

France-Stanford Center Inaugurated

The center will promote an interdisciplinary approach to French studies in the renowned U.S. university

THE FRANCE-STANFORD CENTER for Interdisciplinary Studies was officially inaugurated on November 17 by Jean-David Levitte, Ambassador of France to the United States. The new center will reinforce the strong tradition of cooperation between major American uni-

versities such as MIT, Harvard, the University of Chicago, and Berkeley, and the French Ministry of foreign affairs. Indeed, the establishment of the France-Stanford Center is a major event for French academic cooperation and reflects a desire for long-term cooperation with the U.S.

"We are deeply honored by Ambassador Levitte's visit and delighted at the inauguration of the France-Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Studies," Stanford President John Hennessy said. "From its beginnings, Stanford has opened its doors to the world, exchanging ideas and research with scholars in other countries. This collaboration between French and American scholars celebrates that tradition and reinforces the historic relationship between our two countries at a very important time in both our nations' histories."

The center, located in the heart of Silicon Valley, will aim to foster the discussion of contemporary issues through French and American comparative



From left to right, French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte, Stanford University President John Hennessy, School of Sciences and Humanities Dean Sharon Long, and Consul General Frédéric Desagneaux.

(Courtesy: French Consulate of San Francisco)

approaches, to promote the thinking, research, science and technology of France, and to contribute to the development of balanced exchanges between students and researchers. Another role of the center will be to advance French studies by extending their application to all spheres of knowledge (science, technology, law, ethics, economy, etc...), in addition to the traditional cultural and linguistic fields. Stanford University attaches a great importance to such an interdisciplinary approach, which will play a major role in its development.

The center opened with an initial investment of one million dollars from the Ministry of foreign affairs, with a second million to be raised in 2004 by Stanford University, and a third million to come from the University's School of Sciences and Humanities. The center's inauguration comes amid renewed attention to French-American relations. Last month, members of Congress announced the creation of the Congressional French Caucus, an informal group of senators and representatives that will focus on issues of interest to both countries.

For more information on the center, please visit <http://francestanford.stanford.edu>.

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France Welcomes New U.S. Approach in Iraq

IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION in the National Assembly on November 19, Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said he welcomed "along with all my European colleagues," the new U.S. approach in Iraq.

"It recognizes the principle of sovereignty that we've constantly advocated over the past few months," emphasized Villepin, who also noted that "it envisages a transitional government even before the completion of the timetable for the drafting of a new constitution."

The minister took this opportunity to reiterate France's position as well as its proposals for a "lasting solution" in the face of the worsening and spreading violence in Iraq, and throughout the region. Villepin pleaded for a "global approach," dealing with "all the problems confronting the region: Iraq, obviously, but also the

Israeli-Arab conflict, regional security and the proliferation risk." According to the minister, all of the region's countries must be involved and made aware of their responsibilities in order to reintegrate Iraq in its regional environment.

He added that France was in favor of a "collective approach, because only the United Nations can provide the full legitimacy absolutely necessary for resolving this crisis." The United Nations should be given an "effective part to play in supporting the transition in Iraq." This is why France is arguing for the appointment of a special envoy of the U.N. Secretary-General.

Behind the French proposals lies France's desire to keep the international community united in defense of common principles. The new U.S. approach is certainly a step in the right direction.



Amélie Mauresmo kissing the Fed Cup trophy

France Wins Fed Cup

The French team secured a 4-1 victory over the United States to claim its second Fed Cup, the Davis Cup of women's tennis. Amélie Mauresmo, who did not lose a single Fed Cup game this season, clinched her team's victory in a game against America's Meghann Shaughnessy on November 24. Her teammates were Mary Pierce, Nathalie Dechy, Emilie Loit, Stephanie Cohen-Aloro and Virginie Razzano. France first won the Fed Cup in 1997, versus the Netherlands.

FRANCE DONATES 150 MILLION EUROS TO AIDS FUND

On November 5, French Minister of Finance Francis Mer announced that France's newest contribution to the AIDS Fund will be paid at the beginning of 2004, thus fulfilling the pledge it made during the G8 summit in Evian in 2003. France will triple its worldwide contribution in the fight against AIDS, increasing its annual funding from 50 to 150 million euros. France remains the world's second largest contributor to the AIDS fund, after the United States. According to the latest U.N. statistics, 42 million people worldwide have AIDS.

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT VISITS FRANCE

President Thabo Mbeki visited France on a three-day state visit from November 17 to 19. French President Jacques Chirac and Mbeki talked about issues ranging from African development to conflict resolution. "France has a very direct interest in Africa... One cannot deal with the challenges and problems of Africa without having the closest cooperation with France," said South African Minister in the Presidency Essop Pahad. France is one of South Africa's ten most important trading partners, and the two nations cooperate closely in research and scientific matters.

FRANCE EASES TAX ON FOREIGN EXECUTIVES

The unveiling of a tax break worth 80 million euros will make France more attractive to top foreign executives and to senior French business people who might otherwise leave the country. The new measure, effective on January 1, 2004, will exempt foreign-posting bonuses paid to executives from French income taxes and allow executives to deduct any pension and health contributions they pay abroad from their French tax bills.

