

Villepin Outlines Middle East Plan

According to the French Foreign Minister, "We Need a Real Partnership with the Middle East."

FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER Dominique de Villepin outlined France's plan for the Middle East region in an interview with Le Figaro newspaper on February 19. Insisting on "the importance of starting with the needs and expectations of the countries in the Middle East, and of not trying to dictate solutions," Villepin proposed to involve these countries up front, in a spirit of genuine partnership. He also advocated a comprehensive approach that would take into account all the key issues – political, economic, social, cultural, educational- as well as the security aspects. "Otherwise, our initiative might be perceived as being motivated solely by our security interests rather than by our wish to see the region develop," Villepin warned. He finally reiterated that "if we want to be credible, we cannot ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The French Foreign Minister named three areas in which such large-scale cooperation on the Middle East could occur: "political dialogue first of all, in order to move forward with democracy, good governance and human rights; next, economic and social development, to introduce necessary structural reforms; and, finally, support for efforts by civil society to encourage a cultural dialogue." He added, "This cooperation could lead to a general declaration enunciating the principles of a true 'partnership for peace and progress.' It would define the major steps that must be taken in the region, steps that range from the non-recourse to force, for example, to the strengthening of educational systems."

The French Foreign Minister noted that "Europe is a natural partner of the region" since it has long built deep ties with the countries of the Middle East. Asked about the way in which concrete results could be achieved, Villepin said that France wants to quickly get moving with large-scale cooperation on the Middle East "with our European partners, to begin with: France wants this topic to be placed on the agenda of upcoming European meetings, starting with the European Council in March. Then with the countries of the region,

notably through our dialogue with the Arab League. And finally with our major partners, particularly within the framework of the G8." Villepin stressed in particular that the French ideas complement the "Greater Middle East" initiative recently proposed by the Bush administration. "We want to work with our American friends to maximize the complementary nature of our approaches," declared Villepin. | |



Moshé Katsav, President of the state of Israël, recently paid a state visit to France at the invitation of President Jacques Chirac. President Katsav (right) met with French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin on February 16 in Paris. This state visit by the president of Israel to France is the second in history, after Haim Herzog's in 1988.

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Twenty Year Old TV5 Sets its Sights Ever Higher

The participating nations of TV5 met in Québec on February 13 to adopt the network's 2004 budget.

TV5, THE FRANCOPHONE international network, the second largest in the world after MTV (but ahead of both CNN and BBC International), is celebrating its 20th birthday this year. TV5 boasts an audience of over 147 million homes and centers its programming around international news. A government-supported network that prides itself on its rich reflection of the cultural diversity of the French-speaking world, TV5 is seeking to broaden its appeal with more movies, sports and documentaries.

The 28th annual conference provided an opportunity for all the contributing parties to salute the success of the global network, which increased its world-wide distribution by 30 percent just three years ago. It has now become a fundamental tool for the encouragement of multilateral communication.

Despite budgetary constraints, the participating countries, including Canada, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal, reached an agreement to increase their financial contribution by 2.5 percent for 2004. TV5 has also promised to increase its commercial rev-



The "Journal de l'Eco" on TV5
(Courtesy: TV5 / Les Echos)

enues, which would make the channel less reliant on government aid. During the conference, the participating ministers expressed their profound attachment to the development and evolution of the network in the years to come.

Along those lines, the ministerial conference saluted the country of Senegal for its proposal to solicit a more active role for TV5 in African nations. This follows measures taken by TV5 to take part in the initiatives launched by the United Nations in January 2004 and to play a more active role in the dissemination of material that would increase public knowledge and understanding of HIV and AIDS.

Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations and Serge Adda, president of TV5, signed an accord reading in part, "Through its extensive reach, media can be used as a powerful force for educating and informing the public about the HIV /AIDS epidemic. We therefore resolve, through our companies, to expand public knowledge and understanding about HIV/AIDS."

For more information, please visit www.tv5.org. | |

ISRAEL, FRANCE
REINFORCE FRIENDSHIP

Israeli President Moshe Katzav arrived in France, home to the world's third largest Jewish community, on February 16 for a four-day state visit. Warmly received by President Jacques Chirac, the two heads of state called for closer Franco-Israeli relations. Since 2002, the two nations have launched a variety of joint projects in the fields of science, commerce, education and culture. France has also intensified its fight against anti-Semitism, and the country already has fewer anti-Semitic incidents, in proportion to its population, than the U.S., the U.K., or other European countries.

FRANCE AND BRAZIL
PROPOSE LULA FUND

On January 30, France and Brazil reintroduced the idea of international taxes on arms sales and financial transactions in order to provide funding to combat hunger and poverty around the world. Presidents Jacques Chirac of France and Luis Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil set up a group of several experts to find new sources of funding to fight poverty. The initiative was backed by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and Chilean President Ricardo Lagos.

CONFERENCE ON FUTURE
OF IRAQ PROPOSED

During a visit to India, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin reiterated on February 13 the need to hold an international conference on the future of Iraq. He also stated that no single country can bring peace to Iraq—there must be a cooperative effort by the countries of the Arab world. Villepin declared, "One country can win a war but no country can obtain peace alone."

WORLD PHOTO
PRIZE GOES TO
FRENCHMAN

Frenchman Jean-Marc Bouju has won the World Press Photo of the Year award. The prize photo was chosen from a record of more than 63,000 images by 4,176 photographers from 124 countries. The winning photo shows an Iraqi war prisoner holding his 4-year-old son at a U.S. detention camp. California-resident Bouju recalls taking the photo after American soldiers had cut the plastic handcuffs off the prisoner so that he could embrace his child.

