

A triweekly review of French news and trends
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Blair and Schroeder in Paris, Meet Chirac

The three European leaders discussed Europe and reacted to the situation in Iraq

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER Tony Blair traveled to Paris on May 9 to hold talks with Jacques Chirac. The French president also welcomed German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder four days later.

In both cases, Europe was at the top of their agendas. Blair's visit came as France and Britain are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, the agreement that ended the two nations' historic rivalry and opened an unprecedented era of cross-Channel friendship and exchanges. The meeting also coincided with Europe Day: on May 9, 1950, the first move was made toward the formation of the European Union when French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the creation of an organized Europe. Schroeder went to Paris with most of his cabinet for the 3rd joint meeting with their French counterparts since January 22, 2003, which marked the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty.

Blair and Chirac answered questions from some 400 French and British students who had been invited to the Elysée Palace. In a friendly atmosphere, the two leaders tackled issues ranging from the proposed European constitution and Turkey's

E.U. bid, to Iraq, climate change and sustainable development. In particular, they expressed their faith in the newly expanded E.U., and said that Turkey would eventually join the bloc as well. Acknowledging

that the process of integrating Turkey into Europe will be long and difficult, Chirac insisted, with Blair by his side, that "it will happen and it is desirable for it to happen." Chirac pointed out that Ankara has made important strides toward fulfilling the political and economic criteria for E.U. membership.

Chirac, Blair and Schroeder were confident that a final draft of the E.U. constitution would be ready for the mid-June summit of the Union's leaders. "If we don't reach an agreement on the constitution, we risk creating a Europe that is paralyzed,"

Chirac warned. Chirac and Blair also highlighted the importance of E.U.-U.S. relations as well as the substantial headway that Europe has made at the foreign policy level. The two leaders stressed that, "Europe now speaks with a single voice in all major international negotiations, which is extremely important and innovative." (For more information on the enlargement of



British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac speaking to students.
(Courtesy: French Presidency photographic service / C. Campagne)

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French Minister delegate for the Interior Jean-François Copé speaking to the Congress of the American Jewish Committee (see article on page 3)

(Courtesy: American Jewish Committee)



U.S. Awards Medal of Freedom to French WW2 Heroine

AN 80-year-old French grandmother was awarded the Medal of Freedom by the United States of America almost 60 years after the medal was initially meant to be administered.

A teenage heroine who, along with her parents, aided and often sheltered downed Allied pilots during World War II, Odette Peyrot-Bouchard and her parents were eventually captured by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp. Both of her parents died while in Nazi confinement, but Odette survived the horrific ordeal and was rescued by Allied forces in April 1945.


Peyrot-Bouchard was chosen to receive the Medal of Freedom at the end of the war on behalf of herself and her deceased parents, but she lay too ill in a Swiss hospital to reply to the letter from the American gov-



ernment informing her of her distinction. After years without response, her file became lost.

Thanks to a British colonel in retirement, the situation was once again brought to light. This time a spunky lady filled with life, Peyrot-Bouchard responded to the announcement enthusiastically.

In a moving ceremony, United States Ambassador to Switzerland Pamela Willeford decorated Peyrot-Bouchard on May 3 with the declaration, "It is an understatement to say that Madame Peyrot-Bouchard and her parents richly deserve this award."

Peyrot-Bouchard's response? "I would do it again if the occasion arose." 

FRANCE WELCOMES ENLARGEMENT



The May 1 enlargement of the European Union from 15 to 25 countries was met with celebrations across France, to mark what President

Jacques Chirac called "a great day for Europe." In Paris, citizens of Cyprus, Malta, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia (the new members) were offered free 70-minute boat rides on the Seine's bateaux mouches, and a vast picnic was held at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. The Maison des Cultures du Monde (the World Cultural House) hosted a concert marathon, during which groups from each of the new member countries introduced Parisians to their countries' current music trends. The French Post Office unveiled a new stamp, called "Enlargement," whose design includes a map of Europe and the flags of all the E.U.'s members, and France Telecom offered an hour of free phone calls to any of the new member countries. Strasbourg, home of the European Parliament, celebrated with a massive fireworks display. The celebrations were bolstered by strong optimism in the future of the European project, with 62 percent of the French describing themselves as "Euro-optimists" in a recent poll.

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FRANCE TRAINS JORDANIAN SPECIAL FORCES

French Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie announced on April 26 that France is aiding in the training of Jordan's special forces. The French-Jordanian collaboration is the result of France's conviction that "special forces are essential for security and essential for resolving conflicts," according to Alliot-Marie. King Abdullah II of Jordan, who set up his country's special forces, has called for a better exchange of "techniques, information, and capabilities" to aid his nation in the fight against terrorism.

GISCARD D'ESTAING JOINS CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL

On April 27, former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing announced his intention to join the Constitutional Council, France's equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court. According to French law, former French heads of state have the right to take a seat on the council, which, when petitioned, pronounces itself on a law's constitutionality before it is even enacted. Giscard d'Estaing, 78, was elected president in 1974 at the age of 48, which made him one of the youngest presidents of the French Republic.

FRANCE AND SINGAPORE OPEN JOINT MILITARY RESEARCH CENTER

On April 28, France and Singapore opened a joint defense laboratory in Gif-sur-Yvette, France. The laboratory, named SONDR, will employ researchers from both countries and will concentrate on advanced electromagnetics and radar. The partners involved in the new laboratory are Supelec, a French university known for its electrical and computer engineering programs, Onera, France's leading aerospace research agency, the Defence Science and Technology Agency of Singapore, and the National University of Singapore.

