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Farmer

in Berne

IRAN is eager to expand trade and economic links with Switzerland, a visiting delegation has revealed in Berne. The top-level government team – in Berne for exploratory talks with Swiss government, banking and industrial representatives – told Swiss Radio International that Iran was particularly interested in such expansion because Switzerland had not joined last year's US-led trade boycott of the country.

The visit was the first such Iranian mission to the West since the overthrow of the Shah two years ago. Asked about assets reportedly owned and deposited in Switzerland by the late Shah, the delegation said it hoped these would still be returned to the Iranian people – “to whom they rightfully belong.”

Switzerland has advised Iran that it should use normal legal channels in seeking a return of any such assets.

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WALTER Bringolf, one of Switzerland's longest serving and most respected politicians, has died in Schaffhausen at the age of 85. Mr Bringolf, a Social Democrat, was a member of the Swiss parliament for 46 years and Mayor of Schaffhausen for 36 years. He was made an honorary citizen of the city in 1965.

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MORE than 100,000 signatures have been collected in favour of co-ordinating Switzerland's cantonal school systems – which



means that a nationwide vote will have to be held on the issue. The initiative calls for a new article in the federal constitution, under which the school year would have to begin at the same time in all cantons.

The year currently begins in the autumn in French and Italian-speaking Switzerland – and in the spring in most German-speaking cantons.

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THE wearing of safety belts for motorists will be compulsory in Switzerland from July – three months later than originally planned. Motorcyclists will also have to wear crash helmets from July. Cantonal authorities have requested that both measures enter into force on the same date.

The controversial new

legislation was narrowly approved by the Swiss electorate in a nationwide vote last year.

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THE “Swiss Psalm” is to remain Switzerland's national anthem. It was introduced in the 1960s as a provisional replacement for the former anthem, which had the same melody as Britain's “God Save the Queen”.

Critics claim the Psalm's melody is difficult to sing and its words pseudo-religious – but the government now says that all efforts to find an alternative anthem have failed.

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SWISS working hours are the longest in Western Europe, according to a survey by the International Labour Organisation in

Geneva. The ILO survey – based on 1979 figures – reports that Swiss work an average of 45.4 hours per week.

The country with Europe's shortest working week? Sweden, with 35.7 hours.

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DETAILS have been released of next month's visit to Switzerland by Pope John Paul. His tour – from June 1 to 5 – will cover Lugano, Einsiedeln, Sachseln, Solothurn, Fribourg and Geneva. Although not making a state visit, the Pope is expected to meet all seven members of the Swiss cabinet.

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ENERGY consumption in Switzerland increased last year by 3.5 per cent, according to a government report. The use of petroleum products rose by only 1 per cent and coal consumption by 44 per cent.

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FEDERAL civil servants in Switzerland are to receive an average three per cent pay rise from next January. Their unions had asked for five per cent. Highest-paid personnel will receive no increases, but lowest-salaried staff will be paid nearly six per cent more.

Apart from cost-of-living adjustments, federal civil service salaries have not been increased since 1972. Cost of the increase – Sfr. 180 million or £40 million a year.

Colin Farmer

ANOTHER 57 miles of motorway are to be opened in Switzerland this year. About two-thirds of the planned 1,150-mile national network is currently in operation.