NEW AIRCRAFT
CARRIER TO BE
NON-NUCLEAR

President Jacques Chirac announced February 13 that France's new aircraft carrier will be conventionally powered, thus rejecting the option of building a sister ship of the nuclear-powered Charles-de-Gaulle. "This choice responds perfectly to future operational requirements and offers the best perspectives for cooperation with the United Kingdom," said Chirac. Indeed, the U.K. has already asked French defense company Thales to design two conventionally powered aircraft carriers, which opens up many possible avenues for cooperation and cost savings. The new carrier is slated to enter service in 2014.

Rapid Response Force Unveiled

France, U.K. and Germany propose a European "force de frappe"

FRANCE, Great Britain, and Germany presented their joint project for a rapid response force to the European Union on February 10. The well-equipped, well-trained force would consist of combat units that could quickly be deployed to crisis locations threatening European lives or interests. Such a measure grew out of an initial proposal made by France and Great Britain during their November 2003 Summit. At that time, the proposal was geared toward operations in Africa. Currently, the concept is evolving, but the aim remains the same: protection of regional interests.

Those in favor of such an alliance state that there is a need for the development of an entity, in addition to NATO, that has complete understanding of European matters, and that could quickly step into crisis situations.

Both British Prime Minister

Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac stated that it was time the E.U. "pulled its weight" and took a more active role in speedy military interventions. Officials cited the successful 2003 French-led intervention in Bunia, Congo, as an example of the type of missions the new force could conduct.

FRENCH OFFICERS NAMED
TO 2 KEY NATO POSITIONS

NATO recently accorded two French officers key command positions. A French admiral will join the Supreme Command in charge of the transatlantic alliance's transformation, and a French general will head part of NATO's Response Force (NRF). This reinforces France's strong ties with NATO and in particular with the NRF, a quarter of whose 8,000 men are from France. The NRF, launched by the U.S., is equipped to deal with new security threats, particularly terrorism.

Officials emphasized that the European force would work under the auspices of the U.N. and alongside NATO. It would be a step toward the goal, adopted in 1999, of creating a 60,000-strong E.U. rapid reaction force. The new force would be open to all E.U. states, with the hopes that each major country would contribute units of 1,500 troops ready to be deployed within 15 days, making for a total complement of approximately 10,000 troops. The trio expressed their desire to be fully ready for combat by 2007. | |

Villepin in Kabul, Reaffirms France's Support

FRANCE WILL BOOST its financial support to Afghanistan, as well as its role in rebuilding the country, said French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin during a visit to Kabul on February 12. He reiterated "France's determination to take action in Afghanistan to encourage stabilization, peace and the establishment of a state of law."



Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin welcomed by Col. Morel (left) while visiting French soldiers based in Kabul.

(Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

mand of the NATO-led international peacekeepers in Kabul."

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is a force of 6,500 presently under NATO command and is responsible for helping Afghan authorities maintain security in Kabul. France, committed to the mission, is at the heart of ISAF with 550 men. Eurocorps, a Franco-German brainchild created in 1992, is now made up of troops from Belgium, France,

Germany, Luxembourg and Spain. It has previously participated successfully in NATO peacekeeping operations in both Bosnia and Kosovo.

The French foreign minister also said that France wants to provide more aid to Afghanistan. He reaffirmed France's support for the implementation of the political process defined in Bonn in 2001, in particular the organization of presidential and assembly elections in 2004. Villepin also told Afghan leaders that France would make Afghanistan a priority for financial assistance in the future and would support projects to strengthen health and education services as well as Afghanistan's culture. | |

FRANCE OPENS MILITARY
COLLEGE IN AFGHANISTAN

France opened a military college in Afghanistan on February 14, in what was the latest step in efforts to get the country's fledgling national army off the ground. The \$750,000 new training center for officers is patterned on the French model and was set up by the French military in a rebuilt building on the edge of Kabul. The college aims to train 60 officers during its first six months. Courses include logistics, communications and operations. French General Maurice Amarger, who represented the French Defense Ministry at the opening ceremony, said that "it is a challenging but noble task and I am very proud that my country accepted the proposal of the Afghan authorities and of our Coalition partners to train Afghan officers." The Afghan National Army is considered vital to the long-term security of the country. The United States and other nations in the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan have been working together to forge the new Afghan army so that it can rapidly take the place of regional militias loyal only to provincial warlords.



Congressional French Caucus in France

A U.S. delegation led by Representative Amory Houghton met with France's government

ON FEBRUARY 16, a delegation from the United States Congress met with French President Jacques Chirac at the Presidential Palace in Paris to discuss ways in which to improve Franco-American rela-

tions. The meeting marked the first visit to France by the newly-formed Congressional Franco-American Friendship Caucus.

The bipartisan caucus is headed by Representative Amory Houghton, a Republican congressman from New York, and counts 38 representatives and 14 senators as members, including 30 Republicans and 22 Democrats. The group was created by Houghton as a means of promoting Franco-American cooperation in the wake of the recent war in Iraq.

Houghton was joined in France by four other members of the caucus, Representative James Oberstar (D-Minnesota), Representative Thomas Petri (R-Wisconsin),

Representative Nancy Johnson (R-Connecticut), and Representative Joseph Knollenberg (R-Michigan).

