

Barnier Meets With Bush, Rice, Wolfowitz in D.C.

FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER Michel Barnier visited Washington on May 2 to talk with Dr. Condoleezza Rice, his American counterpart. Barnier also met with National Security Advisor Steve Hadley and the president-elect of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz. While at the White House, the French foreign minister met for 30 minutes with President George Bush.

Rice and Barnier maintain a continual dialogue over several key issues, including the revitalization of the Middle East peace process. The United States and France are in particular collaborating to help Lebanon recover its full sovereignty, and the two nations spearheaded the passage of a U.N. resolution last year on the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. At the end of their press conference together, the French foreign minister and the U.S. secretary of state released a joint statement calling for the end of any "residual" Syrian presence in Lebanon and pledging to assist Lebanon.

During the conference, Rice referred to the forthcoming referendum on the E.U. constitution in France (see our article on page 2) and noted that "the United States has been, from the very beginning,

supportive of European integration (...). We believe that a united Europe, a Europe that is strong and capable, a Europe that is clearly, at its core, democratic and that has a long tradition and heritage with the United States, can only be good for the forward march of progress and democracy in the world. And so we want to see the European project succeed, because a strong Europe will be good for the forces of democracy."

While in Washington, Barnier spoke with the media, including *The Washington Post* and CNN. During an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer, he emphasized his desire to reinvigorate the French-American relationship. "We are in a new stage, a new phase. There are a lot of challenges that we need to face. There are a lot of reasons why we must work together while showing mutual respect for each other on both sides of the Atlantic. We will not achieve peace in the Middle East without one another. We will not win the war against poverty, terror, without standing shoulder to shoulder." He added that "just as Americans need a strong Europe to stand by them, we need a strong America that respects us and trusts us." 

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France Held in High Regard

ACCORDING TO a recently released survey covering 23 countries, the country whose influence in world affairs is most highly regarded is France. Twenty out of 23 countries surveyed had solid majorities (averaging 58 percent) in favor of

France and its global influence, with an average of only 20 percent having a negative opinion of actions taken by the French government. The country with the most positive perception of French foreign policy is Germany with 77 percent, followed by Italy with 73 percent, and China and South Korea, each with 72 percent.

large militaries and have recently used them in a prominent way, the U.S. and Russia, are more often seen as having a negative influence. While trade might buy you love, guns clearly do not."

The poll of 23,518 people was conducted by PIPA and by the polling firm GlobeScan. For more information, please visit www.pipa.org. 



The study also found that 20 out of 23 countries feel that it would be mainly positive if Europe became more influential in world affairs. The strongest proponents of this position include the United States' neighbors Mexico, with 66 percent of Mexicans favoring a stronger Europe, and Canada (with 63 percent in favor of a more influential E.U.). Over 60 percent of those surveyed in China, South Africa, Australia and Russia also subscribe to this position.

Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland, explains that "Europe and China, which have engaged the world primarily through economic relations, or soft power, are widely seen as having a mostly positive influence, while the countries that have very

A380 SOARS SILENTLY ON SUCCESSFUL MAIDEN FLIGHT



The largest passenger airliner ever built made its maiden voyage from Toulouse, France, on April 28. Just before 10:30 a.m., the Airbus A380 started its engines (which produce as much thrust as 3,500 cars on take-off) and 34 seconds later, the four-engine, double-deck plane was airborne, accompanied by the applause of more than 30,000 onlookers. At the completion of the four-hour test flight, chief test pilot Jacques Rosay noted that the plane behaved "immaculately." "You handle it as you handle a bicycle. It's very, very easy to fly." French President Jacques Chirac declared that "a new page in aviation history has been written. It is a magnificent result of European industrial cooperation."

The plane is one-third larger than its closest competitor, the Boeing 747, and is built to transport 555 passengers in three different classes, but could fit as many as 800. Capacity is not the only revolutionary characteristic of the A380—it is also more quiet and more fuel efficient than any other large aircraft. Indeed, the dignitaries and journalists present described it as more quiet than the small chase plane that accompanied it during its maiden flight. The A380 was designed to consume less fuel, relatively speaking, than a compact car: it requires only four-fifths of a gallon to carry one passenger 100 miles. Airbus has already received 154 orders for the plane, and needs about 300 in all to break even.

For more information, please visit www.airbus.com.

**DEPORTATIONS
COMMEMORATED**

Over a thousand representatives and government officials gathered on April 24 at the Human Rights Square overlooking the Eiffel Tower to commemorate the tens of thousands of Jews, political dissidents, homosexuals, Gypsies and resistance fighters who were deported to Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Jacques Chirac, the first president to acknowledge France's responsibility in the deportation of Jews during the war, presided over this annual day of remembrance (which he instituted several years ago) to honor the "victims and heroes" of this terrible tragedy. Chirac reaffirmed the continued importance of the fight against racism and anti-Semitism, and called for never-ending vigilance.



