Chirac Renews French Commitment to Africa

AFRICAN SECURITY turned out to be the main focus of the two-day Franco-African summit on December 3 and 4 in Bamako, the capital city of Mali, although the stated theme of the conference was “African youth” (two out of three Africans are younger than 25). The biennial summit was the 23rd of its kind, the practice having been initiated in 1973 by French President Georges Pompidou. The development commissioner of the European Union, Louis Michel, also attended the summit.

FRANCE MAINTAINS VAST ARCHEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

The advisory commission on archaeological research abroad met in Paris from December 8 to 14 to consider the support that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will provide French archaeological missions around the world in 2006. From Sakha (Yakutiya) to the islands of Patagonia, from Cameroon to Saudi Arabia, the Foreign Ministry supports 160 missions in 60 different countries, with thematically strong presences in Syria, Egypt and Turkey. In 2006 total allocations to French archaeological research abroad will be 2.8 million euros. Of 170 applications considered, 160 were selected, including eight new missions. A special effort will be made to assist archival missions in Lebanon, in close partnership with local scientific authorities.

With regards to immigration, Chirac announced that French consulates would immediately take steps to facilitate the delivery of long-term visas to African entrepreneurs, executives, artists, teachers and researchers, so as to promote cooperation and exchange. He also proposed measures that would encourage African exchange students to return to their countries of origin at the completion of their studies, thereby staunching the brain drain that debilitates the continent.

Chirac also called on the rich nations of the world to double their African aid to help pull the continent out of poverty. The plight of Africa is gaining more international attention, as was evidenced at the G-8 meeting in July, where world leaders pledged to double their aid to African nations, adding $24 billion by 2010. France has also just approved a plan, supported by almost 80 other countries, to tax airplane tickets so as to raise money to fight AIDS, malaria, and other diseases that wreak havoc in Africa (see NFF 05.13).

France has always had a close relationship with large parts of Africa due to its continued cooperation with its former colonies, but it now wishes to expand the scope of its links with the continent. French President Jacques Chirac addressed the 53 African leaders or representatives at the meeting, stating, “Since the declarations of independence you have changed, and so have we. But what will not change is France’s resolve commitment to Africa.”

Ultimately, France wants to be Africa’s “lawyer” in the international arena, by maintaining active support of the continent’s security and helping African countries successfully take charge of their own peacekeeping and crisis interventions. The African Union shares this goal, and hopes to set up its own peacekeeping force by 2010, with France’s help. The major areas that currently need particular attention from an African-controlled organization are the crises in the Ivory Coast and in Darfur, Sudan.

FRANCE MAINTAINS VAST ARCHEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

LAURE MANAUDOU SETS TWO WORLD SWIMMING RECORDS

French swimmer Laure Manaudou capped a remarkable week when she won three titles and broke two world records at the European short course championships in Trieste, Italy. On December 9, 19-year old Manaudou broke the 800-meter freestyle world best when she clocked eight minutes 11.25 to beat by some two seconds the record set last year by Japanese Sachiko Yamada. She then won the 100-meter backstroke title that same day, before smashing the 400-meter freestyle world record on the 10th. Manaudou clocked three minutes 56.79, almost three seconds faster than American Lindsay Benko, who had set the previous record in 2003. “I surprised myself,” said a delighted Manaudou. “I think I broke this world record (400 meter) because I was stressed. I hate to lose. So as I cannot stand a defeat I always give everything I have.” Manaudou added she wanted to swim as much as possible to go on beating records. “The more I swim, the more I win, the more I better my times, the more powerful I feel,” she said. “I wish it could never stop.”

Welcome ceremony in Bamako, Mali.
**Anti-Terrorism Laws Strengthened**

The French National Assembly overwhelmingly voted on November 29 to further strengthen France’s anti-terrorist laws, which are already among the toughest in the European Union. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy introduced the bill in response to the July attacks in London, in which 56 people lost their lives as suicide bombers hit the British capital’s transportation network during rush hour.