According to Houghton, the meeting with Chirac was both friendly and frank. "It's very important for the United States to reestablish our relationship as it was prior to 9/11 with France and that's what we're doing," the congressman explained. For his part, Chirac assured the delegates that relations between Paris and Washington "are rooted in History and in the future." Both parties expressed their eagerness to work together.

During their two-day visit in France, the delegation also met with Foreign Minister Dominique



Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin meets with the congressional delegation.

(Courtesy: Foreign Ministry)

de Villepin, Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie, Minister for the Economy Francis Mer, and Minister for Justice Dominique Perben, as well as representatives from the National Assembly and the Senate. | I

La Fontaine à l'Américaine

TALKING ANIMALS have invaded the Comédie Française theater in Paris. These animals do more than just talk, however, they convey life lessons to their audiences; these are the animals of the famous French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine.

La Fontaine's elegant fables are being brought to life on stage for the first time by American director Robert Wilson. The challenge of portraying La Fontaine's 245 fables theatrically was duly accepted by Wilson, a veteran director from Texas. He decided to approach the enormous task by focusing solely on the fables which include animals. After much deliberation, Wilson chose 19 fables to be enacted.

Wilson's cast includes 14 actors, each of whom portrays the many animals which people La Fontaine's fables. In addition, a narrator is used to clarify and unify the action. The

play aptly opens with "Le Lion amoureux" (The Amorous Lion), set in "a time when animals spoke," and ends with "Les Compagnons d'Ulysse" (The Companions of Ulysses), which describes men who have been transformed into animals and who are reluctant to regain their original form.



The Ant and the Grasshopper

(Courtesy: Cynthia Sager)

La Fontaine was born in 1621 in Château-Thierry. An avid reader, La Fontaine eventually began to produce his own writings. A friend of such literary giants as Molière, Boileau, and Racine among others, La Fontaine is best known for his fables, though he produced works in many genres of literature. In 1684, La Fontaine was elected to the Académie Française.

Fables, Wilson's theatrical rendition of La Fontaine's classic works, is scheduled to play at the Comédie Française through the end of May 2004. | I

Smithsonian Francophony Festival

FOR THIS YEAR'S festival of francophony, which celebrates the cultural diversity of the French-speaking world, the Smithsonian Associates will propose a series of four films and three concerts showcasing six different francophone countries.

The Belgian comedy *Petites Misères* by Philippe Boon, will be screened on March 2, followed by *Abouna*, a spirited film from Chadian director Mahamet-Saleh Haroun, on March 9. March 16 will see the presentation of *Aime ton Père*, a Swiss film by Jacob Berger which tells the story of the reconciliation between novelist Leo Shepherd (played by Gérard Depardieu) and his son, Paul (played by Depardieu's son

Guillaume). The fourth film, *Raja* by Jacques Doillon, will be shown on March 23. *Raja* offers a provocative portrait of colonial society in Morocco through the relationship between a French man and one of his garden laborers.

Quebec singer Renee Calude, who gives her own spin to the French classics of Brassens with her warm and passionate voice, will perform on March 5. On March 25, Fania of Senegal will present a spirited cocktail of African and Europe musical styles. Finally, on March 31, Malagasy guitarist Solo Razaf will play folk music from his native country as well as French *chansons*.

For more information: www.residentassociates.org. | I

FRANCOPHONY WORKSHOP TO BE HELD IN GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The French Embassy is pleased to invite all students and teachers of French to its latest workshop, "J'apprends la francophonie," a one-day session designed to give attendees an updated overview of the French-speaking world. Come and spend a francophone day that will help beef up your French courses with new insights on Francophony. Learn more about Leopold Sedar Senghor, discover new French words, make the most of African tales in your class and pick up some ready-to-use resources. The workshop will be held in Georgetown University, on March, 20. For more information and to make a reservation, please e-mail:

Henri.Hannequin@diplomatie.gouv.fr

U.S. TO COUNT EXPATRIATES IN FRANCE

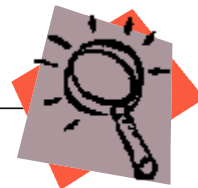
The U.S. Census Bureau scheduled on February 2 a six-month trial to count the number of American citizens living in France. The trial, mandated by the U.S. Congress, is designed to measure the difficulties involved in tallying the number of Americans overseas who are not members of the military or of the federal government. Long-term U.S. residents in France are now expected to report to their nearest consulate in order to register themselves. A report on the trial, which will also cover Kuwait and Mexico, will be made available in early 2005.

CANADIAN COIN MARKS FIRST FRENCH SETTLEMENT IN AMERICA

The royal Canadian Mint released a new silver dollar coin to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first French settlement in North America. The coin is part of a year-long celebration marking the arrival of France's first colonists in North America. These pioneers included Samuel de Champlain, who, along with 79 other colonists, founded the Sainte-Croix settlement in 1604, on an island lying in the Sainte-Croix river between Maine and New Brunswick. The Canadian coin features a 17th-century ship and Champlain's drawing of his settlement.

FRANCE TELEVISIONS DONATES ARCHIVES TO N.Y. MUSEUM

French Television donated one hundred hours worth of archival television shows to the New York Museum of Radio and Television on February 3. This donation, of extracts from TV news, movies, concerts or shows, is a "testimony to the French contribution to television history, and a sign of friendship with the United States" said Marc Tessier, CEO of France Télévisions. At the same time in New York, television representatives from the two countries met to discuss future joint productions.