Saudi Arabian crown prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz (left) spent April 13-15 in France to discuss economic, cultural, and anti-terrorist ties with President Jacques Chirac.

**FRANCE, GERMANY BOOST
INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION**

In order to maintain a technological edge against rising international competition, France and Germany have reinforced their industrial and scientific cooperation through the launch of four new initiatives. The four projects in the

fields of information technology and medicine will be jointly funded by the two countries and include programs to develop a multimedia search engine for the Internet, expand mobile telephone technology, research new brain scan machines, and design equipment to help identify diseases by analyzing skin tissue. In a speech at the Sorbonne, President Jacques Chirac declared that France and Germany "must take the offensive and launch a massive effort in favor of innovation. At stake is technological supremacy in the world. It is a battle for the jobs of tomorrow." Major corporations such as Alstom, Siemens, L'Oréal, and Thales, as well as the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), will pool their efforts as part of these agreements.

Chirac Calls for a Yes Vote

Chirac intervened to encourage voters to say yes on the E.U. constitution on May 29

FRENCH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC appeared on French television on April 14 to urge the electorate to vote "yes" in the upcoming referendum on the European constitution after several polls indicated a possible victory of the "no" vote. Chirac decided to address the issue of the E.U. constitution, which will be submitted to a vote on May 29, in front of an audience of 80 youths from across France.

President Chirac strongly argued in favor of the constitution, urging the French "not to be afraid" of Europe. Chirac warned about the setback a French rejection of the text would represent and highlighted the importance of the European Union for France. He said that rejecting the constitution would halt Europe's development as a unified power, which in turn would weaken France's ability to make its voice heard on



President Jacques Chirac (left) and TF1 anchor Patrick Poivre d'Arvor (right) face the audience

the international stage. Chirac stated that France's future lies in a strong, united Europe, "We do not defend our interests alone. We can only defend them collectively and if Europe is united."

The European constitution seeks to reinforce European cooperation and to give the E.U. a more unified voice in matters of foreign policy, particularly by creating the positions of president and foreign minister. Chirac also remarked that the constitution, which is founded on humanist values, sets goals and standards that will benefit France, by for instance making full employment a priority.

The constitution must be ratified, either by referendum or by parliamentary vote, by the 25 members of the Union. So far Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Spain and Greece have successfully ratified the text. 

Students Without Borders

IN A WORLD WHERE secondary education has become increasingly important, 20 French university students have come together to offer those less fortunate a chance to benefit from an education in France. Etudes Sans Frontières (Students Without Borders) sent Chechen students to school in Paris this year to escape the war zone in their homeland. With their academic year coming to an end, the experience has been judged a complete success.

"We wanted them to have a democratic education and develop intellectually," explained Laure Salefranque, secretary-general of Etudes Sans Frontières. Many of the students come from Grozny, the Chechen capital, whose university is located in the area considered to be the most dangerous in the city.

Salefranque and her partners created the organization in 2003, along the lines of the French nonprofit group Médecins Sans Frontières, which sends doctors into war zones and impoverished areas where care is needed. The students contacted French university presidents asking for free tuition for the refugees, and the universities readily accepted, giving their

For more information, or to send donations:

Etudes sans Frontières

84, rue Vergniaud Web: www.etudessansfrontieres.org
75013 Paris, France Email: etudessansfrontieres@hotmail.com

full support to the project. The organization also contacted Air France, which offered the students free air travel to France. The organization is entirely nonprofit and funded by donations.

Donations and political support from Jack Lang, the former minister of culture and Bernard Kouchner, the founder of Médecins Sans Frontières, helped the program get on its feet. The French government has also thrown its support behind the initiative, by for instance accelerating the visa delivery process for the Chechen students.

Next year, the organization hopes to extend its help to 18 more Chechen students and to Rwandan refugees. The Rwandan genocide orphaned many young Rwandan students and the chance to study in France would give them the opportunity to get a new start in life.

Etudes Sans Frontières is also in the process of creating ties with American and British universities, as many of the students in the program have expressed a strong interest in learning English. 

Raffarin Visits China, 20 Agreements Signed

FRANCE AND CHINA signed 20 agreements on a number of issues, including several contracts worth a total of 3 billion euros, on April 21, during a three-day visit by French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin to China. Raffarin spoke with China's Premier Wen Jiabao and reaffirmed the European position in favor of the lifting of the ban on arms sales to China. The French government believes that lifting the embargo would encourage China to pursue its economic and democratic reforms (in practice, the lifting would be symbolic, as Europe would maintain and strengthen its strict restrictions on the sale of advanced

military technology to third countries).

Three Chinese airlines signed contracts to purchase 30 Airbus aircraft, and Airbus and the China Aviation Industry Corporation made plans to establish an engineering center in Beijing to perform aircraft design work. The two countries also agreed on enhanced nuclear cooperation. "This is a framework agreement that will allow the French side to provide personnel and technical support to Chinese nuclear plants," said Qiao Junping, the Beijing representative of the Guangdong Nuclear Power Group. Currently, two nuclear plants in Guangdong are equipped with French nuclear technology. 



