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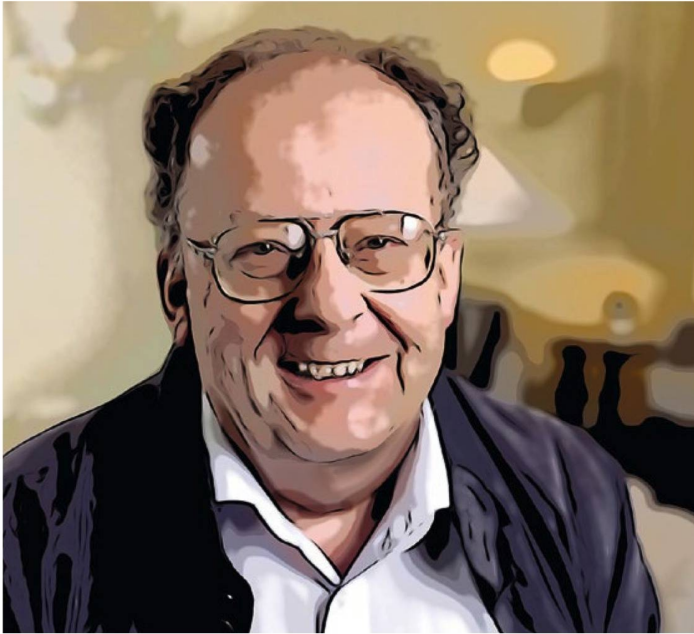
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Beat Richner



Anyone around the age of 50 will vividly remember Beatocello, the sad clown with the large, small and tiny cellos. Beat Richner entertained an entire generation of Swiss children during the 1970s with his performances. Others will have become familiar with him later on through his charity work as a paediatrician.

Richner rebuilt a destroyed children's hospital in Phnom Penh in the early 1990s. He has since run it himself and overseen its continual expansion. Over the years, the native of Zurich has also opened three further children's hospitals in Cambodia. Richner and his teams are said to have treated around 12 million children in the first 10 years of their activities in Asia alone. Almost 90 % of all the nation's sick children have received treatment from the Swiss doctor at some point. This has earned the tireless man of action the nickname "Doctor God".

Beat Richner has been awarded two honorary doctorates for his lifetime achievements and was voted "Swiss Person of the Year" in 2002. Yet he remains very modest. The doctor has repeatedly returned to Switzerland to raise money for the hospitals by giving cello concerts. He has worked tirelessly for the children of Cambodia. However, Beat Richner must now take it easy. The 70-year-old is seriously ill and has handed over the management of his hospitals. He has also been forced to cancel planned performances.

Let us hope that Richner is around for the children of this world for a long time to come. Through his hospitals and the character of Beatocello, he has already become a legend.

MARKO LEHTINEN

New popular initiative against the manufacturers of war material

The Group for Switzerland without an Army (GSoA) unanimously resolved to launch a popular initiative "against the financing of war material manufacturers" at its annual general meeting at the beginning of April. The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) adopted a resolution at its meeting of delegates to help with the collection of signatures for the initiative. The GSoA – together with the Young Greens – hopes to prevent the Swiss National Bank and the pension funds from investing in the weapons industry. The GSoA's last attempt to curb trade in war material through an initiative was an unsuccessful one in 2009.

Old banknotes retain their value

Old Swiss banknotes are to be exchanged at their value without any expiry date in future. In agreement with the Swiss National Bank (SNB), the Federal Council is proposing the lifting of the current exchange deadline. The aim is to prevent people holding banknotes which suddenly lose



their value. Potential victims are heirs to assets which include banknotes that can no longer be exchanged. Foreign workers who return to their country of origin and keep old series of banknotes can also be affected.

Federal Council pledge on e-voting

In a fundamental decision, the Federal Council declared its support for creating the basis for comprehensive e-voting in Switzerland. Electronic voting is to become established as the third voting channel and given equal status to the postal vote and ballot box within a few years. However, the Federal Council does not want to oblige the cantons to introduce e-voting for the time being. A specially appointed expert group is now working on drawing up the consultation draft on e-voting. Parliament is likely to begin its deliberations next year.