FOREIGN MINISTRY'S BUDGET TO GROW

The budget of France's Foreign Affairs Ministry will be increased 2.52 percent to 4.22 billion euros in 2004, despite planned budgetary cuts. According to a letter from President Jacques Chirac to Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, any money saved by cutting the ministry's budget would be "out of proportion with the political costs and the near irreversible damage that [such cuts] would inflict on [France's] diplomatic tool."

Blair and Schroeder in Paris (continued from page 1)

Europe, please visit our Web site, www.ambafrance-us.org, and click on "Bienvenue en Europe").

In regards to Iraq, Chirac and Blair agreed on the need to work together in the framework of the United Nations to ensure a smooth political transition in Iraq, and that, according to Chirac's spokeswoman Catherine Colonna, "no matter what the difficulties or differences in approach, the French and the British will work in good cooperation to contribute to the search for a solution" to the crisis.

Chirac noted that "it's very urgent to genuinely transfer—and to do so unambiguously—sovereignty and power to an authentically Iraqi authority that would be recognized as such by the Iraqi people." The French president added that the United Nations' special envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, reportedly intends to ask Iraqi

technocrats to form an interim government after the June 30 hand-over of sovereignty (this government would serve until the elections that are to take place in January 2005). Chirac explained that France, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, would of course fully participate in the elaboration of these plans.

During a press conference with Schroeder on May 13, at the conclusion of their joint cabinet meeting together, Chirac declared that the ill-treatment of Iraqi prisoners "inspire in us horror and indignation," as did the "inconceivable act—which was broadcast on many channels—the beheading of a young American yesterday." He added, "We also noted, and totally approved of, the fact that our American friends condemned these acts and initiated procedures to punish them."



German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and President Jacques Chirac in Paris

(Courtesy: Foreign Ministry - F de La Mure)

WELCOME CARILLON FOR AIR FRANCE-KLM

It's official! A global giant was born on May 5 when Air France took over the Dutch carrier KLM to create Europe's biggest airline in terms of passenger traffic and the world leader in terms of sales. Pierre-Henri Gourgeon, president and chief operating officer of Air

France, and Rob Ruijter, KLM's chief financial officer, marked the occasion by jointly ringing the New York stock exchange's opening bell as the firm's new ticker, "AKH," traded there for the first time.

The all-share takeover by Air France marked a major consolidation within the European air transport industry, part of a larger restructuring process driven by deregulation, privatization and the arrival of competitive low-cost carriers. The takeover also led to Air France's de facto privatization, as the French government now holds only 44.7 percent of the company's shares. The carriers have forecast 600 million euros (\$720 million) in annual long-term merger benefits.

In related news, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin inaugurated the assembly line of the A380 super-jumbo on May 7 in Toulouse. The A380, built by Airbus, will be the largest civilian airliner in the sky when it takes flight in early 2005. The Airbus factory is itself a breath-taking wonder: it measures 490 meters long by 250 wide and 46 high (539 by 275 by 50.6 yards).



Eurostar Train Named After French Resistance Hero



Michel Hollard
(Courtesy: www.michel-hollard.com)

DURING WORLD WAR II, Hitler positioned deadly secret weapons in northwestern France with the intention of wreaking such havoc on London that Britain would be forced to surrender. In 1943, however, French resistance fighter Michel Hollard realized what the Nazis were planning when he discovered the V1 rocket launcher sites that were being prepared, and he became determined to warn the Allies of the threat.

In honor of Hollard's heroism, a Eurostar train linking Paris to London was named after him on April 27. Hollard, who died in 1993, organized a network of about 100 resistance agents and played a crucial role in informing the Allies of German movements in occupied France. His most important accomplishment was the part he played in foiling the German rocket launcher project. By copying plans stolen from a German engineer, Hollard was able to pass invaluable information on to British diplomats in Switzerland—information which allowed Allied bombers to accurately target and destroy most of the rocket launchers.

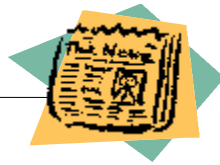
Hollard's bravery was not neglected by the Allies: British General Brian Horrocks hailed the French fighter as the "man who saved London," and American General Dwight Eisenhower acknowledged that if the V1 rockets had not been



The Eurostar in the Gare du Nord, Paris.

(Courtesy: Foreign Ministry)

destroyed, D-Day would probably have been canceled. In 1944, Hollard was arrested by the Gestapo, tortured and sent to a concentration camp, though he escaped before arriving at his destination. He was a recipient of the French Legion of Honor and the British Distinguished Service Order.



Villepin and Perben in D.C.

The two French government officials attended a G8 meeting of interior and justice ministers

ON MAY 11, French Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin attended a meeting of justice and interior ministers from the G8 countries in Washington, D.C. During a press conference, he expressed concern regarding the deteriorating international situation which, according to him, justifies a massive mobilization by all the G8 countries. The ministers from the world's eight largest industrialized countries met in Washington in order to work on better coordination between their intelligence and police services, and to find ways to make public transportation more secure.