The new measures will greatly increase the number of video surveillance systems in public places, permitting their installation not only within the public transportation system, but also in places of worship and in businesses. France currently only has 60,000 public video cameras in operation, compared with an estimated 4 to 7 million in Great Britain. British authorities were able to rapidly identify the London bombers thanks to the video footage obtained with these cameras.

In addition to boosting video surveillance, the new law will also increase the ability of the police to access telephone and computer data as well as previously confidential information concerning passengers traveling by rail, sea or air. Measures aimed at disrupting the illegal networks that finance terrorist activities will be reinforced, and terrorism cases will carry longer prison terms.

Sarkozy hopes the new law will “equip France with a more effective arsenal to prevent terrorist acts,” allowing “the law enforcement authorities greater means to avoid a catastrophe.” The French Senate adopted the law on December 15, and a joint parliamentary commission will now conciliate the two different versions so as to propose a definitive text before Christmas. The law includes a sunset provision, which will allow Parliament to reconsider the need for some of these measures in 2008.

**10th Anniversary of Dayton Accords Marked in Paris**

In celebration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Accords, which brought an end to the war in Bosnia, French President Jacques Chirac and Foreign Affairs Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy played host to the three members of the collegial presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ivo Miro Jovic, Sulejman Tihic and Borislav Paravac. These three political leaders embody the mending of ethnic rifts in their country, as Jovic is a Croat, Tihic is a Muslim, and Paravac is a Serb.

French was actively involved in the resolution of the Bosnian conflict which ultimately left 260,000 dead and 1.8 million displaced from their homes, making it “one of the worst tragedies in contemporary history” according to Chirac. The French military’s decision to take control of the strategic Vrbanja bridge in Sarajevo on May 27, 1995, marked the beginning of the end of the siege of Sarajevo and the first steps towards peace in the region. France soon thereafter lobbied for a more assertive multilateral policy, and President Clinton’s support led to forceful NATO involvement. The Dayton Accords were negotiated in the Dayton, Ohio, air base during November and officially signed in Paris on December 14, 1995. Eighty-four French soldiers lost their lives in combat in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
Microsoft Opens French Research Lab

MICROSOFT RESEARCH, the R&D arm of Microsoft Corporation, will be teaming up with the French National Institute for Research in Computer Science and Control (INRIA) to build and operate a new laboratory in the Paris region of France (see NFF 05.07). The lab, scheduled to open in January, "will investigate two key research areas: software and systems security, and the development of new computing tools for scientists," said Jean-Pierre Vergin, spokesperson for INRIA. The new laboratory is part of Microsoft CEO Bill Gates' EuroScience Initiative, a plan to expand Microsoft's research collaborations in Europe.

"By working with internationally leading organizations such as INRIA, Microsoft is able to drive momentum in new kinds of science and computing, building on strong foundations," said Andrew Herbert, managing director of Microsoft Research's branch in Cambridge. Bernard Ourghanlian, Microsoft France's technical and security director, agreed, saying, "We have maintained a strong relationship with INRIA for a long time. For us, establishing a joint laboratory with the Institute seemed perfectly natural."

INRIA employs 2,700 computer scientists in seven regions of France and works with French business to conduct state-of-the-art research in computer programming. Microsoft Research employs 750 people and operates six labs on three continents. Details regarding intellectual property rights and the degree to which Microsoft will be allowed to profit from the laboratory's research are still being negotiated, although INRIA officials emphasize that Microsoft will not hold sole property rights to the laboratory's software. For more information, please visit www.inria.fr.

Phillips Collection on Display in Paris

SIXTY-SEVEN PAINTINGS and sculptures from the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., are being displayed at the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. Among them are works by Degas, Renoir, Sisley, Giacometti, Van Gogh, and Monet. The collection is world-renowned for its quality and appeal, and it is earning rave reviews in Paris.

Duncan Phillips, the founder of the collection, attended Yale, where he studied ancient and modern art. He wrote and published numerous articles and frequently traveled to Europe, where he amassed a collection that he felt would reflect his passion for contemporary art. Though he died in 1966, his passion lives on through his selected pieces, which were revealed to the public for the first time in 1921, and have since become a legendary staple in the Washington art world.