TAPESTRY-MAKING IN FRANCE

On January 30, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, French minister for culture and communication, inaugurated the new workshops of the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory in Paris. Together with the Beauvais Tapestry Manufactory and the Savonnerie Carpet Manufactory, it is one of three national factories that continue the fascinating, centuries-old tradition of tapestry-making.

The Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory

THE GOBELINS MANUFACTORY was founded in Paris as a dye works in the mid-15th century by Jean Gobelin, a Flemish dyer who settled on the banks of the river Bièvre in the Faubourg Saint Marcel (which later became the capital's 13th *arrondissement*).

In 1662, on the advice of Colbert, the minister of finance, King Louis XIV purchased the Gobelins manufactory to bring all the royal craftsmen together at one central workshop that could produce Versailles's ornate furniture and the Tuileries. Its official title became the *Manufacture Royale des Meubles de la Couronne* (Royal Factory for the Crown's Furniture).

Charles Le Brun, First Painter to Louis XIV, was the first director of the manufactory from 1663 to 1690. Under his direction, a team of 50 workmen completed the furnishings for the Versailles Palace, and their splendid works established the manufactory's international reputation. The numerous craftsmen Le Brun directed included tapestry weavers, painters, bronze-workers, engravers, furniture makers, goldsmiths and

silversmiths—all of whose works were exclusively intended for the king's palaces or as royal gifts to diplomatic representatives.

Because of financial difficulties in the wake of the sovereign's excessive spending on Versailles, the Gobelins manufactory was temporarily closed from 1694 to 1697, after which the

plant focused solely on the weaving of tapestries. This specialization helped to reestablish its reputation, and the tapestries woven at the Gobelins were the finest of any produced in Europe in the 1600s and 1700s. Detailed preparatory drawings were ordered from leading painters such as Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Charles Coypel, François Boucher.

During the reign of Louis XIV, the tapestries of Gobelins celebrated

the glory of the Sun King, but in the 18th century the subjects were lighter and more frivolous. After declining for several years, the art of tapestry weaving was again revived during the reign of Napoleon. The most common designs consisted of historical subjects, and each tapestry took a team of weavers from two to six years to complete!



The Gobelins manufactory, Colbert courtyard
(Courtesy: Manufacture des Gobelins)

The Beauvais and Savonnerie Manufactories

UNLIKE THE GOBELINS Manufactory, whose production was exclusively for the Crown, the Beauvais Manufactory, founded in 1664, was the fruit of a private enterprise. Its location was decided by the state, however, and in order to discourage imports, Colbert decided to establish the manufactory halfway between Flanders, a region known for its high production of tapestries, and Paris.

In the 18th century, the production at Beauvais reached its climax, notably due to the collaboration between late Baroque and Rococo painters Jean-Baptiste Oudry and François Boucher (see our article on page 8). After it was bombed in World War II, the factory workshops were moved to Gobelins. Though most of the production remains merged with that of Gobelins, in 1989 some of the equipment and craftsmen returned to a newly inaugurated building in Beauvais.

Carpet-making in France began when Henri IV founded a

factory in the Louvre Galleries. This operation was later expanded by Louis XIII who installed workshops on the edge of the Seine, in a former soap factory (a *savonnerie*), from which the factory got its name.

The greatest success of the Savonnerie Manufactory came with the order of two huge decorative projects—the 13 carpets of the Apollo gallery and the 93 carpets made to link the Louvre and the Tuileries—under the reign of Louis XIV. When the king moved to Versailles, the subsequent increase in orders served to renew this factory's production.

In the 18th century, the manufactory shifted to the style of Louis XV, with bursting colors and naturalist decorations such as cornucopias or fruit. Under the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Savonnerie was busy providing furniture for imperial homes. In 1826, the factory was moved to the Gobelins to consolidate the nation's production facilities.

The Tradition Continues...

NOWADAYS, 135 WEAVERS—mostly women—use the same materials as the ones used when Louis XIV established the first manufactory: wool, cotton, silk, and gold or silver threads. The weavers restore old tapestries damaged by time and work on new projects based on models designed by contemporary artists which are approved by a consultative commission headed by the French Ministry for Culture.

Although the tapestries are mainly created for national monuments and churches, or presented as diplomatic gifts, some factories, such as the *Manufacture d'Aubusson* sell them to the public.

Finishing a work still takes years: for instance, at the Gobelins manufactory, there is a 40-square-meter carpet made out of 270 different shades of color which was started in 1996 and is still being worked on!

TECHNIQUES USED IN TAPESTRY-MAKING

The actual process of weaving has not changed in centuries. Before the 1600s, miniature paintings or sketches were made for the weavers to interpret. Beginning in the 17th century, cartoons—exact life-size paintings of the intended tapestry, painted by great artists such as Raphael—were used as models directly under the warp in the loom. Skilled weavers were paid according to the difficulty of their work; those entrusted with heads and flesh tones received the highest wages.

Low-warp weaving (*basse-lisse*)

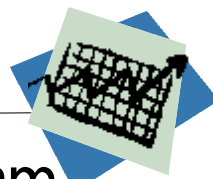
In the Beauvais Manufactory, the weavers work with horizontal looms and use wool for the warp, which is mounted on two horizontal wooden rollers. Using this age-old method, weavers work bobbins full of colored wool or silk from the reverse side of the tapestry and cannot see the image they are creating until it is completed and cut off of the loom. It takes about a month to weave one meter of tapestry.

