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Farmer

in Berne



THE United States President Ronald Reagan and ex-President Jimmy Carter have thanked Switzerland for its mediation efforts during the American hostage crisis in Iran.

President Reagan has also requested Switzerland to continue its representation of American interests there.

★★★★

THE Swiss government has announced the lifting of economic measures against Iran, introduced in May last year. Because of its policy of neutrality Switzerland did not impose direct economic sanctions against Iran. But the government did prohibit any increase in trade with Iran, so that Swiss companies would not take advantage of the boycott by other nations.

★★★★

SWISS arms exports last year were worth Sfr 340 million – 20 per cent less than during 1979. About 85 per cent of the total went to West European markets and the remainder to 70 other countries. Arms sales account for less than one per cent of the total value of Swiss arms exports.

★★★★

THE population of Switzerland now totals 6,329,000, according to preliminary results from last December's national census. This represents an increase of only one percent since 1970 – the lowest increase over any 10-year period since regular censuses were first held in 1850.

Biggest population increases over the last decade were recorded in the cantons of Nidwalden and Zug (each 11 per cent) and Ticino (10 per cent). Population decrease was greatest in Basle City (down 14 per cent).

★★★★

WHO is Switzerland's most popular government minister?

Justice Minister Kurt Furgler, according to a nationwide public opinion poll. Out of a maximum possible six points, Mr Furgler received a 4.8 rating, followed closely by Finance Minister Willy Ritschard (4.7) and Communications Minister Leon Schlumpf (4.6).

Then came Interior Minister Hans Huerlimann (4.2), and Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert, Economics Minister Fritz Honegger and Defence Minister Georges-André Chevallaz (all 4.0).

★★★★

THE clocks will be put forward by one hour in Switzerland on March 29 to conform with other European countries' summertime.

In a nationwide vote in 1978 the Swiss electorate narrowly rejected a plan to introduce

summertime. But parliament has since approved a new proposal by the government and there have been no demands for another vote on the issue.

★★★★

THE top-selling car in Switzerland is still Volkswagen of West Germany despite a spectacular increase in the sales of Japanese models. Of the 280,000 new vehicles sold here last year, Volkswagen manufactured 32,000, Opel 30,000, Renault 23,000, Ford 21,000 and Toyota 19,000.

Total new car sales in Switzerland increased by three per cent but the top five Japanese manufacturers improved their sales from 33 to 163 per cent.

British car sales? Vauxhall and Leyland continued to lose ground but 51 Rolls Royces

were sold – three more than the previous year.

★★★★

LAST year's wine harvest in Switzerland exceeded expectations despite the poor summer. Wine production was 17 per cent above the quantity predicted and quality was also better than forecast.

★★★★

RADIO 24, the commercial radio station, has resumed broadcasting to Switzerland following the lifting of a closure order by Italian authorities. The pop station was launched two years ago by Swiss journalist Roger Schawinski who has contested official Swiss claims that Radio 24 is illegal.

★★★★

GUESTS of honour exhibiting at the 62nd Comptoir Suisse trade fair in Lausanne in September will be Algeria, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Swiss guests will be Canton Berne and the Swiss Army.

★★★★

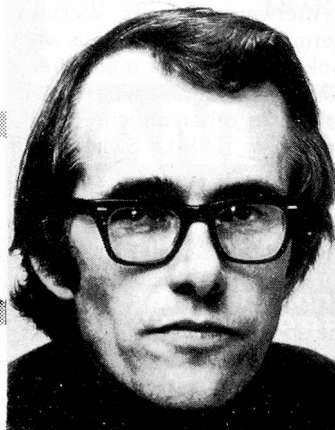
THE number of foreign residents in Switzerland last year increased slightly to nearly 900,000 or 14.2 per cent of the entire population, reveals a government report.

The increase was due to the arrival of 4,300 refugees and 1,500 people from the earthquake region of southern Italy who were granted temporary residence permits.

★★★★

SWISS Members of Parliament again beat British parliamentarians in their 25th annual ski race in Davos. The Swiss won the team event for the 19th time, filling three of the first four places. Individual winner was Berne's Adolf Ogi who is also director of the Swiss Ski Federation.

Best British skiers were Winston Churchill and the Earl of Verulam, who were third and fifth respectively.



Colin Farmer, our regular columnist in Berne, reports in brief on the latest happenings in Switzerland.