Stapleton Named New U.S. Ambassador

THE WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCED the planned appointment of Craig Stapleton, 55, as the new U.S. ambassador to France on April 12. Stapleton will replace current ambassador Howard Leach, who has served in France since September 2001 and who is returning to the private sector. Stapleton's appointment, which is awaiting confirmation by the Senate, will place him in one of America's top diplomatic posts during an important period of renewed cooperation between two traditional allies. Stapleton expects to reinvigorate the close economic and political relationship between France and the United States and to promote their joint effort at democracy-building in Iraq.

Stapleton, who served as ambassador to the Czech Republic until late 2003, is a graduate of Harvard College



Craig Stapleton

(magna cum laude) and Harvard Business School. A member of the Democratic Party, Stapleton nevertheless has close ties with the Bush family (he partnered with Bush to buy the Texas Rangers baseball team, and later married one of Bush's cousins).

In his new role, Stapleton will benefit from his substantial diplomatic and business experience. Before serving as ambassador in Prague, he was president of Marsh and McLennan Real Estate Advisors in New York. Stapleton has also served on the board of directors of a number of publicly traded U.S. companies. His charitable involvement, meanwhile, has focused on private education: he has served as a Trustee of the Brunswick School in Connecticut, and on numerous committees at Harvard. He also served on the board of the Peace Corps during the senior Bush's presidential term. 

France and U.S. Deepen Scientific Cooperation

FRANCE'S NATIONAL CENTER for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the United States' Department of Energy (DOE) signed three bilateral agreements on April 4 at the French Ambassador's residence in Washington,



Dr. Raymond Orbach, director of the DOE's Office of Science, and Dr. Michel Spiro, director of the French National Institute for Nuclear and Particle Physics, sign the umbrella agreement.

D.C. The two countries already enjoy strong scientific ties, and these agreements will further expand French-American collaboration in research and development. The general agreement serves as an umbrella for the two specific agreements that were signed (the first concerning nuclear physics and the second particle physics, astrophysics and cosmology), but it also leaves the door open for future collaborations and exchanges in other areas of mutual interest.

The three agreements will last for five years and outline several actions that can be taken to ensure the sharing of know-how. These actions include a physical exchange of researchers between the two agencies, formal channels of information exchange, and the execution of several joint projects, with particular focus on the physics of relativistic heavy ions, particle physics, astrophysics and cosmology. Additionally, two sub-committees were created to oversee the specific agreements' implementation. 

Mon Quotidien Pairs Up With Miami Herald

The French daily for kids is seeking to expand in the U.S. market with an English edition

FOLLOWING OUR PREVIOUS article on the success of *Mon Quotidien* (see NFF 05.01), the French daily for kids has announced plans to enter the U.S. market through a collaboration with the *Miami Herald*. An English version of *Mon Quotidien* will be distributed free to thousands of children in the Kendall Lakes neighborhood of Miami during a six-month trial period to judge the concept's reception in the United States. Printing began the week of April 4 for the three versions of the paper, appropriately called Daily 13, Daily 10, and Daily 7, each one corresponding to its target age group. François Dufour, head of *Mon Quotidien's* French publisher Play-Bac Presse, is excited about the transatlantic

partnership, which he says has been seven years in the making.

The U.S. edition will include many of the same stories as its French counterpart, with which it will also share a similar layout. Articles will be written or translated by an English-speaking staff in Paris, and the copies will then be transmitted overnight to Florida for printing. By covering the initial cost of 500,000 euros (nearly \$650,000) itself, Play-Bac Presse is incurring the entire risk involved in the venture. But it hopes that once the children's daily proves itself, the *Miami Herald*, and perhaps other U.S. newspapers as well, will subscribe to its new service on a paying basis and include its dailies in their entire circulation. 

CINEMA SPECIAL! **FRANCE TO HELP FRENCH HOLLYWOOD MOVIES**
French Minister of Culture Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres announced recently that all films with American financing, but produced in French and at least in part in France, are eligible for government subsidies. France's system of subsidies for French movies, devised in order to nurture a vibrant national film industry, has proved very successful: last year, France produced 203 films, double what was produced in Italy, Europe's second largest movie producer.

U.S. AND FRANCE UNITE AGAINST FILM PIRACY

American and French filmmakers met at the Hollywood headquarters of the American Film Institute on April 12 to discuss the issue of movie piracy, and to devise ways in which they could join forces to stop what many see as a threat to the film industry. Xavier Merlin, director of European and international affairs at France's National Center for Cinematography, said that France and America "share the same concerns, we are together, piracy hurts everyone who distributes, makes, directs movies."