High-harp weaving (*haute-lisse*)

Exclusively used in the Gobelins Manufactory since 1826, this technique uses a vertical loom made out of two mobile and parallel rollers supported by two beams. The threads, stretched vertically, are separated into two layers: one layer remains fixed while the other can be moved in and out as wool, silk or another material is woven through to create the tapestry. Though this type of loom also requires the weaver to work on the reverse side of the tapestry, unlike the low-warp method, the high-warp loom allows the weaver to use a mirror to view the visible, woven image as it is being created.



Weaver at work
(Courtesy: Manufacture des Gobelins)



Europe Reinvigorates Space Program

France will continue to fund most of the European Space Agency's budget over the next 5 years

THE MEMBER NATIONS of the European Space Agency (ESA) ambitiously decided on February 4 to finance three major programs that will ensure Europe's continued independent access to space. The decision to move forward with these programs was initially decided in May 2003.

One of these programs, European Guaranteed Access to Space, will receive 960 million euros over a 5-year period (2005-2009). According to ESA administrators, this will be enough to continue improving the Ariane-5 launcher, and to build a total of 30 rockets (six per year). France will finance 55 percent of the program, and its partners Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom will provide the remaining funds. This marks the first time that the

United Kingdom is participating in ArianeSpace.

An additional 223 million euros, including 129 million from France, will go toward the development of the Soyuz program in French Guyana, including the construction of a new launch pad designed to accommodate the Russian rocket (Ariane and Soyuz will be launched from different locations for security reasons—please refer to News from France issue 03.13 for more information). The Director General of ESA, Jean-Jacques Dordain, declared, "When a Soyuz lifts off from Kourou in 2006, we shall share with our Russian partner a great moment in European space history."

Finally, 24 million euros have been earmarked for the Future Launchers Preparation Program, which will allow the development of new rockets and help keep Europe competitive in space. **I I**

Most Distant Known Galaxy Discovered

THE MOST DISTANT GALAXY ever identified was observed for the first time by an international team of scientists led by French astronomer Jean-Paul Kneib, using the powerful capabilities of the Hubble Space Telescope. According to the researchers, the galaxy lies roughly 13 billion light-years from Earth, meaning that its light takes 13 billion years to reach us.

"The galaxy we have discovered is extremely faint, and verifying its distance has been an extraordinarily challenging adventure," said Kneib, who splits his time between the California Institute of Technology and the Midi-Pyrénées Observatory in France.

The observation was made via a natural phenomenon of

magnification provoked by a massive cluster of galaxies, called Abell 2218, which deflected and amplified the light emitted by the distant galaxy. Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity first suggested the existence of this magnification process, known as "gravitational lensing."

"Without the 25x magnification afforded by the foreground cluster, this early object could simply not have been identified or studied in any detail at all with the present telescopes available," commented Kneib.

The researchers' findings were presented on February 15 during the annual meeting of the American

Association for the Advancement of Science in Seattle, and they will soon be published in the *Astrophysical Journal*. **I I**



The farthest known galaxy in the universe - an artist's illustration by Jon Lomberg.

(Courtesy: W.M. Keck Observatory, Jon Lomberg)

The Rebirth of Paradise

ONE SUREFIRE RECIPE for increasing biodiversity is to remove all human impact from a stressed ecosystem, close the door on one's way out, and come back in a couple of decades. This is just what the French did with the Iles Glorieuses, or Glorioso Islands (a tiny two-island chain northwest of Madagascar) in response to coral degradation.

No longer inhabited except for a tiny garrison of soldiers whose job is to enforce the islands' status as a nature reserve, the islands were recently revisited by a scientific mission organized by IFRECOR (French Initiative for Coral Reefs) to assess the flora and fauna, and in particular, the state of the coral reef platform on which the islands sit. Other goals included



Pacific coral reef

(Courtesy: WWF Malaysia - DJW Lane)

launching a search among the broad biodiversity of this environment for molecules that could be used to develop new drugs.

In these waters that are off-limits to fishing, the expedition observed schools of fish 20 feet high in places, and including a wide variety of species, such as five-foot saltwater loaches and many kinds of groupers, as well as fish of every imaginable color. In the coral reef department, the offering was equally abundant, as mission scientists counted some 50 varieties of coral, all in bristling health. IFRECOR-funded scientists will carry on this work of analyzing and classifying the life of the Gloriosos while also using the reefs as a laboratory for coral health and a case study of algae/coral symbiosis. **I I**

BIOLOGICAL FARMING GETS A BOOST

Biological agriculture (AB), which advocates environmentally friendly farming practices, is the French Ministry of Agriculture's latest big investment. Approximately 50 million euros are being set aside to rebuild France's AB program over the next five years. Combating problems of distribution to the larger supermarket chains, such as Carrefour, and deciding whether or not products with genetically modified organisms will be allowed to carry the logo "AB" are two of the initiative's priorities.

OXYGEN AND CARBON FOUND ON ANOTHER PLANET

French scientists from the Astrophysical Institute of Paris, using NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, have for the first time detected oxygen and carbon in the atmosphere of a planet that is not in our solar system. Nicknamed Osiris, the planet is located in the Pegasus constellation, about 150 light years from Earth. About the size of Jupiter, Osiris has an orbit very close to its star, creating a surface temperature that exceeds 1200 C. Due to the curiously explosive activity in its atmosphere, observing Osiris could help us better understand Earth's formation.