French Minister of Justice Dominique Perben, who also took part in the G8 meeting, confirmed during a press con-



Minister of the Interior Dominique de Villepin during his press conference

(Courtesy: Aida Senna)

ference that the eight countries had adopted three sets of measures concerning the ability to "bring charges even before an attack has occurred," the use of techniques such as surveillance, infiltration and plea-bargaining, and the transmission of intelligence to judicial institutions while preventing its public diffusion. Perben noted that his law, the Perben II Act of March 9, has already implemented these measures in France, placing the country at the *avant-garde* of the fight against terrorism.

Asked about the release of French detainees from Guantanamo Bay, Perben expressed his confidence that the U.S. and France would reach an agreement in "a matter of a few weeks." French magistrates would then consider whether to bring charges against the seven suspects. ■ ■



French Justice Minister Dominique Perben (right) and Ambassador Jean-David Levitte

(Courtesy: Aida Senna)

Copé Speaks to American Jewish Committee

The French minister delegate for the interior describes France's steps against anti-Semitism

SPEAKING TO THE CONGRESS of the American Jewish Committee on May 6, French Minister Delegate for the Interior Jean-François Copé reaffirmed France's steadfast determination in the fight against anti-Semitism. Placing his speech under the sign of June 6, 1944, a date "particularly emblematic of the friendship between France and the United States," he noted that, just as the Free French and the United States had forged a strong alliance to free Europe of the Nazi yoke, it was now necessary for the two countries to combine their forces once more in the war against anti-Semitism.

He stated confidently that, as a result of the government's willingness to tackle the problem head-on, it has achieved a series of key reforms. It passed the Lellouche Act (in 2002),

which calls for much higher penalties for racist and anti-Semitic acts; it set up a committee, the only one of its kind in Europe, that holds monthly meetings to discuss, identify, and respond swiftly to anti-Semitic acts; and it will soon revamp school programs to reinforce the message that discrimination, and anti-Semitism in particular, are abhorrent (school visits to former concentration camps, for instance, will bring students face-to-face with the horrors of the Shoah).

In related news, a major colloquium took place on May 13 in Paris in order to foster a dialogue between the Jewish and Muslim communities of France. Parallels were drawn between the two religions, which share a common history, and participants concluded that it is critical to teach children early on about tolerance and religious history. ■ ■

Franco-American Business Ties Rock Solid

FOLLOWING THE FIRST MEETING of the Council on the Competitiveness of France (see page 5), Clara Gaynard, president of the French International Investments Agency (AFII), held a press briefing on April 30 during which she stressed the importance of the commercial ties between France and the United States. According to Gaynard, "there are 3,000 French companies in the United States, generating 700,000 direct jobs, and 2,400 U.S. companies in France generating 240,000 direct jobs." Asked whether disagreements over Iraq had had commercial repercussions, Gaynard replied that for CEOs, "political considerations matter very little." Indeed, last year U.S. companies accounted for 25 percent of the 27,335 new jobs resulting from for-

eign investment in France, making the United States the country's leading investor.

Foreign investment in France generated 20 percent more jobs in 2003 than in 2002, and in 2002, France had already received more incoming foreign investment than any country except China. Gaynard explained that France's appeal could be explained by the fact that "One, France is a high-tech country, a country of skills. Two, France is not just a nice place to live in but also to work in." Dismissing stereotypes that are often bandied about in the press, Gaynard also noted that France has "the highest productivity rate in the world."

For more information, please visit www.afii.fr. ■ ■

SPECIAL D-DAY FARES ON AIR FRANCE

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day, Air France is offering U.S. veterans special fares between its U.S. hubs and Paris. Fares are \$504 from the East coast, \$604 from the Midwest and \$704 from the West coast (taxes not included). Veterans born before January 1, 1930, who wish to travel to France between June 1 and August 31 are eligible, as well as members of their immediate families traveling with them. For more information or to book your tickets, please call Air France's special D-Day promotion desk at 1-800-423-7422.

NBC AND UNIVERSAL TIE THE KNOT

On May 12, the merger of NBC and Vivendi Universal Entertainment was finalized, giving birth to a new media giant. The group, which will henceforth be known as NBC Universal, is expected to report sales of more than \$15 billion in 2005. Its business empire includes the NBC, CNBC, MSNBC and USA networks, as well as Universal film studios and several theme parks. Under the deal's terms, General Electric, NBC's parent company, paid \$3.65 billion for 80 percent of Vivendi Universal, and the remaining 20 percent will remain in the hands of France's Vivendi.

SCIENCES-PO LAUNCHES JOURNALISM SCHOOL WITH U.S. PARTNERS

Paris's Institut d'Etudes Politiques, a prestigious school of political science also known as Sciences-Po, will unveil a journalism post-graduate program in the fall of 2004. Its new journalism program will be run in association with the Medill School of Journalism in Chicago, as well as with New York's Columbia University. Best known as a training ground for French politicians, Sciences Po has sought to diversify its student body and curriculum, in the hope of attracting more foreign students.

NEMO FINDS BOX-OFFICE SUCCESS!

Building on its initial success (see NFF 03.14), "Finding Nemo" was the biggest grossing movie in France during the year 2003, the first time in the past five years that this distinction hasn't gone to a French film. According to figures released on May 11, 7.5 million spectators watched "Finding Nemo," placing it ahead of "Taxi 3" (a French action movie), "Matrix Reloaded," and "Lord of the Rings: Return of the King." Of the 12 top movies in France last year, eight were American.



D-DAY REMEMBERED

From June 4th to June 7th, France will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy and pay a warm tribute to the thousands of soldiers and civilians who risked their lives to liberate France and Europe from the Nazi regime.