BRUCE WILLIS HONORED BY FRANCE

Actor Bruce Willis, star of the *Die Hard* films and *Sin City*, has been made an officer in France's Order of Arts and Letters, the highest cultural honor in the country. "This is France's way of paying tribute to an actor who epitomizes the strength of American cinema, the power of the emotions that he invites us to share on the world's screens and



the sturdy personalities of his legendary characters," said Culture Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres who presented Willis with the award. "I am touched by this medal," Willis said, speaking in French, "It proves that film has no borders and that we all belong to the same artistic community."

CINEMA SPECIAL! L.A. FRENCH FILM FESTIVAL BIG SUCCESS

The annual "City of Lights, City of Angels" film festival in Los Angeles brought together French and American filmmakers who view movies as an ideal medium to strengthen transatlantic ties. From April 11 to 17, 19 French films were screened for what was the festival's ninth year. Legendary French director Claude Lelouch opened the festival with the premiere of his new movie, "Men and Women." The film is a follow-up to his classic "A Man and a Woman," written almost 40 years ago, and is the fusion of two different films Lelouch has been working on for years.



The 7 Natural Wonders of France

FRANCE HAS SEVEN NATIONAL PARKS, representing 0.8 percent of French territory and located mainly in the south, due to the scarcity of population in these areas. Three are located in the high mountains of the Alps (la Vanoise, le Mercantour and Les Ecrins), one is in the Pyrénées, and one in the uplands of the Center region (Les Cévennes). The maritime park of Port Cros and the remote island of Guadeloupe, the most recent addition, complete the set.

Thanks to the law on national parks adopted in the 1960s, the classification of a geographical area as a national park ensures the protection of its landscapes and biodiversity, by preventing human settlements. Indeed, these parks are meant first and foremost to be transmitted intact for future generations to enjoy, but also to enable public access to their unique natural heritage. For more information, visit www.parcsnationaux-fr.com.



La Vanoise

THE FIRST national park created in France, in 1963, la Vanoise lies south of the Mont Blanc mountain range, along the spine of the High Alps, in the Savoie region of France. Despite its relatively small size (about 200 square miles for the central zone), la Vanoise boasts an impressive diversity of flora, fauna, geological structures and points of interest. Historically, the creation of the park was moti-



The Bellecombe lake in La Vanoise

vated partly by the near extinction of the ibex, with only a few hundred of the wild goats remaining in 1823, when ibex hunting was prohibited in France. La Vanoise has been paired with the Gran Paradiso National Park on the Italian side since 1972, and the two parks together represent the largest protected reserve in Western Europe.

Throughout the park, the tremendous range of altitude—from 2,541 to 9,227 feet—provides habitats for many species of flora and fauna, including a wide variety of alpine wildflowers as well as chamois, ibex, marmots, and about 125 species of birds.

For more information, please visit the parc's Web site, www.vanoise.com.



A male ibex

Port Cros: a Marine Hideaway

THE PORT CROS NATIONAL PARK includes the peninsula of Giens Salins in Hyères, Cape Lardier, and the islands of Porquerolles and Port Cros. A pioneer for marine reserves throughout the Mediterranean, its core mission is to protect biodiversity and marine ecosystems. The original landscape became the first marine park in Europe in December 1963, and the Porquerolles Island was added in 1971 in an attempt to protect it from urban development. The Park's maritime zone extends approximately 2,000 feet around the coast, allowing for a variety of underwater activities. Port Cros is well known for its wildlife, including 177 different species of birds and 70 different types of fish.

Aside from its captivating natural attractions, Port Cros also has a vibrant cultural history. The rolling hills set a perfect backdrop for the many fortresses that remain in the park, such as Fort de Moulin, which dates back to Francis I in 1531. Nearly 400 years later, in 1921, nature enthusiasts and philan-

thropists Marcel and Marceline Henry made their home on the island and many other intellectuals such as Malraux, Valéry, Gide and Arland, as well as Jean Paulhan, the director of the Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF), followed their lead.

For more information, please visit www.portcrosparcnational.fr.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL HIKING FESTIVAL

The world's first international hiking festival took place from May 3 to May 8 in Val d'Azun, in the southwestern region of the Pyrénées (the second largest mountain range in France after the Alps). "Eldorando" featured several hiking tours for all levels, but also festivities in the evening, as well as debates and presentations on the environment and sustainable development. This festival will be moving to other areas in the region in the future. Special guests this year included delegations from countries that are popular destinations for hikers, such as Mongolia, Mali, Mauritania, Romania and Nepal. For more information, visit www.eldorando.com.

Pink Flamingoes and White Horses in Camargue

AS WELL AS ITS SEVEN NATIONAL PARKS, France has established 44 regional parks, which though less strictly protected (they are usually partially inhabited) still do much to prevent overdevelopment.