FRENCH-JAPANESE ROBOTICS ALLIANCE

Japan and France recently decided to collaborate more closely in the field of robotic science. The scientific teams of both countries have created the Joint Robotic Laboratory, with sites in Versailles, France, and Tsukuba, Japan, to combine Japanese know-how and French expertise in software design. The new alliance hopes to create state-of-the-art robots with functions varying from surgical assistance to space exploration.

ELECTRONIC CANE HELPS VISUALLY IMPAIRED

After eight years of work, the CNRS in France has begun commercializing an electronic cane for the blind. The new technology measures distances to objects and relays the information back to the user either by sound or vibration. After having completed their training, the first users are thrilled by their new-found autonomy. The CNRS will begin distributing canes to the 10,000 blind persons in France who lead active lives (out of a total of 50,000).

1.8 MILLION FEWER SMOKERS IN FRANCE

A study published in February by the National Institute for Prevention and Health Education reveals that the number of smokers in France has decreased 12 percent—1.8 million individuals—since 1999. This decrease has been attributed to recent price hikes on cigarettes (a pack of cigarettes in France now costs approximately six dollars), and it bodes well for the success of the plan against cancer launched by President Jacques Chirac one year ago.

'QUICK—WHAT TO DRINK?'

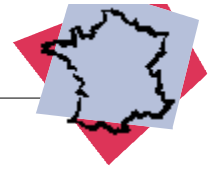
The National Inter-professional Office of Wine unveiled on February 3 an official French wine Web site entitled "Quick—what to drink?" One can select from three different characters who each explain a different aspect of the processes associated with wine. The winegrower explains crops, production, land, and the climate associated with wine, the wine waiter explains how to taste, serve, and recognize wines, and the wine expert explains the vocabulary of wine exporting and how to categorize wines. Check out the site at www.vins-france.com (available in French, English, German, and Spanish).

FRENCHMAN WINS FIRST EUROPEAN LOTTERY

"Euro Millions," the first European lottery, was launched on Friday, February 13, and a Frenchman from Bourges, Cher, won the 15-million euro jackpot. Over seven million French citizens participated in this first ever trans-national lottery which brought together lottery operators from France, the United Kingdom, and Spain. Operators from the three Benelux countries, as well as Ireland and Portugal, have also expressed an interest in joining, and organizers hope to extend "Euro Millions" all over Europe. Organizers have said that future jackpots could rise up to 74 million euros. Winning numbers will be announced every Friday in Paris.

THREE NEW THREE-STAR RESTAURANTS IN MICHELIN 2004

The 2004 Michelin Restaurant Guide will officially be released on February 27. At the top, 27 restaurants will be in the three-star category in the 2004 guide, including one new arrival (Michel Trama's Loges de l'Aubergade in Puymiro) and two restaurants that had previously lost their three-star rating (Marc Meneau's L'Espérance in Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay and Jean-Michel Lorain's Côte Saint-Jacques in Joigny). Sixty-seven restaurants were awarded two stars, and 410 one star. Bon appétit!



Government Answers Call of Father Pierre

Prime Minister pledges that housing for the poor will be high on his government's agenda.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER his first public appeal for action in the fight against social poverty and exclusion, Father Pierre, 91, founder of the Emmaüs charity and popularly known as the embodiment of the "conscience of France," denounced on February 1 the shortage of social housing, rising rents, and congested housing structures. French President Jacques Chirac, who received Father Pierre for dinner at the Elysée Palace on that same day, declared that he was favorable to the possible requisitioning of unoccupied housing, a measure he had himself implemented when he was mayor of Paris.



Father Pierre
(Courtesy: www.maison-aube.org)

The French government promptly announced on February 4 that it will finance in 2004 the construction of 80,000 low-rent housings. Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin also announced that a "big national debate on housing for the poor" will be held in the fall, in answer to Father Pierre's wish. Raffarin notably set four priorities for his government's housing policy: maintaining a rapid rhythm of construction, intensifying the rehabilitation of private housing, reinforcing solidarity, and promoting access to property.

According to the Abbé Pierre Foundation's report on housing released in January 2004, more than 3 million people live in unsatisfactory conditions in France.

Jules Verne Bested

Francis Joyon sails around the world in 73 days, setting a new world record.

FRANCIS JOYON has proven that it is possible to go around the world in 73 days. Or, to be more precise, in 72 days, 22 hours, 54 minutes and 22 seconds. On February 3, 2004, the 47-year-old Frenchman captured the non stop solo round-the-world sailing record, breaking the previous record by more than 20 days.

His historic voyage in a 90-foot multihull sailing boat came astonishingly close to beating the 71-day record set in 1997 for a fully crewed circumnavigation of the globe. Averaging 372 miles a day, Joyon has amazed and inspired the sailing world with his feat.

Joyon's accomplishment is all the more incredible when his lack of major sponsors is taken into account. Known for his resistance to publicity, he lost his financial backing from



Francis Joyon on his sailboat with his two companions.

(Courtesy: IDEC / Mer & Média)

Banque Populaire in 2000, and thus undertook his voyage on a tight budget provided by IDEC, a small French construction firm.

Though the boat Joyon sailed in had seen its share of record-setting trips, it was old and relatively run-down before he rented it. Joyon himself repaired the boat and repainted it in preparation for his voyage. As he could not afford a shore-based weather expert, he was forced to make all routing decisions by himself.