Perhaps the most famous piece in the collection is "Le Déjeuner des Canotiers" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the painting that many may recognize from its appearance as a reproduction in the house of Amélie Poulain’s neighbor in the movie Amélie. "It is probably the last occasion to see this painting in Europe" says Jean-Louis Prat, the commissioner of the exposition. For Duncan Phillips, this painting alone was worth all of the Giorgiones or Titians in the world.

The Paris exhibit will run though March 26, after which the collection will head to the MoMA in New York City. To learn more, visit www.museeduluxembourg.fr.

American Plays Napoleon in Record Austerlitz Re-Enactment

Approximately 30,000 spectators and 3,500 participants from all over the world came together to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Napoleon's famous victory at Austerlitz on December 3 in the small Czech town that is now known as Slavkov u Brna. On December 2, 1805, 75,000 French soldiers defeated a joint Austro-Russian force of 91,000 in what became Napoleon's most famous victory. The key stages of the strategic battle were reenacted in the original location for the first time ever, and the French emperor himself led his troops. He was played by Mark Schneider, a 37-year-old American from Williamsburg, Virginia. Schneider, who is half French and speaks French fluently, was chosen to play the main role because of his striking resemblance to the French military leader.

The organizers of Austerlitz 2005 spent seven years and $610,000 preparing the reenactment outside Brno, in the southeast of the Czech Republic. This is the biggest event of its kind ever staged in Europe. Spectators paid $72 for good seats, and $10.8 for cheaper tickets. The 1.5-hour-long reenactment was aired live on Czech public television.

RUNAWAY CAT FLIES BUSINESS

Workers at office supply firm Raflatac in Nancy, France, were surprised to see an emaciated tabby cat emerge from a shipment crate on October 24. Their surprise changed to astonishment once they checked Emily’s tags and discovered she’d traveled all the way from the U.S. The 1-year-old tabby had spent three weeks without food or water in a cargo container after wandering into a Wisconsin paper company’s distribution center in September. The French company immediately contacted Emily’s family in the U.S., and Joelle de Becker of Raflatac took care of the cat for a month while she cleared quarantine. To spare Emily the trauma of a return trip in an aircraft’s hold, Continental Airlines flew her back in business class, in a seat that normally goes empty (she is now its secretary perpetuelle, or de facto president), will be touring the U.S. from March 20 to March 31 (exact itinerary yet to be determined). To learn more, visit www.alliance-us.org.

STARSKY & HUTCH GO FRENCH

The 1970’s U.S. cop show “Starsky and Hutch” will be remade for French TV. But expect a French twist! The title characters, for instance, have been renamed Duval and Madani. Fear not, the show will retain its essence, with approximately half of the 22 initial episodes being based on scripts from the original series. Also getting a makeover (literally) is Captain Dobey: the character will now be portrayed by a woman. Huggy Bear, the fast-talking street informant who helps the two detectives, will be renamed César. The show has been commissioned by the M6 channel and shooting will begin in December.
Simone Veil: a French Icon

As France prepares to mark the 61th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, a liberation which put an end to one of the most horrifying episodes in human history, NFF celebrates one of France’s most famous deportees, Simone Veil, who continues to play a key role in the country’s political and social life. Indeed, in a recently released poll, she was named France’s most popular political figure, with an impressive 80 percent of respondents expressing a positive opinion of her.

Surmounting Adversity with Principled Determination

Simone Jacob was born July 13, 1927, the daughter of a Jewish architect in Nice. Her father was banned from working in 1941 under the pretext that Jews could not account for more than 2 percent of the total workforce in a profession. In March 1944, at the age of 17, her entire family, with the exception of one sister who was working with the French Resistance, was stopped by the Gestapo and deported to the concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Veil spent 13 harrowing months there and survived, but she lost her parents and brothers to the camp.