Operation Overlord: the Allied forces land

AT THE CRACK OF DAWN on June 6, 1944, Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy and changed the course of history. Thousands of soldiers, mainly from the United States, Britain and Canada, landed on the Normandy coast in northwestern France.

At 6:30 A.M., the first assault wave, comprised of an American infantry division, landed on Utah Beach.

On Omaha Beach, another American force soon discovered that the Germans had covered the beach with machine-gun nests, mortars, minefields and barbed wire. Under the punishing barrage of German fire, most of the amphibious tanks were sunk, thus depriving the infantry of vital cover fire. By the



evening of June 6, the beach-head secured at Omaha was barely two kilometers deep. Despite the difficult beginning, the Allies were ultimately successful on Omaha Beach though the victory exacted a heavy price—officially, over 1,000 soldiers were killed while 2,000 were wounded.

At Pointe du Hoc, 225 U.S. Army Rangers rapidly scaled the cliff. The force was soon surrounded by German troops; by the time troops from Omaha Beach arrived to aid them on June 8, only 90 were still able to fight.

Following heavy fighting, the British and Canadians landed 25,000 and 21,000 men on Gold Beach and Juno Beach, respectively.

The 3rd British Division landed on Sword Beach, with the support of tanks and two brigades of Green Berets. Meanwhile, to the east, the 1st Special Service Brigade managed to gain a foothold in Colleville before marching eastwards and attacking Ouistreham. Among its ranks were 177 French marines led by Lieutenant Philippe Kieffer. From the opposite direction, the 4th Brigade was also able to make its way inland, taking Lion-sur-Mer and Luc-sur-Mer.

War remnants on Normandy's beaches serve as a powerful reminder of the valor shown by Allied soldiers.



A special thanks to Patrick Elie for providing us with all of the images on this page. Visit his website at: 6juin1944.com

AN INTERNATIONAL CEREMONY OF REMEMBRANCE

Seventeen heads of state and government will attend the official international ceremony of remembrance on June 6, in Arromanches. French President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin will welcome American President George W. Bush, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Queen Elizabeth II. Among other dignitaries, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Canadian Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and Prime Minister Paul Martin, Belgian King Albert II and Dutch Queen Beatrix will also be present.

About 6,000 people have been invited to the 90-minute-long ceremony of remembrance, which will feature a show by 15 ships, 56 planes and 1,950 soldiers on the ground. Twenty thousand people have been invited to other ceremonies. Over 8,000 policemen will be in charge of providing security.

(To learn more, visit www.ambafrance-us.org and click on the D-Day logo).



St Laurent sur Mer memorial for the U.S. soldiers buried at Colleville sur Mer

D-Day: An American Soldier's Tale

JAMES H. JORDAN was a 22-year-old Private First Class when he landed at Omaha Beach. Like that of many soldiers who survived the disembarkation, his testimony is a precious and moving tribute to those who fought and died for freedom.

"At about 4:00 A.M. on the morning of June 6th, we began boarding the landing craft. Once all landing crafts were on line, the order for the invasion to begin was given and we headed for the beach. To both my right and left and as far as I could see, landing crafts were headed at full speed to the Normandy coastline. With the sun rising, it was a remarkable sight. Almost immediately, we came under fire.



Within minutes, for some reason, our boat started to take on water and we began to lag behind the other landing crafts. About seventy-five yards from the shore, with our boat sinking, our Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Kenneth Klink, gave the order to abandon ship. Just as he gave the order, we took a direct hit by an artillery shell to the middle of the craft, killing a number of men instantly. The ramp was dropped and those who were able began to get out. I had to step over the bodies of my fellow soldiers and friends who were now lying dead on the floor of the boat. As I got close to the ramp I was hit by a large wave that knocked me all the way to the back of the boat. Again, I made my way to the front and managed to leave the boat just as it was sinking behind me. I was the last man off.

As I stepped off, another large wave hit me and I went completely under the

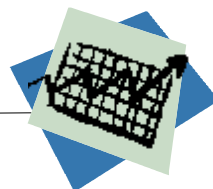
water. With the weight of all the gear on my back, I began to sink fast and knew that I was about to drown. Fortunately, I was able to get my pack off and reach the surface of the water. I then swam to shore. As badly as things had begun for me, once I made it to the beach, it got worse.

The entire beach was a killing field. Artillery and machine gun fire were exploding all around me. Men were lying dead and wounded on the beach. I picked up a rifle lying on the beach and began running forward with the aim of reaching a three to four foot high sea wall about two hundred yards inland. As I was running across the beach, machine gun bullets began whizzing past me and hitting the ground just inches from my feet. I hit the ground. I laid there motionless, hoping the German machine gunner would think he had killed me and stop firing in my direction. It must have worked because the bullets that had been landing right next to me stopped. After a few seconds on the ground, I got up and continued running. (...)Somehow I had made it across the beach. Of the thirty men from my landing craft, only twelve were now left. (...)



At the start of the day, my company consisted of one hundred and eighty-seven men. By nightfall, only seventy-nine were left. For me, the day had been frightening, exhausting and painful in many ways. Yet, I was more fortunate than many others-I had survived."

Extract from Patrick Elie's Web site (www.6juin1944.com).



