

Business Briefs

Health Care

Poland imposes harsh budget cuts

Polish Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka has signed a bill cutting the public health sector budget, which will increase the cost of basic medicines and hospital care. Poles will have to partially cover the costs of a bed and food during hospital stays, and share the costs of special health tests and dental care.

The cuts will further worsen the situation in the health care system, which has been suffering from a constant undersupply of medicines and erosion of care in the past years.

Theoretically, health care is still free for all insured people in Poland, which is a large majority of the population. In practice, however, most clinics and hospitals ask for voluntary donations before they admit someone for treatment, and some more expensive treatments have an "official" price list.

Most patients do pay—sometimes because they want to help out, sometimes because they feel embarrassed or even hope for better than ordinary treatment. Often, hospitals also rent their premises to bookstores, newsstands, and even hairdressers in order to make extra money to cover maintenance costs.

Infrastructure

North-South high-speed rail axis said critical

The creation of a North-South axis for high-speed rail transport in Europe is vital, declared Heinz Duerr, the head of the two German state railway companies, after a meeting of several North European railway directors in Copenhagen, Denmark on Sept. 29.

The meeting, which was also attended by Peter Langager of the Danish State Railways (DSB) and Stig Larsson of the Swedish State Railways (SJ), resolved on a policy for more joint investments in the development of combined rail-truck transportation in high-speed transit at speeds of 200 kilometers per hour and more. Also, the development and production

of multi-system locomotives to make cross-border rail transport independent from the differing electrical currents in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden was endorsed at the meeting.

The directors called on their governments to accelerate construction of tunnels and bridges across the three Baltic straits of the Fehmarn Belt, Fehmarn Sound, and the Oresund to make the uninterrupted passage of trains between Sweden and continental Europe possible by early next century.

It is expected that the volume of commodity transport of goods between the European mainland and Sweden, which reached a volume of 8 million tons annually in 1990 already, will double by the year 2000 and triple by 2010.

In reviewing plans for new high-speed rail transit routes across the continent and to Turkey by the year 2015, the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Sept. 29 reported that 3 million jobs will be created and secured by such projects. The report mentions plans, though not concretized yet, in eastern European countries for links to the predominantly western high-speed projects, through Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Balkans, as well as through Warsaw into the Community of Independent States, including a high-speed rail route from St. Petersburg to Moscow.

France

Economy suffering effects of worldwide depression

According to two recent polls of the National Institute of Statistics (INSEE), based on questioning 3,300 heads of companies, the economic situation in France looks extremely grim. If some were still hoping for an upswing during the first quarter this year, nobody expects one now. All those questioned indicate that they will be decreasing investment considerably and reducing jobs.

The majority of companies are revising downward their expectations for the year. Rhône Poulenc has announced reduced profits from an estimated 20% in the beginning of the year, to 10-15% now. The quarterly profits of

Total, the oil company which just recently privatized a part of its capital, have decreased 30%. Other large companies like Club Méditerranée and Carrefour are also drastically reducing profit estimates.

The worst results for mid-year, however, are those of Crédit Lyonnais. Profits for the first half of the year are down 93% from those of the same period in 1991.

The foreign trade deficit for August is 3 billion francs. What is unusual about the deficit is that for the third month in a row, industrial exports to Germany have considerably decreased, indicating that there is a crisis on the other side of the border as well.

Energy

Declassification to aid fusion power development

The "United States is starting to declassify H-bomb fusion technology," in order to permit the more rapid development of laser pellet fusion energy systems, William J. Broad reported in the Sept. 28 *New York Times*. The same scientific principles are used in igniting nuclear fusion in tiny pellets with lasers as those utilized to ignite large-scale H-bombs with atom bombs. The move toward declassification was first reported in the July issue of the newsletter of Fusion Power Associates, edited by Dr. Stephen O. Dean.

All of the essential concepts in H-bomb fusion have been published by Japanese, French, and Spanish scientists over the past decade. The continued secrecy has prevented U.S. scientists from participating in international science conferences where these "top secret" questions were openly discussed. The *Times* noted that in 1979, the U.S. government attempted to prevent *The Progressive* magazine from publishing an article on the H-bomb. The Fusion Energy Foundation introduced an *amicus curiae* brief in the case—which the government subsequently lost—pointing out that the information the government wanted to suppress had already been published and circulated in both the *New Solidarity* newspaper and *Fusion* magazine.

The move toward declassification is wel-

Briefly

● **USE OF HEROIN** is on the rise in the United States, as the drug is entering the country in greater amounts, at lower prices, and ever more lethal levels of purity than before, the *China Daily* reported Sept. 23. One U.S. official is quoted saying that heroin users will outnumber cocaine users by the year 2000.