Veil persevered, and did not succumb to despair. After the Liberation she moved to Paris, where she continued her studies. After receiving her baccalaureate in 1944, she enrolled at the Institute of Political Studies (IEP) and then at a law school, eventually becoming a magistrate. During her studies she met her husband, Antoine Veil, whom she married in 1946 and with whom she had three children. In 1950, Veil decided to follow her husband, a high-ranking civil servant, to Germany where he had been posted.

Returning to Paris after her stay in Germany, Veil was inspired to get actively involved in her nation’s political affairs, using her training as a magistrate to champion the modernizing trend occurring at that time in France. She first stretched her political wings in an effort to convince the National Penitentiary Administration to improve the conditions for detained inmates. She then fought hard to reform adoption rights, and to provide illegitimate children with the same rights afforded to children born into a traditional household.

From Nazi Victim to Advocate of Europe

After her departure from French politics in 1979, Simone Veil became the first popularly elected president of the European Parliament and focused her energies on promoting and continuing the integration of Europe. She expressed her perpetual hope for the future when she said: “I am placing my hope in Europe, in a Europe that has overcome hatred and barbarism to commit itself to achieving peace and solidarity between the peoples of Europe.” In January 1982, Veil left her presidency position at the European Parliament, but continued her involvement in European affairs. She served with the judicial service for Parliament, and in 1984, she led a moderate and openly pro-European group.

After spending many years with the European Parliament as a deputy, Veil accepted an invitation to return to a French government position in 1993, when she became minister of State for social affairs, health and towns during the premiership of Édouard Balladur. In 1996 she became a newly selected member of the International Commission for the Balkans, directed by Léo Tindemans, which was charged with finding ways to reconstruct a region devastated by war.

In 1998, she was appointed to the Constitutional Council, France’s equivalent of the Supreme Court. Her mandate on the Constitutional Council will end in 2007 (its members are nominated for nine-year terms), but Simone Veil will certainly continue to lead a very active civic life. She now supervises the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, and she spoke very movingly during the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz last year.

As a popularly elected former deportee and Jewish woman, Veil embodies the hope for a successfully united, accepting, and peaceful Europe.

These early struggles prepared Veil for a topic of great controversy: that of abortion. Named minister of health by President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in 1974, she promptly introduced a law to the French National Assembly that would authorize voluntary terminations of pregnancy. She endured a barrage of attacks, even from those within her own party, but ultimately succeeded in passing the law by allying with members of the opposition party. This victory represented a considerable step forward in establishing a woman’s right to choose.
First Partial Face Transplant

A 38-YEAR-OLD French woman from Valenciennes received the world’s first partial face transplant, performed on November 27 by a team led by Professor Bernard Devauchelle and Professor Jean-Michel Dubernard, who performed the first hand transplant in 1998 as well as the first double hand and forearm transplant in 2000.

The woman was admitted to the hospital in May 2005, after losing both her lips, her nose and her chin in a freak attack by her dog. Usually surgeons use skin from a patient’s back, buttocks or thighs to graft onto a face. But in this case, the injuries were “extremely difficult, even impossible to repair using conventional oral-facial surgery techniques,” according to a statement from the two hospitals involved. The surgical team felt that grafting a triangular section of skin taken from a donor’s face had a much better chance of success, and had the advantage of restoring speech and chewing functions.

The family of the donor, who was in a brain-dead condition, gave permission for the removal of needed facial tissues, muscles, arteries and blood veins, and the operation was then performed quickly and, it seems, successfully. The patient’s face did not take on the exact aspect of the donor’s, but is rather a hybrid of both her own’s and the donor’s. So that her body does not reject the tissues, the patient must take immuno-suppressants for the time-being and, if need be, for the rest of her life.

Ethical concerns about facial transplant may stand in the way of its practice in some countries. In France, the National Advisory Ethical Committee has voiced a negative opinion regarding full facial transplants, but does not oppose partial facial transplants, provided the patient is fully informed of all the risks—both physical and psychological—involved (which was the case here).