Council on Competitiveness Meets

The Strategic Council on France's Competitiveness met for the first time on April 26

ON APRIL 26, the Strategic Council on Competitiveness met for the first time in the prime minister's Matignon residence. Composed of 25 top executives from some of the most important companies operating in France, the Council was set up in order to help the French government make the country more competitive in the global economy. Those present included Felix Rohatyn (a former U.S. Ambassador to France), François Bujon de l'Estang (a former French Ambassador to the U.S., and currently the President of CitiGroup France), Katsuhiko NakaGawa (Vice President of Toyota), and Ferdinando Beccalli (President of GE Europe).

The Council commended France for the steps it has already taken (such as the simplification of administrative procedures), and called for the pursuit of economic reforms and a more favorable research framework. Prime Minister Jean-Pierre

Raffarin emphasized that research and development will indeed be a priority, with incentives for researchers to set up shop in France and tax credits for R&D investments.

The Strategic Council will meet again in 2005. In the meantime, a campaign to promote France will be launched at the end of May during the World Investment Conference at la Baule, and Raffarin has pledged to keep the competitiveness of France at the top of his government's agenda. ■ ■

SARKOZY SETS HIS SIGHTS ON PIRATES

French Minister of the Economy Nicolas Sarkozy is putting his foot down on fakes—illegally imitated items that are sold as originals. In fact, he has made it one of his priorities. Sarkozy met with more than 50 individuals from various sectors of society affected by such piracy, promising swift action. For starters, illicit networks will have to face heightened security at France's borders, and Sarkozy is hoping to rapidly reach agreements with other governments to better battle the problem.

Each year in France, more than 30,000 jobs disappear due to the sale of illegally imitated items. For the whole of Europe, that number soars to 200,000. In 2000, 5 percent of the world's total commerce consisted of fakes. Today that number has reached 10 percent. No longer consisting solely of luxury items such as Gucci and Vuitton bags, piracy now includes even the most mundane items—DVDs, cassettes, cigarettes, toys, clothing, automobile parts, and medicine. Not only do these imitations cost jobs, they are also often of shoddy quality and thereby pose serious safety risks.

The Franco-German Aventis, known for its expertise in vaccines, was the leading pharmaceutical company in France, and the seventh in the world, making it an ideal match for Sanofi. The two companies will combine their strengths in such fields as diabetes and cancer studies to create a powerhouse of research and innovation in the pharmaceutical sector. The new, bigger firm will also be better able to underwrite massive R&D expenditures (researching new medical compounds is an extremely expensive and time-consuming process). The merger, if approved by E.U. and U.S. competition authorities, should be operational by 2005. ■ ■

Private Retirement Accounts Launched

ON APRIL 22, France's new individual retirement accounts became a reality when Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin signed the final governmental decree that specifies how they are to be implemented. Until now, France's pension system had almost exclusively been state-funded, in a scheme known as "pay-as-you-go," in which contributions from present-day workers pay for the pensions of present-day retirees.

This system will continue to form the basis of the country's pension program, but individuals will now have the option of setting up individual retirement

accounts, known as "*plans d'épargne retraite populaire*," which will benefit from tax breaks. Funds placed in these accounts will be invested, and the proceeds will be paid out as annuities once their holders retire. In order to protect investors from vagaries in the stock market, funds will gradually and automatically be placed in secure bonds the closer one gets to retirement age. ■ ■



IRAN PICKS TOTAL FOR BILLION-DOLLAR CONTRACT

French oil conglomerate Total was chosen by Iran to develop a natural-gas field in South Pars. By extending the opportunity to France, Iran hopes to gain access to the European market. The billion-dollar contract, which will probably be signed within one or two months, further strengthens France's commitment to Iran's development. The South Pars field, located underneath the Persian Gulf, is the largest natural-gas field in the world, and Iran holds 15 percent of the world's natural-gas reserves, second only to Russia.

NISSAN POSTS RECORD PROFIT

The Nissan automobile group, co-owned by French carmaker Renault, earned net profits reaching a record high of 503.7 billion yen (\$4.68 billion). Its sales also exceeded three million vehicles for the first time in 13 years. Nissan executives attributed their strong profits to an ideal combination of increasing sales and decreasing costs, due in large part to Renault-inspired reforms. The company, riding high, plans to further extend its success with the release of 28 new models over the next three years and the expansion of its operations in new markets such as those of China, Russia, and Africa.

NEW FINANCE MAGAZINE

A new magazine dealing with the financial world has just hit the stores. "Banque et Finance" (Bank and Finance) will be sold at kiosks for 8 euros on Mondays, and will aim to provide incisive financial commentary and analysis as well as breaking news relative to the world of French finance and the Paris Bourse. The director of the publication, Patrick Fillioud, added that the magazine will also exemplify how the world of finance is not only for the wealthy but for the average citizen as well. The magazine aspires to reach between 15,000 and 20,000 readers.

FLINTSTONE NECKLACE

Tiny shells from a marine snail named *Nassarius kraussianus* were discovered in the Blombos Cave in South Africa by a Norwegian-led team of French, U.S., British, and South African researchers. The shells are unusual in that they are all pierced in an identical manner, as if they were part of a necklace or bracelet. Believed to be 75,000 years old, they seem to constitute the first evidence of human jewelry, leading researchers to surmise that Homo sapiens was in fact artistically inclined long before sketching the cave paintings—first found in southern Europe about 35,000 years ago.

MUMMIES DAY

More than 50 mummies were discovered in Egypt by a team of French and Egyptian archeologists in Saqqara. The mummies, wrapped in linen and sealed inside stone or wooden sarcophagi, were in surprisingly good condition, noted Zahi Hawwas, the secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. Hawwas described them as "the best conserved [mummies] dating from this period." He added that they are from the first millennium BC, and were probably buried during the Ptolemaic period, which ended with the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC.

