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## SNIPPETS

**20 March:** At the United Federal Assembly following the outbreak of the Iraq war, Federal President Pascal Couchepin expresses the Swiss government's regret that the USA acted without a UN mandate and confirms Switzerland's neutral stance.

**23 March:** At a national rally in Berne some 50,000 people protest against the Iraq war and the violation of international law. Anti-war demonstrations are also held in other Swiss cities.

**27 March:** The investigation into the Swissair MD-11 disaster in Halifax in September 1998 which claimed 229 victims exonerates the pilots. The probable cause of the accident was an electrical spark which triggered a devastating fire.

**30 March:** The canton of Basle Country remains firmly in centre-right hands. Two seats on the cantonal government go to the FDP and one each to the CVP, SVP and SP. The SVP wins the parliamentary election and is the second-strongest faction after the SP.

**3 April:** The educational directors of French-speaking cantons agree on a language curriculum which introduces "early German" from the third year of elementary school and brings English classes forward to the 5th year.

**6 April:** The SVP and SP win the election for Lucerne's cantonal council. The CVP has the largest number of seats followed by the FDP and SVP. None of the candidates achieved an absolute majority for election to the State Council.

**6 April:** Massive shifts in the Zurich elections: The Left wins a third government mandate and gains twelve seats in parliament. Zurich's government is the first in Switzerland with a majority of women members.

**9 April:** According to the Federal Council, more than 90 percent of the population is able to reach their local post office on foot or



Keystone

33 Swiss have been sworn in as new Swiss Guards. Among them is Dhani Bachmann, the first dark-skinned member of the corps.

by public transport within 20 minutes. Despite cutbacks Switzerland will continue to boast one of the densest post office networks in Europe.

**11 April:** 500 years ago, on 11 April 1503, the Treaty of Arona was signed with Louis XII, handing Bellinzona over to the Swiss confederates and sowing the seeds of the present-day canton of Ticino.

**14 April:** The canton of Vaud celebrates the 200th anniversary of its membership of the Swiss Confederation. On the occasion Federal Councillor Schmid recalls how Napoleon's troops liberated Vaud from Bernese rule. The canton of St. Gall commemorates the 200th anniversary of confederation with a republican banquet.

**17 April:** The Federal Office of Health reports a year-on-year increase of 25 percent in HIV infections and announces plans for a new AIDS campaign targeting the main risk groups.

**24 April:** A representative survey of schoolchildren on drug, tobacco and alcohol consumption produces worrying results: Young people start smoking at a very early age, and a much higher proportion get drunk on alcohol or high on illegal drugs.

**25 April:** Zurich's Town Hall, where the first session of the state council was held on 25 April 1803, commemorates the mediation acts drawn up by Napoleon 200 years ago and the birth of the modern canton of Zurich. The canton of Aargau also celebrates its 200th anniversary.

**28 April:** The French Alstom Group announces a reduction in the Swiss workforce. 470 jobs are to be shed in the Power Turbo Systems Division, which currently employs some 2900 people in Baden.

**28 April:** Switzerland's tunnel safety levels are not optimal, according to a study in eleven European countries. The Milchbuck tunnel in Zurich and the Piumogna tunnel on the A2 are rated "questionable".

**1 May:** Federal Councillor Kaspar Villiger announces the "largest economising and restructuring package in history", aimed at saving some CHF 3.4 billion. The cost cuts mainly affect education and farming, transport and energy, foreign aid and the army.

**1 May:** Bernard Stamm wins the Around Alone regatta, having taken 115 days to sail over 25,000 nautical miles around the world in 5 stages.

**4 May:** The CVP gains strength at the cost of the FDP in elections to the Grisons cantonal parliament. The power ratio has changed only slightly. The well-attended "Landsgemeinde" of Glarus rejects the government's proposed tax increase. In Geneva the Left-Green majority is confirmed in the municipal council.

**6 Mai:** Dhani Bachman from Hildisrieden/ LU is sworn in as a Swiss Guard at the Vatican. Born in India, he was adopted as a child by a Swiss couple. RR