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Telegrams

After only a year as secretary general of the Department of Foreign Affairs, former radio journalist **Alfred Defago**



place over one year to see whether clean needles should be distributed to drug addicts amongst prisoners to prevent the spread of AIDS. It is unfortunately undisputed that drugs are taken in Swiss prisons. The pilot project will cost the Federal Office for Public Health almost half a million francs.

Domestic staff sleeping in cellars, being sexually molested by their employers, with no social security, working round the clock for a starvation wage, subject to dismissal at a moment's notice – such conditions exist not only in Africa and Asia but also in the rich conference city of Geneva. To be blunt, in the diplomatic community. Cases of the sort, in which third-world diplomats treat domestic staff like slaves, keep cropping up. If a victim appeals to Swiss justice, expulsion may result. ■

Point of view

"The more languages you know, the more you understand human beings."

Uzbek proverb

has been appointed Swiss consul general in New York. Defago himself cites a government reform programme, which makes the secretary general head of the department's administration, as the reason for this surprising change. But many diplomats feel offended by the decision, made by Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti without the usual consultation.

June saw dog days in Berne. About 16,000 dogs of all races and from all countries took part in the biggest canine beauty competition in the world. Hotels were booked out as far afield as Biel, Soleure, Fribourg and Meiringen.

About 23,000 scouts of both sexes came together during the summer at the federal camp, known as "contrast 94". Camp participants, including 800 visitors from abroad and 2,000 assistants, raised their tents in the mountainous Napf region between the cantons of Lucerne and Berne. "contrast 94" was the biggest meeting of the kind ever held by the Swiss scout movement, which now has 62,000 members.

Jabs in jail: In the Hindelbank women's prison a test programme is taking

Financial fraud

In the worst case of money laundering seen in Switzerland so far US\$ 150 million (Sfr. 220 million) were recently seized at Union Bank of Switzerland. Criminal proceedings have been opened against a deputy director of many years standing in this, Switzerland's biggest bank. The seizure took place during investigations into suspected money-launderers from the Colombian Medellin drug cartel. Canton Vaud prosecutors have been proceeding against a number of Colombian nationals since June 1993; these are suspected of contravening anti-money-laundering regulations in the cantons of Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva.

Confiscation of over 30,000 counterfeit five-franc pieces in Slovenia represented the biggest discovery of forged Swiss coins made yet. But this is only the tip of an iceberg which is steadily growing. The amount of forged Swiss paper money is also increasing very fast, mainly because of the vastly improved colour photocopiers now available. ■

More alternative energy, less conventional power

After solar power, wind power. Canton Berne will pioneer alternative energy. In the Bernese Jura, a wind park is to be set up which will provide the equivalent of a quarter of the Mühlberg nuclear power plant's annual production, supplying enough electricity for 20,000 households. In spite of higher investment of between 80 and 160 million francs, electricity produced by wind will in the end come out about eight times cheaper than solar energy. In 1993, energy consumption in Switzerland dropped for the first time in over a decade – to the tune of almost 3% per head of population. This was mainly due to lower industrial use and energy saving. ■

Huge demonstration against pension-age increase



Thousands of men and women from all over Switzerland streamed into Berne's Bundesplatz to protest against the planned increase in the pensionable age for women from 62 to 64. Women speakers from various organisations

Migros Club School 50 years old

When Migros opened its first language school in 1944, a new era in adult education began. It started with a few adepts hungry for knowledge, but over the years it developed into the biggest Swiss institution for leisure activities and language courses, as well as many

other forms of training. In this jubilee year, there are now club schools in 54 locations, over 6,000 teaching and training staff and more than 300 subjects taught covering about 10 million hours of spare time. ■

More than 10,000 bankruptcies

In 1993, 10,500 firms and individuals were forced into bankruptcy – which is 680, or 6.9%, more than the year before. But concluded bankruptcy proceedings saw a new record loss of Sfr. 2.5 billion, which is almost double the 1992 figure.

Most bankruptcies were in the cantons of Zurich (1,700), Vaud, Geneva (1,400 each), Berne (1,000) and Aargau (600). The biggest increases were in the cantons of Glarus (up 41%), Thurgau (up 27.8%), Schaffhausen (up 25%) and Berne (up 20.6%). The number of pursuit proceedings was also once again higher than the previous year. Orders to pay increased by 9% to 1.9 million, and the number of legal seizures rose by 10% to 750,000. On the positive side, there is a fever for setting up new companies in Switzerland. In the first three months of 1994, 1,300 of these were inscribed in the trade register. Most of them were in servicing. ■

The language frontier

A number of travel agencies have improved their range of services for French-speaking Swiss. They are targeting people who want to go on holiday in exclusively French-speaking groups. French speakers complain that they feel at a disadvantage in mixed-language groups, since important explanations by travel organisers are often given in German only. Also, French speakers simply do not like the sound of Swiss-German. Some find German-Swiss too pushy. "They grab their room keys just like they do parking places", an enraged French-speaking tourist told the "Nouveau Quotidien". ■

3,700 workplaces lost

In 1993, the federal government was the worst job destroyer. Most redundancies were in transport and defence. Apart from this, personnel director Peter Hablitzel's report is positive. "The federal administration is becoming smaller, more female, more qualified, more language representative, more flexible and

once again older", concludes the study, which is carried out once every five to seven years. At present, hours worked by the just 146,000 staff make up an equivalent of 140,000 full-time posts. ■

Diary

Music and theatre

August 14–28 Interlaken, Berne: Music festival
August 25–28 Willisau, Lucerne: International Jazz Festival
August 26–September 10 Zurich: "Theaterspektakel", theatre performances

Art exhibitions

August 20–October 16 Winterthur, Zurich: Decorative Arts and Crafts Museum, Original Swiss Graphic Art
September 3–November 12 Warth, Thurgau: Kartause Ittingen: Retrospective Adolf Dietrich

Festivals and folklore

September 1–11 Delémont, Jura: Festival of the Jura People
September 1–2 Zurich: "Knabenschiessen" – shooting competition for youngsters combined with popular festival

Congresses and fairs

August 22–26 Geneva: Women's World Summit Conference
August 27–September 4 Zurich: Zürs, "Fera", International TV, radio and hi-fi fair
September 2–10 Soleure: Soleure Political Discussions
September 6–10 Basle: Muba, "Orbit", International Exhibition for Information, Communication and Organisation Technology
September 7–11 St. Gallen: Olma, "Mobautech", International Fair for Model Construction, Designs and Accessories

Sport

August 17 Zurich: International Athletics Meeting

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