Guy Lecuyot, an Egyptologist at France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and part of the 12-member team from the Louvre Museum that is helping to excavate the site, said he had spotted the sarcophagi when he was trying to extricate other mummies. For French archeologist Jean-Pierre Adam, "This type of discovery happens two or three times a century." Researchers are now trying to date the sarcophagi more precisely and to determine to whom they belonged.

EVEN FRENCH PRISONERS CREATE FINE CUISINE

"I Cook for Myself Alone," a new cookbook put together by 600 French prisoners in collaboration with Michelin three-star chef Marc Haerberlin, will soon be released. Inmates from all across the nation were invited to send recipes (using ingredients costing less than a dollar!), with the best making it into the book. Treats such as "Solitary Salad" and "Two-Apple Prison Pie" were among those chosen, and the creator of "Seabream with Mushrooms on a Bed of Lettuce" won the grand prize, receiving a TV set! Haerberlin was quoted as saying, "I suspect there must be a few ex-chefs doing time." The competition sought to have prisoners cook for themselves as a "constructive and therapeutic recreation," not to replace prison food.

FROG LEG FEAST

The 32nd annual Frog Festival was held in Vittel, France, on April 24-25. Estimated attendance was between 20,000 and 30,000 during the weekend, when 7 tons worth of frog legs were consumed! Snail-buttered frog legs and a frog-leg provincial omelet were both popular recipes. The Frog Leg Tasting Brotherhood of the town of Vittel organized the festival, and welcomed visitors from all over France, as well as visitors from Belgium and Portugal.

9 GOLD MEDALS FOR FRENCH WINES IN BRUSSELS

The 11th annual "Brussels World Competition in Wine" was held in Belgium in early May to kick off the capital's Wine Expo, held every year for wine professionals. A total of 174 wines competed for the Grand Prizes. Of the 27 grand prize gold medals that were handed out, nine went to French wines (once again recognizing France as the world's top wine producer). Chile came in second, with six medals.

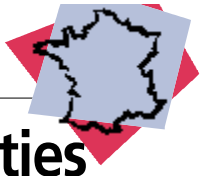
THE CELL-PHONE SAVVY FRENCH

The Telecommunications Regulation Authority recently announced that there are 41.9 million active cell-phone numbers in France, equivalent to 70 percent of the country's population. The actual percentage rate of cell-phone owners is likely lower, however, as many users have several phones. Ile-de-France (Paris) is the leading department in France in terms of cell phones, with enough for an astounding 99.5 percent of the population! And the number of clients rose 7.8 percent in 2003, suggesting that the market is far from saturated. Cell phone usage in the U.S. is currently just under 50 percent.

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Chirac Sets Forth New Social Priorities

Minister of the Interior Dominique de Villepin calls for stronger civic education

DURING A MEETING with France's prefects on April 27, French President Jacques Chirac called on his government to put social cohesion and employment at the top of its agenda, in order to better meet the nation's aspirations. Chirac described a plan that would seek to achieve three key goals: job creation (in particular at the entry level, to help new generations make the transition from college to the job market), the implementation of a right to housing, and a global and coordinated plan to provide equal opportunities to all. According to Chirac, social cohesion and economic growth are inextricably linked, and one cannot be achieved at the expense of the other. He insisted, for instance, that the government's job-creation measures would also help make companies more competitive.

In a similar vein, Dominique de Villepin announced his priorities as the nation's new interior minister and emphasized his desire to put national cohesion and solidarity at the forefront of his actions. He added, however, that he will not soften the government's stance against crime and insecurity but will instead pursue his predecessor's energetic reforms, which he praised (his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, is now Minister of the Economy). He notably unveiled a plan to create a national crime database that would be accessible to all police officers, and to tackle three main problem areas: juvenile delinquency, drugs and illegal immigration. Most importantly, he expressed the desire to create a civic program that would reunite the French people around the values of the Republic. 

Paris Fair Marks Its 100th Anniversary

THE PARIS TRADE FAIR, one of the biggest and oldest in the world, celebrates its 100th anniversary in May. After its creation in 1904, in the wake of the Paris Universal Exhibit of 1900, the fair encountered such swift success that a new, much vaster exhibition center was built to house it at the Porte de Versailles in 1924.

This year, the Paris Trade Fair brings together some 2,650 exhibitors, each belonging to one of 22 different categories, ranging from gardening to swimming pools, from multimedia software to perfumes, from interior design to handicrafts. Throughout its history, the fair has maintained its popularity by introducing the latest innovations—indeed, it

first introduced TVs and copying machines to France. It does so by including the winners of the famous Concours Lépine, a contest that recognizes the most useful inventions designed by amateurs.

Companies now consider the trade fair a valuable marketing tool, which allows them to see what rivals are offering and to gauge what consumers want. As such, the fair has weathered the economic slowdown, with the number of visitors steadily increasing every year. According to John Shaw, the fair's president, visitors continue to appreciate the Paris Fair due mainly to the variety

of products it presents, rather than because of low prices. Last year, the fair generated 458 million euros, from both direct and indirect purchases, each visitor spending on average 733 euros. 




Big crowds at the Paris fair
(Courtesy: Foire de Paris)

French Soccer Team Celebrates Its Centennial

MAY 1, 1904: the French national soccer team plays the first game of its history against neighboring Belgium in a 3-3 draw. After having reached the top ranks of the highly competitive world of soccer in the past two decades (with a victory in the 1998 World Cup, and in the European cups of 1984 and 2000), *les Bleus* celebrated their 100th anniversary this month.