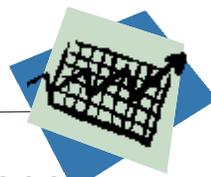
One of the most noteworthy regional parks is that of Camargue. Established in 1970, it is known for its beautiful landscapes along the Mediterranean Sea, the flamingoes that inhabit its delta, and the famous black bulls and white Camargue horses that have provided a livelihood for many of the region's inhabitants. Camargue is located in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region and is surrounded by water on three sides—the petit Rhône and Canal of Péccaïs to the West, the grand Rhône to the East, and the Mediterranean to the South. Camargue, home to over 12,000 breeding pairs of pink flamingoes, is one of the few places along the Mediterranean where the fascinating long-legged birds can be found. The park also

protects the Camargue horse and the native bulls, "bouvines." Breeders of the horses, known as "manadiers" (ranchers) or "gardians" (cowboys) use the horses to herd the wild bulls. Both the horses and bulls have greatly affected the cultural development and traditions of the region. The landscape, for instance, is spotted with "cabanes," the long and low houses of the manadiers. The historic Camargue bull fights, known as "courses à la cocarde," were developed centuries ago and challenge men to retrieve colored ribbons from the horns of the wild animals. Camargue is also famous for the yearly pilgrimage of the gypsy population to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

For more information, visit www.parc-camargue.fr.



Pink flamingo in Camargue



New Stock Market for Small Businesses

EURONEXT, one of Europe's leading cross-border stock exchanges, has announced the creation of Alternext, a market tailor-made for small and mid-sized companies. These companies play a vital role in the European economy, but only a small percentage of them are publicly traded. As the euro zone's leading exchange, Euronext is once again leading the way to help these companies grow at a time when European Union regulations are imposing tougher requirements on regulated markets.

Alternext will provide an innovative solution well suited to mid-sized companies seeking to finance growth and gain access to capital markets. It is an exchange-regulated market that offers small and mid-sized companies from every sector of the economy simplified access to financial markets and streamlined listing requirements. Alternext also ensures compliance

with rules on investor disclosure and the control of financial information. "The creation of Alternext meets the needs of an entire community of interests, comprising issuers, investors, venture capitalists and financial intermediaries" Martine Charbonnier, Euronext's executive director of listing, said.

The launch of Alternext is the final stage in the overhaul of the listing arrangements for all Euronext regulated markets. The market will gradually cover the entire euro zone, keeping pace with the harmonization of E.U. regulations. Alternext will officially open for business on May 17 with the listing of MeilleurTaux. Around ten more listings are slated to follow between mid-May and mid-July.

For more information, please visit www.euronext.com.

Sneak Preview of Future at Cannes TV Fair

The MIPTV fair mixed digital technology and humanitarian action

THE SOUTHERN CITY OF CANNES hosted the 42nd International Television programming fair from April 11 to 15. This five-day extravaganza, called "MIPTV Featuring MILIA," serves as a television program trade fair as well as a showcase to unveil new media technologies. The show's new name underlines the ongoing fusion of television and digital technology. In previous years, MILIA, the audiovisual entertainment fair, was distinct from MIPTV, the showcase for the latest digital entertainment technologies.

As an indication of the convergence of the digital and media industries, buyers previewed programs on a fully digitalized screening system that eliminated the long queues for videocassettes in years past. Viewers had a huge selection to

choose from, ranging from blue-chip documentaries, kids' shows, the latest reality formats, and TV miniseries. The comeback of documentaries, the unveiling of TV-capable mobile phone technology, and the digital and audiovisual prowess of Asian countries, especially South Korea, constituted the fair's highlights.

In addition to welcoming over 11,400 top TV, video, cable, satellite, and digital hi-tech executives and program buyers, MIPTV also hosted U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and former U.S. president Bill Clinton. Both were present to encourage international media firms to unite against the spread of AIDS. A meeting between U.N. officials and several executives of these firms resulted in an agreement to exchange copyright-free audiovisual programs about AIDS prevention.



Frenchmen Defend Unpasteurized Cheeses

IN A COUNTRY WITH NEARLY 400 different varieties of cheese, an association is fighting to save certain kinds in danger of extinction. On the occasion of the fourth edition of its National Cheese Day on April 8, the *Association Fromages de Terroirs* called attention to the irreversible disappearance of several traditional unpasteurized varieties of cheese. According to Véronique Richez-Lerouge, president of the Association, "In 30 years, more than 50 cheeses have been struck off the menus as the proportion of industrial cheeses continues to grow while cheeses made from unpasteurized milk only represent seven percent of our consumption."

More than half of the cheeses which receive a quality rating today in France are made from pasteurized milk. "You can't expect small producers to have the same standards as big cheese manufacturers. We have to find a proper compromise," explained Guy Martin, a Michelin three-star chef who has published a book

entitled *Cuisiner les Fromages* ("Cooking with Cheese").