FRANCOPHONE BOOK SHOW IN BEIRUT

The French Cultural Mission of Lebanon hosted its twelfth "Salon Francophone du Livre" in Beirut from October 31 to November 9. The show included French-language books, music, and multimedia activities. Over 100,000 visitors attended the show, a large increase in interest from last year's 82,500. One year after the Beirut Summit, the show demonstrated the increasing presence of francophony in Lebanon.

NEWS FROM FRANCE / November 26, 2003

Government Unites Against Anti-Semitism

ON NOVEMBER 17, just 48 hours after a serious attack on a Jewish boys' school in the Paris suburb of Gagny, French President Jacques Chirac held an emergency meeting with Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Justice Dominique Perben and Minister for Education Luc Ferry. During the meeting, the president and prime minister condemned all acts of anti-Semitism "solemnly, in the name of the nation" and declared that "when a Jew is attacked in France, it is all of France that is attacked."

The government promptly announced the creation of an interministerial committee to fight racism and anti-Semitism. The committee, including all four senior ministers, will meet every month to assess the progress being made in the fight against hate crimes. Other measures were also strengthened: the security of Jewish centers of worship and schools will be increased, anti-Semitic acts will be punished more severely,

and programs for the prevention of racism and anti-Semitism in schools will be implemented. In order to help defuse social tensions, the government will also launch a \$7 billion urban renewal program targeting the predominantly Muslim neighborhoods of France's main cities. The Jewish community reacted very positively to the decisions, with France's Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk declaring that "the president has made a highly symbolic gesture."

Chirac, who later met with the leaders of France's 600,000-strong Jewish community (the largest in Europe) to strongly condemn the firebombing, has long made the fight against anti-Semitism a government priority. In December 2002, the Lellouche law qualified racist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic acts as penal-level crimes. During his September visit to New York, Chirac met with representatives of the American Jewish communities to assure them that the French government is confronting anti-Semitism head-on. ■ ■

France and Russia Reinforce Space Cooperation

Russia will launch its Soyuz rockets from French Guiana

ON NOVEMBER 7, French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Alyoshin signed an agreement paving the way for a new level of cooperation between the two space-faring nations. Following the construction of a new launchpad in 2006, Soyuz rockets will be able to use the Kourou base in French Guiana, which will give them a significant advantage compared with their present launch location in Baikonour, Kazakhstan. Indeed, Kourou's proximity to the equator means that less fuel is required for a launch, due to the boost provided by Earth's own rotation.



Guiana launchpad with an Ariane 5 rocket moving into the launch zone.

(Courtesy: Ariespace)

Raffarin called the agreement a "historic event" and "a great step in economic and scientific cooperation." It reinforces existing ties between the European and Russian compa-

nies that have jointly commercialized Soyuz rockets since 1996. Their joint-venture, Starsem, will now work closely with Europe's Ariespace, which operates the Kourou launch pads.

Derived from the R-7 ballistic missile, the extremely reliable Soyuz rockets have almost 1,700 launches to their credit, more than any other rocket. A Soyuz carried Sputnik, the world's first satellite, in 1957, as well as Youri Gagarine, the first cosmonaut, in 1961. Capable of transporting mid-sized payloads, the Soyuz

will replace the old European-made Ariane-4 rocket, which is being phased out. The larger Ariane-5 will take charge of heavier payloads, in the 6- to 12-ton range.

Europe and Russia are also cooperating on other space projects, with the eventual goal of building a new generation of reusable rockets by 2010. ■ ■

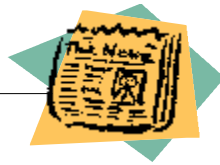
New Council Seeks to Attract More Foreign Students

LONG A HOST TO STUDENTS seeking to expand their intellectual and cultural horizons in the field of higher education, France recently announced the establishment of a new council dedicated to nurturing and improving the relationship between France and a vast pool of international students who are seeking education in the halls of France's most prestigious and established universities.

The establishment of the National Council for the Development of International Mobility of Students was announced on November 12 by Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin and Minister for Education Luc Ferry. The mission of the council, comprising 40 members

representing the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various other qualified individuals and organizations, is to improve the reception and training of international students in France. It will draft proposals and recommendations that will then be reviewed by the government. Priorities include promoting international recognition of French degrees and improving scholarship and housing programs for visiting students.

Today, over 190,000 foreign youths (about 10 percent of France's total student population) study in France, making it the third most popular host country, after the United States and Britain. ■ ■



"French Alley" in ACTFL Event


French language was strongly promoted during the teachers' annual event in Philadelphia

THE AMERICAN COUNCIL on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) held its annual event in Philadelphia from November 21 to 23. In order to mark ACTFL 2003 as the beginning of a new era in the promotion of French in the United States, the Embassy of France put together a "French alley," including more than 20 booths. With presentations from all over the French-speaking world, the booths presented up-to-date and diverse materials on the teaching of French. ACTFL estimates that there are approximately 30,000 French teachers in the United States, and the Embassy wanted to provide them with advice and information to help them in their work.

