sound not convincing, the television added. According to these experts, revengeful reaction of the Russian elites would worsen the relations not only between both countries, but also with the key Western European partners.

**How to combat the African flu and deal with the people.** Belarusians are complaining to Lukashenka’s administration about the way the officials are liquidating the nation’s pig population. The ruler criticised them for “a new problem – a negative reaction by our citizens to our actions, the actions of our veterinary service”. State TV pointed out that Lukashenka had already more than once called the officials to deal with people’s complaints. He instructed them on how to combat epidemics more efficiently and with a better attitude towards people. The television emphasised that the flu does not affect people, but is a danger to the economy – and as a result, the state could export less.

Belarusian state television noted how and when the virus appeared in Belarus. At the same time, the media said that, “the expansion of the African flu is a world problem. It is difficult to find a country that has not gone through it”.
Lukashenka also discussed the most recent cases of the flu appearing in Russia. In his words, “It concerns me that the African flu, unfortunately, is spreading to Russia (…) We cannot be isolated from the whole world, even so more from Russia, thus here we should undertake the necessary measures”. One of them might be refraining from selling animal feed out of Belarus.

International Affairs

Events in Syria and the international context. Journalists noted that “Geneva-2”, a peace conference on the situation in Syria, that is to be attended by the heads of the US and Russia was being postponed. State television noted that the Obama administration did not plan to back out from the very idea of an international conference in Hague. On another occasion, the media reported that Russia disapproved of Washington’s position. It explained that Moscow remained convinced that the use of chemical weapons was a provocation done by the insurgents’.

Ukraine’s independence anniversary. On 24 August Ukraine celebrated the 22nd anniversary of its independence. TV reported Lukashenka’s greeting to Victor Yanukovich: “intensive dialogue on all levels appears to be an important component in the development of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations.” In his words, the basis of mutual relations of both countries remained, “a positive historical memory, spiritual memory”.

Sri Lanka – Belarus Relations. For the first time in history the head of Sri Lanka visited Belarus. Journalists commented that the country could help Belarus to have more of a presence in the regional market. They added that in 2012, trade reached more than 46m USD. The media said, “we buy tea, knitted fabric and we sell them potash fertilizers”. They continued on and stated that the cooperation has even more potential. State TV also commented that “Businesses of Sri Lanka are ready to invest in
Belarus”.

Lukashenka, during his meeting with Mahinda Rajapakse, found a few similarities between both countries. In his words, “you are absolutely a peace loving country” and “you are an opponent of any conflicts”. As for the economy, he said “you are developing socially-oriented economy”. Finally, Lukashenka added that “you have given to your nation not only hope, but today even a guarantee of a peaceful and tranquil life”.

Other

Positive attitudes of Russians and Belarusians. Belarusian state television reported that according to a sociological survey conducted by the Russian newspaper “Vzgliad”, over 60% of ordinary Russians expressed their support for Belarus. The majority of Belarusians also consider Russia brotherly. The only thing Belarusians did not accept was the way that the nouveau riche Russians behaved, the news noted.

Minsk and Astana tighten their relations. The main state TV channel reported that representatives from Astana and Minsk discussed the construction of Belarusian diary and meat factories in Kazakhstan. They also considered a prospective industrial-technological centre in Kazakhstan, as well as some joint projects on infrastructure building.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1). Freedom of the press in Belarus remains restricted and state media convey primarily the point of view of the Belarusian authorities. This review attempts to give the English-speaking audience a better understanding of how Belarusian state media shape public opinion in the country.