Others remain more optimistic, however. Cheese-maker Philippe Olivier said, "For the past two to three years, young people have been moving here to save these cheeses, young farmers of 30 with ethics, who produce while respecting the environment, who make a lifestyle choice by choosing to become producers... And at the same time, there have never been so many young people registered at the cheese school in Paris." According to Sylvain Gaudu, head of Lafayette Gourmet, "We have to explain that cheese is a wonderful product, and not something harmful. We have to defend French heritage and safeguard those products with real taste."

For more information, visit the National Cheese Day's Web site, www.journeenationaledufromage.com.



PERNOD RICARD ACQUIRES LEADING LIQUOR BRANDS

Britain's Allied Domecq recently agreed to a friendly takeover by France's Pernod Ricard and its U.S. partner, Fortune Brands. The deal, likely to be worth more than \$13 billion, will give the French company control over 20 of the top 100 liquor brands in the world, and will catapult it to the number two position in the wine and liquor market, after the British giant Diageo. In particular, the deal will double Pernod Ricard's size in the U.S. market. A number of historic Scotch whiskeys will come under French ownership, including Ballantine's, Teacher's and Laphroaig, as well as the well-known gin Beefeater, and the spirits Xalhua and Mailbu.

ESA ROBOT PREVENTS LANDSLIDES

The European Space Agency's technology transfer program has just developed a robot that is capable of securing unstable rock walls, thereby preventing landslides. Roboclimber is a four-ton robot capable of scaling vertical surfaces, drilling 20-meter holes into rock walls and then inserting rods into the holes to stabilize the rock face. The robot was successfully tested in Italy on January 12. Its large-scale deployment would save an estimated 75,000 euros per landslide front, as well as prevent the loss of hundreds of lives and billions of euros in damage that result every year from landslides.



FRANCE TELECOM TO OFFER EDGE TECHNOLOGY

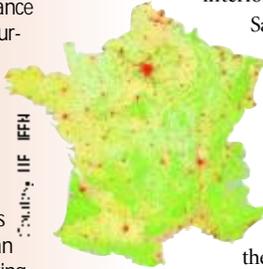
Orange, a subsidiary of France Telecom, announced on April 8 that it will be converting its lower-quality mobile network to EDGE, a high-speed data technology. EDGE (Enhanced Data for Global Evolution) will allow Orange's subscribers to access the Internet and even television programming much faster than current technology. Although EDGE cannot carry as much data as 3G technology, it can provide data at a speed comparable to that of 3G and less expensively. EDGE technology will be available to the public this summer.

CAISSES D'EPARGNE OFFERS INTEREST

Caisses d'Epargne, a French banking corporation, will be the first to offer interest on checking accounts now that doing so has become legal in France. The bank is offering a minimum interest rate of 0.5 percent for all checking accounts under 2,500 euros, with higher rates for larger amounts. In an already competitive market, this is sure to cause other banks to follow suit and intensify competition. According to Finance Minister Thierry Breton, "It's a very good initiative and excellent news for consumers."

FRANCE BECOMING MORE URBANIZED

According to a study conducted by the French Institute on the Environment (IFEN), and based on satellite photos obtained through the Corine Land Cover European research program, urbanization in France has progressed 4.8 percent from 1990 to 2000. Rural areas still represent 59 percent of the land in France, forests 26 percent and aquatic zones 10 percent, with urban zones making up the remaining 5 percent. Indeed, France remains a deeply agricultural society with large rural expanses, especially compared with other, more densely populated countries in Europe, such as Belgium and the United Kingdom. This increased urbanization can be attributed to accelerating business development, with France's most dynamic urban corridors following the north and southeast routes of the TGV (France's high speed train) as well as the Brittany and Mediterranean coastlines. IFEN hopes its study will encourage the government to take additional measures to ensure "the maintenance of biodiversity, the quality of the countryside and the preservation of the ecosystem."

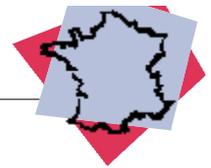


RIGHT TO DIE LEGISLATION

The French Parliament passed on April 13 "right to die" legislation that grants terminally ill patients the right to deny themselves further medical treatment. The law also stipulates that medical acts must not be pursued in an unreasonably obstinate manner. While the law still rejects euthanasia, a physician can now administer pain-relieving drugs to patients even if these may accelerate death. The debate gained momentum in recent years after the mother of Frenchman Vincent Humbart that patients deserve the right to die with dignity.

FRENCH STUDENT ROOTS OUT WORLD RECORD

Frenchman Alexis Lemaire, 24, set a world record on April 6 by becoming the fastest person in the world to figure out the 13th root of a 200-digit number in his head, without even using a pencil and paper. Lemaire, whose feat was witnessed by a mathematician and two bailiffs, described the task as "the most difficult mental arithmetic challenge in history." The computer science student took 8 minutes and 30 seconds to reach the 16-figure answer, making him the mental arithmetic world champion. His next self-appointed task: to learn 40 languages!