The patient, who wishes to remain anonymous, is doing well and is delighted with her new appearance, which she even prefers to her old, according to Dubernard.

Pierre Auger Observatory, World’s Largest, Unveils First Findings

THE PIERRE AUGER Observatory, the largest in the world, is nearing completion and has already produced titillating findings. Located in the Argentinean pampas at the foot of the Andes Mountains, the Observatory is a collaborative work of over 370 scientists from 16 countries, including France’s National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), which was one of the project’s initiators. The telescope is intended to measure high-energy cosmic rays, the source and nature of which continue to mystify scientists. Understanding their origin may provide insights into the very structure of the universe.

Though it is not yet complete (the finishing touches are slated for late 2006), its preliminary results have already ruled out certain hypotheses. The rays do not seem to originate from the center of the galaxy, nor are they vestiges of the Big Bang. Instead, they are almost certainly the product of one of several possible “exotic” cosmological events.

The Observatory consists of an array of 1,600 particle detectors, which are essentially large tanks filled with ultra-pure, de-ionized water. As high-energy cosmic rays pass through these “Cerenkov detectors,” their radiation and electromagnetic energy is measured. The detectors are spread throughout an area equal to the size of Rhode Island. In addition to the Cerenkov detectors, there are 24 more traditional telescopes that observe ultraviolet fluorescent light emitted as cosmic rays pass through the atmosphere.

High-energy cosmic rays are very rare: on average, there is only one occurrence per square kilometer per century. Because of its size, the new facility should be able to detect 10 per year, more than all current installations have detected in the past four decades. Scientists hope to begin construction of a second observatory, this time in the northern hemisphere, probably in southeastern Colorado, as soon as funding can be secured.

The Observatory is named in honor of French physicist Pierre Auger (1899-1993), who in 1938 became the first person to observe the air showers created by high-energy cosmic rays passing through Earth’s atmosphere. Learn more at www.auger.org.

La Poste to Become Bank

ON NOVEMBER 30, the Committee of Credit Establishments and Investment Companies (CECEI) approved the French Post Office’s application to provide a full range of banking services. The Post Office already offers its customers certain financial services, and it will now be allowed to provide them with an entire banking portfolio. The new bank will open its doors in March, pending the European Commission’s approval.

More than 10 years ago, the public postal service conceptualized the vision of a large-scale bank that would be able to distribute credit in the same manner as BNP Paribas or Credit Agricole, thereby taking advantage of its vast network throughout the country. But before doing so, it had to prove to French authorities that it would not present unfair competition to major private-sector banks, of which there are nine in France. La Poste, which handles 2.5 billion euros worth of funds, already has more clients (28 million) and more agencies (17,000) than its rivals, making it a formidable competitor, but it will be closely watched by regulatory authorities to ensure that the playing field remains level. For more information, visit www.laposte.fr.

TOULOUSE TO BE GALILEO HQ

Toulouse, in southwestern France, was chosen as the administrative and financial headquarters of the Galileo European satellite navigation program, with responsibility for business development, marketing, and system engineering. The decision is expected to create up to 15,000 direct and indirect jobs for locals. The location in Toulouse was chosen for its close proximity to other aerospace firms, such as Alcatel Alenia Space, Thales, and EADS Astrium. Galileo is similar to America’s GPS system but is designed to be even more accurate. The system, which will rely on 30 satellites, is expected to be operational in 2010. To learn more: www.galileo.eu.

NEW STATE BOND MARKET

Euronext and Agence France Trésor have announced the creation of a secondary market in French government bonds that will be open to individual investors beginning January 2. The new market, named OAT aux Particuliers, will make it easy for individuals to buy and sell government bonds. Individual investors will be provided with the same security, transparency, liquidity and information that are already available to professional investors. The new market will give individual investors access to a full range of fixed-rate, inflation-indexed and zero-coupon treasury bonds with maturities of 2 to 50 years. To learn more: oaatparticuliers.euronext.com.