● **JAPAN** and the United States will jointly develop over five years a new solid-fuel rocket engine to improve the range and speed of surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles, Japan announced Sept. 29.

● **IRAQI** health officials say that the U.N. sanctions and the destruction of syringe plants by the bombing are forcing them to re-use syringes and steel needles. This will "lead to very, very serious health problems, carrying dangerous diseases and microbes, like AIDS, from one person to another," Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr. Shawqi Murqus told Reuters on Oct. 1.

● **AIDS AND TUBERCULOSIS** are rampant among Florida migrant farm workers, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia reported Oct. 1. Tests of 310 migrant workers in Immokalee, Florida during February and March showed a 5% rate of AIDS infection—ten times higher than the national average—44% tested positive for TB, and 8% for syphilis.

● **CITIBANK** engineered the stock market scam which crashed the Bombay stock market this spring, Hars had Mehta, the broker accused of wrongdoing in the case, has charged in an exclusive interview with *News-track* magazine.

● **CHINA AND RUSSIA** plan to build a bridge across the Heilongjiang (Amur) River at the city of Heihe, linking the Chinese industrial center Harbin with Blagoveshchensk in Russia, the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported Oct. 1. "Transport industries . . . are unable to meet the demand caused by sudden development of border trade," it said.

come, if it actually happens. It brings to the fore other questions, such as whether the government will admit the key role of Bernhard Riemann's 1856 paper on shock waves in the development of inertial confinement fusion.

Africa

IMF responsible for infrastructure collapse

"The increasingly parasitic role of the International Monetary Fund" (IMF) is to blame for the collapse of Africa's infrastructure and economy, Kevin Watkins, a policy adviser to Britain's Oxfam relief agency, wrote in a commentary in the Sept. 28 London *Guardian*.

Watkins charged that the growing economic-currency crisis in Europe has "blown Africa off the agenda" at this year's IMF-World Bank meetings in Washington. This is only "the latest in a decade of policy failures and financial mismanagement orchestrated by the two institutions. Since the debt crisis struck in the early 1980s, the IMF and World Bank have dominated economic policymaking in Africa. As one country after another succumbed to the lethal combination of rising interest rates and falling commodity prices, the IMF stepped in with short-term loans to burgeoning trade and budget deficits. Along with the loans came conditions governing money supply targets, interest rate levels, and public spending, which transferred budget management to Washington."

Watkins complained that the "free market writ" of the so-called IMF "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAPs) now "reigns supreme across Africa, but recovery is nowhere in sight. Living standards, which fell by a third in the 1980s, continued to slide. . . . Investment is hovering around mid-1970s levels, infrastructure is collapsing, inflation is rampant, and hunger is a spreading threat."

The blame for these developments, he wrote, rests with the IMF's total backing for "creditor claims that sub-Saharan Africa's crippling external debt could—and should—be honored, consigning the region to repayment levels bound to stifle growth."

According to Watkins, "over the past 10 years, sub-Saharan Africa's debt has tripled to \$180 billion, and the annual cost of servicing it is \$10 billion—draining the region's limited capital resources. Moreover, despite allocating almost a third of their foreign exchange earnings to debt repayment, most countries are building up arrears at a frightening rate. Collectively, these amount to almost \$11 billion, compared with \$220 million in 1980. . . .

"The human costs of Africa's debt crisis have been immense, with governments squeezing public sector wages and health and education budgets to meet their financial obligations. Debt repayments are also undermining efforts to introduce successful market reforms, including many advocated by the World Bank and IMF. . . .

"There is little point in the IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus issuing . . . declarations on poverty alleviation, when his institution is part of the problem."

Trade

Europe must stand up on air war, says Attali

European airlines must stand up against the "aerial version of the Pax Americana," demanded Bernard Attali, chairman of Air France, in the French Sunday newspaper *Le Journal de Dimanche* on Sept. 27. Bernard Attali is the brother of Jacques Attali, the present French chairman of the London-based European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Attali said that Europe is confronted with a fierce trade war launched against transatlantic air traffic, with U.S. airlines, which should not be capable of running this ruinous competition because they are all bankrupt, setting prices below cost. They seem to have strong political backing from the top of the U.S. administration, he said.

Attali charged that the aim of the U.S. airlines' strategy is to conquer the transatlantic air passenger market by "killing" the other competitors, to impose an "aerial version of the Pax Americana" along with the Bush administration's new world order project.