

Business Briefs

AIDS

Disease called 'growing menace' to children

AIDS is now the ninth-leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 4 in America. By 1991, a full 10% of pediatric hospital beds will be devoted to children with AIDS, according to a new report of the Work Group on Pediatric HIV Infection and Disease.

The report states, "Probably for every child who meets the CDC definition of AIDS, another 2 to 10 are infected. It is estimated that by 1991, there will be at least 10,000 to 20,000 HIV-infected children in the United States, and 1 of every 10 pediatric hospital beds will be occupied by a child with AIDS."

Dr. Antonia Novello, the head of the group behind the report, said, "If current trends continue, AIDS can be expected to move into the top five leading causes of death in youngsters in the next three to five years."

The report notes that AIDS is already the seventh leading cause of death among Americans ages 15 to 24. "The repercussions of HIV infection in adolescents are magnified by the potential of these sexually active young people to become parents themselves, transmitting the virus to yet another generation."

Usury

Mexican finance minister seeks funds

The new Mexican finance minister visited Washington before Christmas, looking for "new money," i.e., a rollover of Mexico's current obligations to the tune of over \$7 billion.

Pedro Aspe, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's finance minister, has already begun negotiations with major banks and the U.S. government, seeking \$7.3 billion in new loans. The London *Financial Times* Dec. 22 asserted that he will "take a tough line" with the bankers—whatever that might

mean, since Salinas has pledged no debt moratorium under any circumstances.

On Dec. 19, legislators from every opposition party attacked Aspe harshly for Salinas's new budget, which they said panders to the interests of foreign bankers. The new budget cuts public spending a further 2.8%, and only calls for 1.5% annual economic growth, which translates into a per capita decline. Aspe had asked the legislators for "national unity" prior to his visit to the bankers' Washington.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that U.S. and Mexican businessmen and bankers would demand the complete revocation of Mexico's law limiting foreign investment in return for the money. Investment is now limited to 49% foreign participation—one of the few vestiges of Mexican nationalism left standing after Salinas's predecessor, Miguel de la Madrid's term of office. Foreign banks and businessmen, said the *Journal*, have their eyes on the "petroleum and financial services" industries, i.e., Pemex, the nationalized oil company, and the nation's banking system.

Meanwhile, the defrauded, actual winner of Mexico's July presidential election, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, proposed a six-point agenda for dialogue between his opposition coalition and the Salinas government. The central points are, "Defense of the sovereignty, wealth, and existence of the nation," including reducing foreign indebtedness, and "defense of the conditions of life and existence of the Mexican people."

Agriculture

China's 'worst' drought threatens wheat crop

One of mainland China's worst-ever droughts is threatening the 1989 wheat crop, the *China Daily* reported Dec. 19. The northern wheat-growing provinces, the Yangtze Valley, and the southwest of China had only half their normal rainfall in 1988.

Temperatures have been high and rainfall low since October. Zhejiang province in eastern China has had less than 20 mm of rain in the past two months, only one-fifth

the normal amount, and in Shandong province, the drought is the worst in 70 years. In Hubei and Jiangsu provinces in the Yangtze Valley, 80% of the farmland is affected.

In November, Agriculture Minister He Kang said, "We are facing a grim situation. In recent years, output of grain has stagnated, while hog production has fluctuated. Due to continuously growing population, gradually decreasing farmland, and rapidly increasing consumption, once alleviated grain shortages have again become acute."

Food

Soviets lead U.S. in food irradiation?

Do the Russians, whose agricultural sector is a perennial disaster, know more about handling wheat than Americans?

A little-known protocol of agreement is in effect between U.S. Wheat Associates and the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Grain Products, to "exchange grain information" and to discuss "use and handling of wheat," the *Colby Free Press* reported on Dec. 8. The Kansas paper reported that David E. Frey of the Kansas Wheat Commission had disclosed that a group of Soviet technicians, led by A.E. Yukish of the Ministry of Grain Products, visited Kansas in the summer of 1988, and showed that the Russians are superior to Americans in handling grain.

In fact, the Russians are reportedly bragging about how they are more advanced than the United States in their use of irradiation to control insects. The Soviets have an irradiation facility in the port of Odessa, where they irradiate the grain they have purchased from the United States.

The Soviets complained that the use of chemical insecticides in the United States, where the application of irradiation techniques has been irrationally blocked, has produced "potent toxicants and has the disadvantages of pollution of the environment, accumulation of residual amounts of the chemicals in the grain, and difficulties in ensuring uniform treatment of the entire bulk of grain."

In contrast, a Soviet pamphlet stated that