ANTI-CHOLESTEROL YOGURT TO BE COVERED BY INSURANCE

Danone has reached an arrangement with the French insurance group AGF to reimburse customers who purchase Danone’s anti-cholesterol nutritional products, since policy holders who use these products are less likely to suffer from cardio-vascular diseases. Indeed, Danacol, an anti-cholesterol yogurt released last April by Danone, contains sterols, which have been scientifically proven to reduce cholesterol levels by more than 10 percent after three weeks. This announcement comes immediately after Unilever, an Anglo-Dutch consumer products group, introduced a similar agreement with the French insurance company Maaf.

FORTY YEARS IN SPACE

France just celebrated its 40 years as a space power! On November 26, 1965, France launched the spaceship Diamant A (pictured), which released a satellite named Asterix into orbit. This stunning accomplishment made France the third country after the Soviet Union and the United States to enter the “race to conquer space.”
Among Internet users, there is a sub-

society. For President Jacques Chirac, the Law of 1905 is an

mance.” In fact, a survey found that working students do as well as, if not better than, their counterparts on exams, with an 85 percent success rate in 2004. This may be due to the fact that only three out of ten students who work say that their job prevented them from attending classes.

For students whose work gets in the way of their studies, the University of Paris XIII (Villetaneuse) has a program that allows students to extend a one-year course over two years, making it easier to reconcile the two. Students taking part in the program are also entitled to take special tests which are graded separately from the others. This November, a dozen businesses and the 13 universities of Paris signed a charter at the mayor’s office in Paris, which declares that employers will provide exemplary working conditions while the schools will develop support mechanisms and alternatives for students who work, including night classes, online classes, and excused absences.

French Students Mix Work and Studies

A RECENT POLL by CSA shows that nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of French university students have already had a paid job at some point in their lives, while one out of two students works during the school year. This covers a wide range of employment situations, from babysitting and performing other small jobs to working full-time.

According to Unef, a student union, “In general, paid activity does not have an adverse impact on exam perfor-

Cheers for Cheaper Houses!

T HE MINISTER of social cohesion and housing, Jean-

France. “It’s true, today, there are no housing agencies that offer houses at 100,000 euros,” declared Yves Jégot, a deputy Mayor of Montereau. Now, for the equivalent of the rent on low-income housing (500 euros a month), families will be able to achieve the dream of homeownership over a 15-year period. Between 50 and 100 communities are already in contact with the Ministry of Housing to participate in the program, and the government expects 7,000 to 10,000 of the houses will be built a year.

 рекламирующий хлебосольство, но также и обеспечивает учащихся работой.

The butcher's business had been the original record holders before being outdone in 2004.

FREE DENTAL EXAMS FOR CHILDREN AND ELDERLY

Starting in 2006, French children between the ages of 6 and 12 will be eligible for a free dental exam. Over a million children are expected to take part in the program, designed to instill healthy oral hygiene habits in children from an early age. By age 4, 17 percent of children have at least one cavity (50 percent in Paris). The newly expanded free dental coverage will also apply to pregnant women (eligible for a check-up between their fourth month of pregnancy and six months after their child's birth) and adults between 60 and 65 years of age.

FRANCE LEADS EUROPE IN INTERNET USE

The French surf the Web an average of 13 hours per week, the highest rate in Europe. Spain and the UK were close behind, with an 11-hour-per-week average. The European Interactive Advertising Association survey showed that Internet use in Europe has risen 17 percent since 2004 and 56 percent since 2003. Among Internet users, there is a subgroup of “power users” who spend a very considerable amount of time plugged in (24 percent of the population spends 16 hours or more online each week). The Internet follows only television as Europe's preferred source of news.

BUT HOW DOES IT TASTE?

Four French butchers from Salbris have fashioned the largest pork roast in the world: 935 feet long (equal to about three football fields) and 4,735 pounds. They used the meat of 150 pigs, giving new meaning to the expression “pigging out!” A representative from Guinness World Records was on hand to witness this achievement. The butchers had been the original record holders before being outdone in 2004.