The first half of the French national team's history was in fact rather uninspiring. It was only in 1958 that it chalked up its first big win during an official competition. During that year's World Cup in Sweden, the French team—led by Raymond Kopa and Juste Fontaine (who scored 13 goals during

the event, a record that still stands)—reached the semi-finals. French supporters would then have to wait for the eighties to see the celebrated "Platini generation" (Platini, Giresse, Tigana) carry the team to the World Cup semi-finals twice in a row (1982 and 1986), and win the European Cup on French soil in 1984.

Finally, France and its star player Zinedine Zidane won the World Cup in 1998 in Paris. Refusing to rest on its laurels, the team won the European Cup two years later in Holland. Though *les Bleus* failed to advance in the 2002 World Cup, they have since regained their confidence and appear to be the clear favorites for the upcoming European Cup, which will take place in Portugal this June. 



BAGUETTE BONANZA!

The baguette, perhaps France's most archetypal victual, was feted for a week during the 9th Festival of Bread, from May 10 to May 16. More than 10 billion baguettes are made every year in France, and they represent 70 percent of bakery sales. Local bakeries, or *boulangeries*, remain very popular in France, attracting 14 million customers a day (83 percent of the French eat bread at least once daily—on average, 165 grams worth). Clearly, low-carb diets are not about to take-off in France!



Latitudes Contemporaines

Lille will host a contemporary dance festival from June 21 to June 28

IN THE SPIRIT OF ITS NEW role as the cultural capital of Europe, the city of Lille will be hosting a contemporary dance festival, "Latitudes

Contemporaines," from June 21 to June 28. It is the second event of its kind, following the success of last year's festival.

The festival will feature performances by artists from all over Europe, who will introduce their audiences to the latest in contemporary choreography and give residents of the Lille region a rare chance to see some of the most inventive international artists in the business brought together in a single spot. Along with the many performances, the festival will also



"La Vision du Lapin" by Laurence Yadi and Nicolas Cantillon

(courtesy: Michel Cavalva - Latitudes Contemporaines)

host workshops, debates, and colloquiums with the artists, in an effort to strengthen the ties between the audience and the dancers and to better familiarize the public with contemporary dance.

Organized also in part to provide a window to the future of contemporary dance, the name "Latitudes Contemporaines" was chosen to represent the free and open spirit of the festival. One of its goals is to provide artists with the latitude, or free range, to experiment and innovate. Those interested in learning more about the festival may access its Web site at

www.latitudescontemporaines.org

"MONA LISA" IN NEED OF A FACE LIFT?

Leonardo da Vinci's famous "Mona Lisa" is giving the Louvre's curators sleepless nights. The 500-year old painting, the most frequently visited sight in the world's best-known museum, seems to be showing new signs of deterioration. Indeed, the poplar wood that the "Mona Lisa" is painted on shows signs of warping, and experts feel that the painting is in worse condition than previously assumed. For some time now, the "Mona Lisa" has been kept behind a thin glass and in a room with low lighting to protect it against damage from bright light, temperature changes, and humidity, to which it has been particularly sensitive. A new technical study will be conducted to assess the painting's condition and to find out which conservation techniques will be best to save it. The room in the Louvre currently displaying "Mona Lisa" is to be renovated in early 2005.



Cornucopia of Foreign Films in Cannes

FOR ITS 57TH YEAR, Cannes has sought to increase the number of countries featured in its competition, while perpetuating its glamorous image (American superstars Tom Hanks and Brad Pitt both made appearances). Movies by many famous directors were screened during the two-week long festival (Emir Kusturica and the Coen Brothers competed for the Palme d'or, while Pedro Almodovar, Quentin Tarantino and Jean-Luc Godard presented their newest movies), but it was above all an occasion to discover movies by

up-and-coming young directors from all over the world. This year, three U.S. movies will be in competition: "The Ladykillers" (Coen Brothers), "Fahrenheit 911" (Michael Moore) and "Shrek 2." Gilles Jacob, president of the Cannes Festival, summed it up best when he said that this year's selection was "inventive, not too classic nor too pretentious; a selection which has to be the most international, the most open to all movie genres..." The festival, which started on May 12, will run until May 23. For more information, please visit: www.festival-cannes.fr



View of the Western Terrace (courtesy: Marc Riboud - RMN)

"HEAVENLY MOUNTAINS"

From now until June 28, the exhibition "Montagnes Célèstes," or "Heavenly Mountains," will be on display at the National Galleries of the Grand Palais in Paris. Boasting more than one hundred paintings dating as far back as the 12th century, the exhibition features Chinese landscape art in which mountains and rivers are glorified as sacred elements in nature. A retrospective of Marc Riboud's photographs of the Huangshan mountain chain are also on display, providing visitors with a glimpse of the mountain's present-day grandeur and mysteriousness. For more information, please visit: www.rmn.fr/galerienationalesdugrandpalais

KIDS, TAKE YOUR PARENTS TO THE MUSEUM!

French museums are celebrating the sixth "Springtime" festival, held every year in May, under this year's theme of "History and Stories." The festival included a Europe-wide celebration on the first Sunday of May, and 955 French museums as well as 576 museums across Europe opened their doors without charging admission, inviting the public to explore their riches. Part of this celebration is a French initiative called "Take your parents to a museum," in which 400,000 French elementary school students are given an invitation for one child and two adults entitling them free admission to any participating museum in May. The Ministry of National Education was a partner in the initiative, and students were introduced to different museums in April, in preparation for their free trip.

