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World Economic Forum in Davos

What drives people to go to the World Economic Forum (WEF)? "Sex and China", says "Le Temps" newspaper. Of the 240 debates on offer, it was the round table on "Sex and Business" that was the most popular. Apart from a few exceptions, the leading politicians were conspicuous by their absence. Consequently, the WEF filled the front pages of the daily newspapers with invited stars: singers Bono (U2) and Peter Gabriel, as well as actors Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and Michael Douglas.

FIFA punishes Huggel

In the wake of the incidents during the match between Switzerland and Turkey in Istanbul on 16 November last year, FIFA's disciplinary committee ruled that the Turkish national team must play its next six home games "behind closed doors" on neutral territory. It has also imposed a six-game ban on Switzerland's Benjamin Huggel and Turkey's Alpay and Emre Belozoglu. As a consequence of this decision, the Swiss international player will not be allowed to take part in the World Cup.

Euro 2008 and security

The security costs that the Swiss authorities will have to pay for staging the 2008 European Football Championship have escalated from CHF 10 million to more than CHF 60 million. Switzerland's Minister for Defence and Sport, Samuel Schmid, explained that the initial estimate was made before the attacks on New York and that the new security standards have not been relaxed since then.

New look for Cailler

Faced with strong competition, Nestlé Switzerland is seeking to rejuvenate its brands. Nestlé boss Nelly Wenger, former director of the Swiss national exhibition Expo.02, has ordered this rejuvenation programme, which will begin with the Cailler brand

of chocolate. With this in mind, she has asked the French architect and designer of the Expo.02 monolith, Jean Nouvel, to modernise the product design. Nestlé Switzerland's long-term aim is to bring out at least twelve new Cailler products every year.

Spiralling figures

It's one record after another at UBS. Compared with 2004, Switzerland's largest bank has managed to post a 75% rise in net profit to CHF 14,029 billion. The Credit Suisse Group has also announced record results, reporting net profit of CHF 5,850 billion, up 4% on last year.

Bird flu

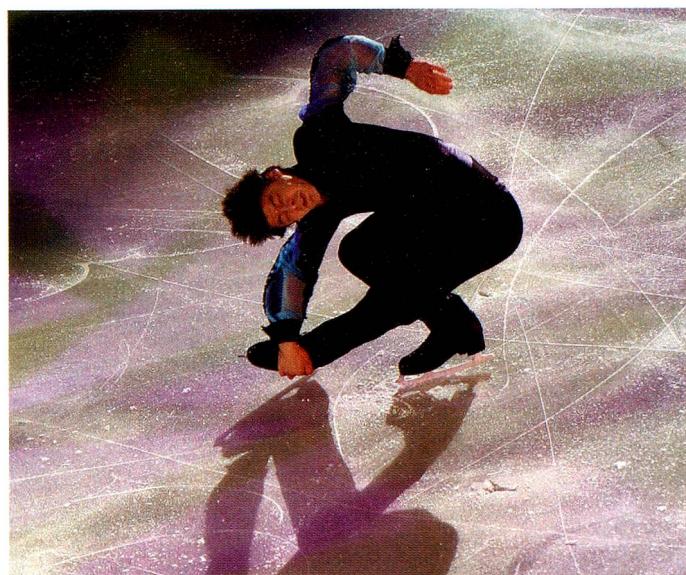
Swiss poultry have been cooped up since the middle of February. Following on from the directives passed back in October 2005, the Federal Council has adopted new directives to protect poultry against bird flu. They must now be kept in covered enclosures so that no wild birds can get in. The H5N1 virus has been detected in France, about a hundred kilometres from the Swiss border. Further dead wild birds and carriers of the virus have been found in Italy, Germany and Greece. A threat is also posed by migratory birds from Africa that will reach Switzerland in the spring.

Fax from Egypt

The publication of a confidential Swiss intelligence document in the press has caused an uproar in the Swiss parliament. The electronic surveillance system operated by the Swiss Ministry of Defence intercepted a fax sent by the Egyptian foreign ministry to its London embassy, mentioning the existence of secret CIA prisons in Europe. But the authenticity of the document has not been proven.

Medal haul for Switzerland

The Olympic Games in Turin were kind to the Swiss athletes. Bruno Kernen and Martina Schild came away with bronze and silver respectively in the



downhill. Ambrosi Hoffmann from Graubünden won a bronze medal in the super-G. In freestyle skiing, the acrobatics of Evelyne Leu earned her the gold. In the skeleton, the women's event was won by Maya Pedersen-Bieri from Berne, with Gregor Stähli achieving bronze in the men's competition. Tanja Frieden from Berne took gold in a new Olympic discipline, the snowboard cross. Snowboarder Philipp Schoch managed to beat his brother Simon to the gold in the men's parallel giant slalom, with Daniela Meuli winning the women's contest. Stéphane Lambiel put in a wonderful performance to earn the silver medal in figure skating. In the two-man bob, the duo Martin Annen and Beat Hefti came away with the bronze medal. And the silver medal in curling was won by the Swiss team skipped by Mirjam Ott.

Swissmetal

In Reconvilier (JU), the employees of Swissmetal are on strike for the second time in just over a year. They are protesting against the restructuring measures planned by management. More than 10,000 people from all over the "Arc Jurassien" region have demonstrated in support of the 300 or more strikers. Joseph Deiss, Minister of Economic Affairs, has appealed to the management of Swissmetal and the trade union Unia to open negotiations.

Public finances

Switzerland's accounts make for surprising viewing. In 2005, the government had to contend with a deficit of just CHF 100 million instead of the 1.8 billion budgeted. This improvement was thanks to a fall in spending of more than CHF 1.1 billion and a rise in income of CHF 600 million. And this does not even include the exceptional income: proceeds of CHF 7 billion from Swiss National Bank gold sales and CHF 1.4 billion from the sale of Swisscom shares. As a result, the budget is expected to be balanced again by 2007.

Air pollution record

During the course of January and February, concentrations of dangerous fine dust particles in the air reached unprecedented levels for Switzerland. The NABEL monitoring network continuously measures air pollution, with the limit set at 50 micrograms per cubic metre of air. In Switzerland's major cities, this permitted threshold was at times exceeded up to fourfold. Following an appeal by the Swiss Environment Minister, Moritz Leuenberger, twelve cantons introduced a speed limit of 80 km/h on their motorways. The recent wind and change in the weather have "cleared" the air, but preventive measures will still be taken.

ALAIN WEY