A Citizenship Guide for Immigrants

NELLY OLIN, France's minister delegate for integration, introduced on April 11 a "Guide to the Rights and Duties of French Citizens." This initiative follows the reform enacted on November 2003 by then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy, which stipulates that anyone wanting to acquire French citizenship must be sufficiently knowledgeable about the French language and the fundamental principles of the French Republic.

Starting June 1st, applicants for French citizenship will receive the free guide, which they can study to prepare for the civic exam that will now be an integral part of the naturalization process. Legal immigrants can already benefit

from free, state-provided French-language and civic classes that specify, for instance, that polygamy, forced marriage, and female circumcision are illegal in France.



The booklet will provide additional information about the organization of political and administrative powers in France and about core national principles, such as liberty, equality and fraternity (France's motto) and secularism. In this way, it is hoped candidates for French citizenship will assimilate the principles and values of the Republic, thereby facilitating their integration into French society.

In 2004, 99,368 immigrants were granted French citizenship, up from 64,081 in 1992.

New Electronic I.D. Cards Launched

PRIME MINISTER Jean-Pierre Raffarin approved on April 11 the Interior Ministry's project to create a new national electronic identity card. Last month, Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin outlined his plan to replace the identity cards and passports offered to French citizens with new ones that will carry a microchip containing digitized photographs and fingerprints. Such biometric security measures will later be extended to other I.D. documents, such as driver's licenses and social security cards. Currently the plan is to introduce the new passports in 2006, and the identity cards a year later.

Villepin has called the new cards "necessary to defend France's borders and citizens." Although owning a national identity card ceased to be compulsory in 1955, he stated that in order for the system to be effective in terms of security, the identity card should become compulsory within a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately for citizens who have not had to pay for national identity cards since 1998, the new, more expensive cards will no longer be free. "The price of passports

will be increased a little. And there'll be a fee for the identity card: that's the price of security," explained Villepin.

Administrative Services Get Thumbs Up

IT WOULD SEEM THAT, overall, the vast majority of French citizens are highly satisfied with the range of national services the government provides. Indeed, over 71 percent of the French are satisfied with the administration of government services, according to a recent survey conducted by Paul-Louvrier / BVA and radio channel France Inter. Health care services were among the most highly appreciated, receiving a favorable rating by 85 percent of respondents. The national education system was close behind, receiving an approval rating of 78 percent, followed by the law enforcement sectors, which won a 69 percent approval rating. Even the justice and employment services, which had lower satis-

faction ratings, came in at over 51 percent. All of these essential government services have posted a marked increase in satisfaction levels over the past year, rising on average by over 12 percent. This increase in satisfaction rates suggests the government's attempts to improve public services while keeping costs under control are proving successful.

STRAWBERRIES REPLACE POPCORN



A producers' association in the southern city of Nimes has decided to promote its members' strawberries by distributing them to those waiting in line at the local independent movie theater. The particular variety of strawberry being distributed is called the "gariguette," recognizable by its elongated shape and juicy taste. According to Vanessa Molina from the Strawberry Producers Association of Nimes, "the audiences that come to this type of cinema generally have a very high standard of quality. That is why we have chosen to better acquaint them with the *gariguette*, a variety of strawberry that is more sophisticated and also more expensive." This promotional undertaking also includes 50 local restaurants, which are offering dishes featuring *gariguettes*, several hotels, which are including them in their breakfast menus, and a free sampling at the city's tourism office.



New Home for Mona Lisa

The Louvre's crown jewel is now displayed in a larger, better lit and more secure room

THE MONA LISA, Leonardo da Vinci's chef-d'oeuvre, has once again moved rooms within the Louvre. After four years of waiting for renovations to be completed, the Mona Lisa has moved from the Salle Rosa to the



COURTESY: FRANCE 24

Salle des Etats, unofficially renamed the Salle de la Joconde after the French name for the painting. The new location also houses the Louvre's largest painting, Veronese's *The Marriage at Cana* (6.77 x 9.94 m), which is displayed across the room from the Mona Lisa. The two masterpieces are surrounded by other works of 16th-century Venetian art which will now benefit from the more than 20,000 daily visitors (6.6

million in 2004) that the Mona Lisa brings to the museum.

Since the Mona Lisa's debut in the Louvre in 1798, the painting has been moved a total of seven times. Its new placement allows for better protection, better lighting, and better

crowd circulation. Two windows were reopened in the room and a sky light was added to illuminate the walls as well as the center of the room. The renovations, which cost about 4.81 million euros, were funded by the Japanese television company Nippon Television Network.