While Joyon's trip was taxing—the yachtsman slept only 4 hours a day—he enjoyed it thoroughly. As he

explained, "[This voyage] was the realization of a dream. ... Three months of solitude at sea, for a sailor, is a sought-after goal. Such an experience is synonymous with liberty." | |

French Government Goes Electronic

IN ORDER TO SIMPLIFY the lives of citizens all over France, the French government announced on February 9 a new plan to digitize its administration. The new *Administration Electronique*, dubbed ADELE, will break down barriers between citizens and the State, allowing the public swift and easy access to all administrative agencies, as well as expediting services in several domains such as address changes and social security payments. Its implementation will take place gradually, and should be fully in place by the year 2007. In all, ADELE will affect at least 140 different government services that will become accessible either by telephone or Internet.

Many new services will be created as well, among them a unique line enabling both citizens and corporations to

address their inquiries to the proper authorities by dialing 3939, a number formerly reserved for government workers, all for the price of a local phone call. Another project will introduce a new universal debit card allowing citizens to electronically pay fees for the municipal library, public pools, public transportation and even school lunches. And government-issued identity cards will now contain a special microchip containing various personal information.

Though the massive project will cost the French government a total of 1.8 billion euros (approximately \$2.3 billion) over the next three years, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin stated that once the implementation period is over, the plan will actually save the French government around five billion euros a year. | |



New Cultural Initiatives Announced

FRENCH CITIZENS have recently been greeted by four new initiatives from Minister of Culture and Communication Jean-Jacques Aillagon aimed at promoting a better understanding and appreciation of French history, keeping the country's cultural riches open to all citizens, and promoting the values that reinforce French identity.

The first of these programs, called "Passport for France," will be launched this year. On his or her 18th birthday, every French citizen will receive a cultural passport which will be good for life, and which will allow one free entry to each national museum and monument in France. The second initiative is called the "Picnic of Fraternity." The idea is for every community in France to have a public picnic on August 26, this date being the anniversary of the 1789 signing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. This grand

national picnic will promote culture through the experience of culinary diversity.

An exhibit entitled "France," put together by the National Museums' Organization, and featuring works from the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, Versailles and other national museums, is the third initiative. This exhibit, designed to portray France as a diverse and dynamic country, will travel to eight big cities, and will begin in late 2004. The fourth proposed project is a renovation and expansion of the Pantheon in Paris, to spruce up the French memorial where many of the country's best-known figures are buried.

Aillagon has also announced new measures, including the possibility of cultural grants and lodging, to encourage international artists and other cultural professionals to come to France. France is currently home to 25,000 international artists, architects, and writers. | |

Three Decades of Comic Celebration in Angoulême

IN JANUARY 1974, France began to honor a major art form—comic books! Sometimes also known as graphic novels, comics have been celebrated every year since January

25, 1974, at the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême (International Comics Festival in Angoulême), or more simply Angoulême BD. At the time, comic art had been experiencing an incredible renaissance, and Angoulême was home to many of the best comic artists. The city thus emerged as one of pictures, the Capital of Comics, where even the museum began to acquire original illustrations featured at the first festival.

Cartoons have long played an integral part in French culture, even before the creation of the festival at Angoulême. In 1985, French President François Mitterrand, finalized plans for the creation of a National Center of Comics and Images, which now houses

both a Library and a Museum for animated art. Also created was the Centre National de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image (National Center for Comics and Images).



La Marque Jaune, from the "Blake et Mortimer" album by Edgar P. Jacobs. An exhibit on the series, jointly organized by the Musée de l'Homme and the Angoulême Festival, runs through April 30 in Paris.

(courtesy: Musée de l'Homme - Blake et Mortimer)

Always held at the end of January, the festival was once again a great success over its four-day run (January 22-25), during which more than 10,000 square meters were dedicated to the celebration of comics. This year's Grand Prix, which honors an entire career and body of work, went to Philippe Chappuis, aka Zep, who is well known for his semi-autobiographical *Titeuf* series. *Le Combat Ordinaire*, by Manu Larcenet, was judged 2004's best album. On average, about 400,000 albums of comic art were sold by the festival's conclusion. | |

For more information, please visit:

www.b dangouleme.com.

February Fiestas in France

IN FRANCE, FEBRUARY is a fun and festive month, with carnivals galore! Originally a secular and pagan festival, the idea of carnival was embraced by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. It soon became a time of popular feasting and celebration in preparation for the hardships of lent. Indeed, the word carnival is derived from the Latin expression meaning "to remove meat," and so during the carnival, a fat cow would be led through the streets of Paris to remind its inhabitants to forego meat during the 40 days preceding Easter. Nowadays, though observing lent has fallen out of fashion, the country continues to celebrate carnival season, with Mardi Gras (February 24 this year) marking



The Nice Carnival's parade in 2003
(Courtesy: Andrew Wilk)

the festivities' high point.

One of the most famous winter festivals in France is the one that takes place in Nice. The Carnival of Nice, considered the most important carnival of Europe, will celebrate its 120th anniversary this year. It is especially famous for its balls and masquerades and is greatly inspired by Italian-style festivals. The highlight of the Nice carnival is its grotesque parade, similar to an immense comic strip where participants give free course to their imagination. The famous "Bataille des Fleurs" rages during the parade, as participants hurl flowers onto spectators. This year, the King of Clowning led his subjects across the city in front of approximately 1.25 million visitors. | |

«THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE» WINS AWARD

Sylvain Chomet's "the Triplets of Belleville," was named best film of 2003 at the ninth Lumières Awards, France's equivalent of the Golden Globes. "Belleville," an animated film abounding with fantasy and poetic humor, has also been nominated for two Oscars (Best Animated Film and Best Original Song) as well as three Césars, which are France's equivalent of the Oscars.