AZNAVOUR REMINISCES

To celebrate his 80th birthday, internationally renowned French singer Charles Aznavour will soon be publishing his memoirs, in which he will write about his difficult childhood and successful career. His rags-to-riches life story is full of interesting insights and fascinating anecdotes, including, of course, the story of his liaison with Edith Piaf. The son of Armenian refugees, Varenagh Aznavourian was born on May 22, 1924, and after six decades as a performing artist, during which he composed more than 600 songs and sold more than 100 million records—and appeared in more than 60 movies—Aznavour has secured his place as the great torchbearer of the French *chanson* tradition and one of the last classic pop song stylists. Aznavour will be performing in Paris May 22 at the Palais des Congrès.

THE SHADOKS IN MOURNING

Jacques Rouxel, father of the weird bird-like creatures "the Shadoks," died on April 25, aged 73. He had become famous in 1968 for his cartoons featuring simplistic drawings and absurd humor. Rouxel, after failing to become a scientist, ended up working for French television, where he created the first two-minute Shadok cartoon. First airing in May 1968, a new Shadoks cartoon ran every day, and the series soon became very popular worldwide, and the subject of many tie-ins, including toys, comics, CDs, and DVDs. Many believe that Rouxel's nonsensical humor, especially appealing to English-speakers, derived from his stay in New York as a student.



WHAT DO I KNOW?

The famous French collection "Que Sais-Je?" just published its first issue in English, "Investments." This encyclopedic collection was founded in 1941 by Paul Augouvent and has been translated into 43 languages. The PUF publishing company explained that it was not by chance that the subject of investments was the first to be released in the language of Shakespeare, as English is now considered the "universal language of finance." Its author, Michael Rockinger, is a scientific consultant for the Banque de France and a teacher at the Collège des Ingénieurs in Paris.



Erratum: The last two sentences of our "Letters Bring D-Day Back to Life" article were accidentally cut out. The article should have ended with: "U.S. President George W. Bush, French President Jacques Chirac, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, joined by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, will meet in June on the Normandy beaches to commemorate the D-Day landings. For more information about the ceremonies, please visit www.liberation60.gouv.fr."

Japan and Paris: Mutual Inspiration

The Honolulu Academy of Arts explores how Japan and France influenced each other's art.

JAPAN AND PARIS: Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and the Modern Era," the first exhibit of its kind, showcases French and Japanese paintings from 1882-1932 in the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The show, which pre-sold more than 10,000 tickets, includes European *chef-d'oeuvres* purchased more than a century ago by Japanese industrialists. Artists highlighted include worldwide notables Matisse, Renoir, Cézanne, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Picasso, Gauguin, and Pissarro, as well as works by Japanese artists who were inspired by them.

Curator Jennifer Saville took over four years to assemble the 53 paintings on loan from 28 museums and a multitude of corporate and private collections in Japan. The museums include the Hiroshima Museum of Art and the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo. One painting was borrowed from the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery.

The exhibit unveils a magnificent tale of the exchange of cultures and techniques as Japan opened itself to the West some 150 years ago. A new class of Japanese industrialists began to collect Western art, while many Japanese artists set out to find the magicians behind the masterpieces. Umehara Ryuzaburo, for instance, became a student of Renoir, and his 1913 "Narcissus," displaying a seated male nude, was clearly inspired by Renoir's techniques. When the then scandalous nude paintings made their debut in Japan, they were kept in a separate room closed off by a curtain.

Honolulu Academy of the Arts Director Stephen Little said the Japanese collectors and artists of this movement "really revolutionized art in Japan." For the first time, Japanese artists put aside their

ink, silk, and paper and picked up oil and canvas. The blending of the two cultures is evident in paintings such as Mitsutani Kunishiro's 1932 "Scarlet Rug" which reveals two Japanese female nudes—and their pet Pekinese—on a radiant red rug in front of a Japanese flower arrangement. Mitsutani (in Japan, family names come first), remains one of the most—if not the most—internationally acclaimed Japanese artists of his time. But Saville notes that these Japanese artists struggled with the conflict inherent in integrating the West's style while still respecting their nation's traditions. It was a new, foreign way to view the world for them.

On the flip side, many French painters collected Japanese

woodblock prints and other artistic items in what became a veritable "Japan" craze. To name just one, French artist Edgar Degas revealed the impact Japanese technique had on him in his portrait of American impressionist Mary Cassatt. She is portrayed seated and leaning forward with cards in her hands, asymmetrically

placed against an unfinished background in a manner very reminiscent of Japanese artwork.

Little explained, "The show is much more than a show of pretty paintings. It's about the artistic dialogue between Japan and Paris." Many insist it is no less than the embodiment of the influence the entire Eastern and Western hemispheres have had on one another.

The exhibit is open until June 6, and provides an excellent cultural excuse to visit the beautiful island of Honolulu! Star Trek's "Mr. Sulu Takei" contributes his voice in the self-guided tour narration. For more information, visit: www.honoluluacademy.org.



There are clear similarities between *Bather*, 1891, by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (left) and *Scarlet Rug*, 1932, by Kunishirō Mitsutani.

(Courtesy: Honolulu Academy of Arts)

News from FRANCE

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