In April 2004, the Louvre released an official statement saying that the poplar panel on which the Mona Lisa was painted showed "a greater amount of warping than previously noted." It added that the museum would take advantage of the move to launch "a detailed scientific and technical study of the *Joconde*, whose present state of conservation raises several concerns" (see NFF 04.06). These concerns were alleviated during the painting's presentation to the press on April 5, when museum curator Cécile Scaillierz reassured reporters that "the painting is doing very well, although it is very fragile." ■



COURTESY: AIR FRANCE

NEW AIR FRANCE UNIFORMS

Air France revealed a new line of uniforms for its 36,000 employees specially created by haute couture designer Christian Lacroix. This is the first uniform change for Air France in over 17 years. Air France President Jean-Cyril Spinetta announced: "In a way Air France and *haute couture* inhabit the same universe—a world where tradition and technology intermingle, and where the aim is to diffuse and perpetuate a certain French style of living." The new uniforms consist of over 100 items which are interchangeable and can be mixed and matched.

SYLVIE VARTAN NAMED AMBASSADOR TO WHO

French singer Sylvie Vartan was named the World Health Organization's "goodwill ambassador" on April 11, a position which will help to promote child care in eastern Europe. Vartan, of Bulgarian descent, has already achieved great success with her work in Bulgarian children's institutions. Since 1991, her organization, "Sylvie Vartan," has been providing medical equipment and humanitarian aid for Bulgarian hospitals and orphanages with a central focus on care for newborns.

PICASSO PAINTING RECOVERED

French Police recently recovered a missing painting by Pablo Picasso. The painting entitled *Nature Morte à la Charlotte*, a cubist work completed in 1924, was discovered in a private residence in the Paris suburb of Antony. The work was discovered as a result of an anonymous tip which led authorities to uncover the painting discreetly hidden behind a wardrobe. Valued at \$3.2 million, the Picasso painting was returned to the George Pompidou Center just in time to commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the painter's death on April 8th.

FRENCHMAN BUYS BOLLYWOOD RIGHTS

Frenchman Achille Forler purchased the rights to 25,200 Bollywood songs and movies to guarantee that Indian composers and songwriters receive their due royalties. "Bollywood does not know that such rights exist in the world," Forler said. His company, Deep Emotions Publishing, spent \$3 million to obtain the rights, and it now owns some of the most popular songs and movies from Bollywood, the world's largest producer of films. Forler has already helped composer Shubha Mudgal retrieve royalties for the use of her songs (originally composed for "Kama Sutra") in "Monsoon Wedding."

NEW ROOMS IN VERSAILLES OPEN TO PUBLIC

Members of the French National Assembly voted unanimously April 7 in favor of a law transferring to the public the sections of the Chateau de Versailles reserved for the French parliament. The transfer consists of 26,000 square meters and about 60 offices, including ones for the presidents of the Assembly and the Senate. The proposal was made by the president of the Assembly, Jean-Louis Debré, who has never made use of his office in Versailles. The French minister of culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, cited this as "an historic opportunity to reunify Versailles, the most emblematic monument of our national heritage." The transfer must also be submitted to the Senate for confirmation and will most likely take three to four years to complete.

Cannes Selection Announced

Several American films will be competing for the Festival's prestigious Palme d'Or

THE ORGANIZERS of the 58th Cannes International Film Festival announced on April 19 the films that will be showing from May 11 to 22 (53 were chosen out of a total of 1,500!). Unlike the previous year's line-up, the new list has many films from returning, celebrated directors, including Hou Hsiao-hsien (*The Best of Our Times*), Jim Jarmusch (*Broken Flowers*, starring Bill Murray), Lars Von Trier (*Manderlay*), Gus Van Sant (*Last Days*) and David Cronenberg (*A History of Violence*). Also different from last year is the absence of controversial films like Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 911*. Two returning favorites, Mexican director

AGA KHAN RESTORES FRENCH CHATEAU

The Chantilly Chateau, home to France's second most important art collection, has been rescued by its neighbor, the Aga Khan. The Aga Khan, the billionaire leader of the world's 15 million Shia Ismaili Muslims, has donated 40 million euros (\$52 million) to be used for repairs. His donation will go a long way toward contributing to the chateau's restoration, which is expected to cost at least 70 million euros (\$91 million). The Chantilly Chateau, located an hour from Paris, houses 6,000 works of art, including three by Raphael. It is the only museum other than the Louvre to have three paintings by the Renaissance's unequaled Italian master. The chateau's last owner, Henri d'Orléans, bequeathed the chateau, 7,800 hectares of land, the art collection and over 30,000 books, upon his death, on the condition that it be open to the public.



COURTESY: STEPHEN VAUGHAN

Nicole Kidman makes an impression during the 56th Cannes Festival (May 2003)

Carlos Reygadas and Italian director Marco Tullio Giordana, will be showing their respective films, *Battle in Heaven*, about a thwarted kidnapping and *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide*, a coming-of-age story. *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, directed by and starring Tommy Lee Jones, is probably the most unexpected choice in the Cannes selection. Other featured films include Atom Egoyan's *Where the Truth Lies*, Michael Haneke's *Caché* (*Hidden*), Johnnie To's *Election*, Wim Wenders's *Don't Come Knocking*, and Frank Miller's *Sin City*. The jury which will select the winning film will be presided over by Emir Kusturica. ■