HENRI SALVADOR WINS GRAND PRIZE

The 2004 Grand Prize from the National Union of Authors and Composers was awarded on February 5 to 86-year-old Henri Salvador to honor his entire career. Salvador has seen great success in France and internationally with his 2001 CD, *Chambre Avec Vue* (Room with a View). Starting in February, Henri Salvador will begin a tour of France, with concerts in Grenoble, Marseille, and Strasbourg. He also hopes to go on an international tour, both to the U.S. and to Japan.

PERPIGNAN CELEBRATES DALI CENTENNIAL

According to the Spanish surrealist Salvador Dali, Perpignan's train station is "the center of the world." Mayor Jean-Paul Alduy, therefore, inaugurated on February 2 an illuminated column at the train station to symbolize its exalted status, and to launch the celebrations that mark the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth this year. These include six art exhibits and a cultural exchange program with Dali's hometown, Figueras (Spain).

OFFICE OF CINEMA PRODUCTION CREATED

Jean-Jacques Aillagon, French minister for culture, announced on February 3 the creation of an Office of Cinema Production. This office, consisting of producers, representatives of actors' unions, and representatives of TV stations, among others, will focus on the French film industry from an economic standpoint. Its first task will be to evaluate the effectiveness of the Ministry of Culture's 2003 initiatives in support of the French film industry.

CENTENNIAL OF PABLO NERUDA

Chilean-born poet Pablo Neruda will be celebrated throughout France in 2004, one hundred years after his birth, with conferences, art exhibits, and poetry readings and competitions. Neruda has strong ties to France, where he served as a Chilean consular officer, and later as his country's ambassador. It was during his tenure as ambassador in Paris that he received his Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971.



FRENCH ARTIST Samuel Rousseau's first solo exhibition can be seen at Parker's Box gallery, in Brooklyn, New York, until March 18. Rousseau is known for his illusionist and surrealist works, such as a weighing scale that sniggers derisively if anyone stands on it. While poking fun at everyday life, such works also reveal much about the ironies of modern life. For more information, please call Parker's Box at (718) 388 2882, or email them at info@parkersbox.com.

News from FRANCE

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Genius of the French Rococo

"The Drawings of François Boucher (1703-1770)" and "Boucher's Mythological Paintings: the Last Great Series Reunited" are on display at the Kimbell Art Museum, in Fort Worth, Texas

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER, the 18th-century French Rococo-style artist, is being commemorated on the 300th anniversary of his birth with an exhibition spanning his life's entire legacy, which include more than 10,000 drawings. For the first time ever, 80 of these graphic pieces are being housed under the same roof and can be viewed in a breathtaking ensemble in the Kimbell Art Museum, in Fort Worth, Texas. The exhibit showcases 80 drawings and 6 paintings on loan from museums and private collections from around the world. Many of the pieces have never been seen in the United States.

Boucher, born in Paris in 1703 to a lace designer, is often recognized for his sensuous portrayal of the human body and his stint as first painter to King Louis XV in 1765. Seldom is the focus centered on his abilities as a draftsman. But he began his career as an apprentice to François LeMoyne, the great court painter, and he later mastered the art of etching. In addition to being a master craftsman, Boucher can also be considered a master businessman. He quickly learned how to provide what the public desired, while privately cultivating his personal niche. During this time he was heavily influenced by Antoine Watteau and reproduced hundreds of Watteau's drawings.

Through endeavors such as the creation of illustrations for Molière's works, Boucher was able to reach the rarely attainable ranks of publicly recognized French painters. At the same time, Boucher was successful in shifting attention to the beauty of illustrations. Before Boucher, drawings were not widely accepted as art.

Boucher's drawings were created using soft red chalk and by capturing the expression and detail of the human form so characteristic of the Rococo style - a style characterized by free, graceful movements, a playful use of line, and delicate colors. Such works can be found in museums and galleries around the world (the

Louvre Museum in Paris, for instance, boasts a stellar array of Boucher paintings in its collection), but nowhere can one find the vast assortment that the Kimbell Museum is offering.

Since the Kimbell Museum owns four of Boucher's paintings, museum curators decided to hold a companion show to that of his drawings. This companion show features two paintings on loan from the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. All six masterpieces were painted for the Hotel Bergeret de Frouville in Paris a year before Boucher's death in 1770, and most measure approximately 9 x 6 1/2 feet.

All six paintings have not been together in one place in decades and have never been exhibited alongside Boucher's drawings. Many of the works spend most of their time in storage due to their fragile nature. According to Timothy Potts, director of the Kimbell Museum, "Even if you went to museums in Europe, you wouldn't get to see all of these drawings."

The Kimbell is the second and final on the U.S. tour of François Boucher's drawings (the first venue having been the Frick Collection in New York). The Fort Worth museum is hosting the exhibit through April 18. For more information, please visit www.Kimbellart.org.



Study of a Despondent Woman in Drapery,
François Boucher, 1761.

(Courtesy: Kimbell Art Museum)