RECORD FUND-RAISING FOR TELETHON 2005

The France-2 Telethon, held every year to raise money and awareness for research on myopathy, a neuromuscular disorder that affects thousands of people each year, earned a record of over 99 million euros in donations during the live show broadcast continuously on December 2 and 3. This is the most money that has ever been raised during the live show, and donations during the week after the Telethon raised 99,041,125 euros this year. For more information, visit www.telethon.fr.

Celebrating 100 Years of Secularism

D ECEMBER 9, 2005, marked the 100th anniversary of France's Law of 1905 separating church and state. The idea of secularism was born in the midst of the French Revolution of 1789, as tensions rose between the monarchy-supported Catholic Church and revolutionary intellectuals. In the 1880s, the French government gradually moved toward a more complete secularism within the state, and laws concerning both public schools and associations were enacted. Prior to this time, the priests of the Church had a key role in the educational system.

Thoughts concerning secularism eventually crystallized into the Law of 1905, which guarantees the free exercise of religion while stating that the government may not recognize, subsidize, or finance any cult. The law was the source of much public debate during the first 20 years of its existence. Today, support for secularism runs high and the concept has become a central tradition within French society. For President Jacques Chirac, the Law of 1905 is an important "pillar" of liberty.

This October, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy created a commission to consider amending the law, in an effort to address the scarcity of Muslim mosques in France. Such a change would not be the first: since it was established in 1905, the law has been modified 10 times.

For more information, see our in-depth article in NFF 04.10, or visit www.1905-2005.fr.

MISS FRANCE 2006 CROWNED

Miss France 2006 will be 19-year-old Alexandra Rosenfeld. Miss Languedoc (a region on France's western Mediterranean coast) was elected by French television viewers (on channel TF1) voting by phone and by a panel of celebrity judges, including actor Jean Reno and rock star Johnny Hallyday. Sophie Ducasse from the Paris region and Laetitia Faquel from Albigeois, in the southwest, finished second and third, respectively. Notably, the 2006 competition was the first Miss France competition to contain a bikini round. Rosenfeld is in her second year of college and is studying tourism in the hopes of opening her own travel agency. She lists her discipline and comfort with competition as her greatest strengths (she is a long-time track athlete); her greatest shortcoming is a lack of confidence. Outgoing Miss France, Cindy Fabre (see NFF 04.14), was on hand to present her successor with the crown.

French Students Mix Work and Studies

A RECENT POLL by CSA shows that nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of French university students have already had a paid job at some point in their lives, while one out of two students works during the school year. This covers a wide range of employment situations, from babysitting and performing other small jobs to working full-time.

According to Unef, a student union, “In general, paid activity does not have an adverse impact on exam perfor-

Men prefer brunettes. It’s official. Men have expressed their hair-color preference when it comes to women, and the winners are... brunettes! A survey taken in France asked men what hair color they preferred: 56 percent (and a whopping 60 percent of men under 35) preferred brunettes. However, when women were asked what hair color they thought men preferred, a substantial 58 percent believed that it was blond.

Social News S O C I É T É
Contemporary Iraqi Art on Exhibit in Paris

PARIS WILL HOLD the first exhibition to show contemporary Iraqi works in Paris since the modern art museum of Baghdad was ransacked in 2003. Mohammed Zenad, director of the Al-Athar Art Gallery in Baghdad, wanted to show that “art and beauty have always been alive in Iraq,” and that “[its art] shows the ancient man of Sumer bending under modern misfortune.” Zenad chose Paris as he was inspired by pioneers such as De Shakir Hassan and Jawad Salim, who studied at l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Almost 800 pieces by 42 Iraqi artists are included in the exhibit, with at least two works per artist.

Zenad has been gathering works from Iraqi artists since the age of 17, braving danger and destruction to do so. The pieces he collected have traveled from Jordan to Tunisia and beyond. He is driven by the desire to prove to those abroad that, beyond the images conveyed by the media, there is a nation of people whose hearts beat and whose souls survive despite all the chaos. There is, in Iraq, a world of beauty that has been captured by its artists. Once Zenad received support from corporate sponsor Bernard Krief Capital, he was able to fulfill his dream and bring his message of hope and optimism to France.

