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SNIPPETS

31 January: Zurich's City Council publishes an "urgent call to the government and cantons for a new asylum policy", recommending that refugees be placed as soon as possible in public employment schemes to earn their keep.

9 February: The federal people's referendum is decided by a clear majority with a turnout of only 28 percent. The reform of people's rights and the new hospital financing plan are approved by over 70 percent of voters in all cantons.

9 February: One in two Swiss pension plans have insufficient coverage. Some pension plans demand higher contributions from their members by increasing the percentage paid from their salary. The government announces its intention to relax coverage requirements.

9 February: The 2002 federal accounts close CHF 3.3 billion in the red as opposed to the budgeted CHF 0.3 billion surplus. The main cause of this deficit was an unexpected drop in income of almost CHF 3.6 billion.

14 February: Justice Minister Ruth Metzler proposes withdrawing benefits for asylum seekers in Switzerland whose application has been rejected. She issues invitations to a national conference on asylum scheduled for the beginning of April.

16 February: 40,000 people take part in a peace rally in Berne to demonstrate against the war on Iraq. Speakers claim that the US government's agenda is political power and oil, and not security.

16 February: The humanitarian conference in Geneva convened by Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey in response to the imminent war on Iraq is attended by 29 states and 21 international organisations. In view of the impending humanitarian crisis, an improvement of existing structures is called for.

16 February: The World Alpine Ski Championships come to an end in St. Moritz. Switzerland snapped up two silver medals



Five races and five wins: Alinghi beat the Kiwis hands down!

(Corinne Rey-Bellet in the downhill and Silvan Zurbruggen in the slalom) and two bronze (Bruno Kernin in the downhill and Marlies Oester in the combination).

17 February: Special talks on the German-Swiss agreement on air traffic for Zurich airport are broken off due to irreconcilable differences. The main bone of contention was the overflight ban over German territory at weekends and on public holidays between 20.00 and 09.00.

17 February: The annual "care barometer" survey conducted by Credit Suisse documents the main concerns of the Swiss: Healthcare, unemployment, pension, the refugee situation and the new poverty.

20 February: In Paris French and Swiss VIPs commemorate the mediation constitution enacted by the erstwhile consul of France and later Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. The mediation acts brought an end to the Helvetic Republic created in 1798 and turned the mediation cantons of Aargau, Grisons, St. Gall, Ticino, Thurgau and Vaud into independent political entities.

20 February: Last year 38,833 persons were naturalised in Switzerland: 20 percent more than the previous year. Most of these new citizens originate from Italy, ex-Yugoslavia and Turkey. Switzerland still has the lowest naturalisation rate in Europe.

26 February: The Credit Suisse Group, which last year posted the largest loss in its history (CHF 3.3 billion), cuts 1,250 jobs,

including 350 at its subsidiary Winterthur Insurance. The national airline Swiss sheds 700 jobs. And chemical giant Clariant (Muttenz) aims to reduce the workforce worldwide by 1700.

27 February: Ticino author Piero Scanziani dies in Mendrisio at the age of 94. He was the author of over thirty works and published his first novel, "The Key to the World", in 1941.

2 March: Switzerland becomes the first land-locked country ever to win the America's Cup sailing trophy. The multinational crew assembled by Geneva millionaire Ernesto Bertarelli wins the most prestigious prize in sailing with his yacht Alinghi.

4 March: A surprise result from the Council of States: The cantonal representatives vote 26 to 8 to enlarge the Federal Council from seven to nine members. The reform project goes to the National Council for approval.

6 March: The National Council echoes the Council of States in approving 50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood as the limit for driving.

19 March: The air traffic agreement with Germany is scrapped. Following the breakdown of special talks in Berlin (17 February) the Council of States votes against the agreement. Germany intends to implement unilateral measures now that the international treaty has failed. RR

Translated from German