Zenad had to take the “road of death” between Amman and Baghdad, where he was detained at a checkpoint and, despite having the necessary paperwork, was forced to give up the pieces for a week. Today, he has miraculously succeeded in bringing this Iraqi art to Paris.

The exhibition will run through January 15 at the Musée du Montparnasse. For more information, please visit www.museedumontparnasse.net.

Renovated Petit Palais Reopens to Public

THE PETIT PALAIS has just emerged from four years of renovations; it has undergone a true metamorphosis, and is now the architectural jewel it was meant to be in the very prestigious Champs-Elysées neighborhood. It was created for the Universal Exposition of 1900 to house a city museum which opened its doors in 1902.

To mark its reopening, Artist Quentin Blake, who made headlines in 2001 when he drew on the walls of London’s National Gallery, has been given carte blanche to do the same with the walls of the Petit Palais. Giles Chazal of the Petit Palais remarks, “the walls of our galleries have begun to float into the clouds, and the ladies of the banks of the Seine to talk, discuss, argue, laugh, cry, sing.” The museum has also unveiled a “Women of Paris” exhibit that can be viewed until February 12. It features works by Renoir, Degas and Cassatt, along with lesser-known 19th- and 20th-century paintings from the Petit Palais’s reserve collection.

Among its permanent collection, largely bequeathed by Auguste Dutuit, visitors can find ancient artifacts, medieval objects, rare manuscripts and books, and Dutch paintings from the 17th century. The collection includes Poussin’s The Massacre of the Innocents, Ruben’s Prosperpina, and Rembrandt’s Self-Portrait with Poodle.

Like all City of Paris museums, the Petit Palais now has no admission charge. To learn more, visit petitpalais.paris.fr.

Reconstructing La Fayette’s Frigate in Rochefort

IN 1780, LA FAYETTE set off to defend freedom in America. Today, his splendid frigate, the 213-foot-long Hermione, is being rebuilt exactly as it once was. The reconstruction is taking place in the town of Rochefort, located in the west of France.

In January 1779, the Marquis de La Fayette, a 21-year-old French aristocrat, came back from America where he had fought as a volunteer alongside the patriots seeking independence from Great Britain. He was able to convince the King of France to provide military and financial assistance to General George Washington. On March 21, 1780, La Fayette arrived in Rochefort and boarded a brand-new frigate, the Hermione. After a 38-day crossing, he joined General Washington to inform him of the imminent arrival of French reinforce-
Celebrating French Contemporary Art in New York

**WHY STYLE**, French Contemporary Art in New York

French artist Bruno Peinado is featuring some of his work in a New York exhibition, "WHY STYLE," in what is his first major solo show in the United States. Hosted by the Swiss Institute-Contemporary Art, the French artist has recently garnered fame internationally in the art world.

The title refers to the classic hip-hop film, *Wild Style* (1982) by Charlie Ahearn, which depicts the beginnings of the hip hop scene in South Bronx. *Wild Style* shows a generation of DJs, rappers, and graffiti artists who create innovative works while making compromises between the integrity of their art and its misuse and co-opting by the media.

"WHY STYLE" is a turn of phrase that suggests the balance struck between the media and fashion worlds' method of appropriation and the reversal of such gestures. The exhibition engenders a visual assault that features many references that are inverted and turned inside out, such as a 6 becoming a 9, or popular logos caught in Native American dream catchers, blacked-out American flags, white musicians in blackface performing, and Malcolm Mclaren's elevation of trash-punk with the New York Dolls. The borrowing and quotations create an abundance of well-known signs and symbols caught in a circle, somewhere between the iconic black cube monoliths of minimalism and South Bronx Graffiti.

WHY STYLE will be on view through January 7 at the Swiss Institute in New York. To learn more, visit www.swissinstitute.net.