But the "French alley" was not only focused on educational matters: it also gave an overview of the diversity of the

French-speaking world. Indeed, with more than 43 French-speaking countries, 130 million French-speaking individuals throughout the world and 90 million people learning the language, French cannot be solely defined as the language spoken in France.

Last but not least, the "French alley" offered the opportunity to discover traditional homemade products such as flavored soaps from Provence, pastries, chocolates and African crafts. An original method to teach French using perfumes was presented, much to the interest of the attendees. The French Embassy also organized a workshop on French immersion programs in the United States.


To learn more about French programs in the United States, please visit www.frenchculture.org. 

French Program at NYU Celebrates 25th Anniversary

INAUGURATED IN 1978, New York University's Institute of French Studies, the self-proclaimed "most French place in the U.S.," is celebrating its 25th anniversary as one of the most esteemed, rigorous and unique academic institutions devoted to the study of French culture. Using an innovative approach, the center incorporates various fields, ranging from history, sociology and political science to anthropology, ethnography and literature, and coalesces them under the umbrella of French studies.

Although Michel Beaujour, author and former Yale professor, devised the original concept in 1975, Nick Wahl, the director from 1978 to 1996, elevated the idea from a dream to a reality. According to Tom Bishop, director of the Center for French Culture and Civilization, Wahl "made the Institute what it had to become ... he oriented it towards the social sciences and to the possibility of dual certification" (in French

and another discipline). Using his "Hungarian charm," Wahl also helped to attract prestigious French guest speakers, including historians Jean Revel and François Furet, and sociologist Edgar Morin.

The French Studies program is set apart by its fundamental intellectual premise, according to Bishop. "Our students often complained that French studies only led to literary ... analyses, while what primarily concerned them was contemporary French civilization. It was to bridge this gap that we founded an Institute of French Studies." A radical departure from tradition, the Institute veered away from previous insular, compartmentalized teaching methods and instead integrated both the social sciences and French culture. This multidisciplinary model continues to evolve under current director Edward Berenson, with a newfound emphasis on French-American relations. 

NEW NICKEL DESIGN CELEBRATES LOUISIANA PURCHASE

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase, the United States' \$15 million acquisition of more than 800,000 square miles of land from France, the U.S. Mint revealed a new nickel, redesigned for the first time in 65 years. One side will continue to show the bust of Thomas Jefferson, while the reverse, usually adorned with Monticello, Jefferson's home in Virginia, will feature two clasped hands. The coin will be introduced to the market in 2004, and will revert to its traditional design in 2006.

FRENCH-U.S. COOPERATION MUSEUM TO BE RENOVATED

On September 3, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, the French minister of culture, and Eugénie Anglès, president of the American Friends of Blérancourt, signed an agreement to launch the renovation and expansion of the National Museum of French-American Cooperation, located at the Château of Blérancourt in Aisne. Private donors and the Florence Gould Foundation will help finance the two-year renovations, slated to begin in 2004. The museum, founded in 1924, commemorates the two nations' historic cooperation and promotes cultural and artistic exchanges.

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Literary director of the French publishing house Grasset from 1960 to 2000 and author of several renowned novels, Yves Berget was the newest recipient of the Renaudot Essay Prize for his "*Dictionnaire amoureux de l'Amérique*" (The Love-Smitten Dictionary of America). Calling it his "long song to America," he chides his compatriots for not being more resistant to U.S. culture, but does not blame America for its success. Instead, he calls for a cordial, balanced French-American relationship.

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France, Peaceful but Not Pacifist

FRANCE, WITH NO TERRITORIAL ambitions or declared enemies, is a peaceful nation, but by no means a pacifist one. As one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, and as one of the world's few nuclear powers, it does not shirk its international responsibilities. For historical, political as well as economic and cultural reasons, France more than ever needs an easily adaptable, technologically

advanced national defense in order to achieve its two-pronged defense objectives: the protection of its vital interests and the preservation of a stable and peaceful global security framework. In pursuit of these goals, the French armed forces are deeply involved in peace operations all over the world, making France, after the U.S. and Britain, the country with the third highest number of soldiers deployed abroad.



French army troops in Afghanistan
(Courtesy: French Army)

A Sophisticated Army

FRENCH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC, who launched a major defense reform at the beginning of his term of office, continues to make national defense a priority. A five-year programming law enacted in 2002 breathed new life into France's military budget (next year's budget again raises military spending to 32.4 billion



Operation Enduring Freedom: first encounter between the French Rafale (front) and the U.S. F-18.

(Courtesy: French Navy)

cooperation with allies will continue to be paramount, explaining that "French military

euros, making it the second biggest item in the budget after education). This law's objective was to modernize and to maintain at a high level of readiness the armed forces' equipment, but also to complete a professionalization process begun in 1996. Air Force General Pascal Vinchon, who heads the Embassy of France's military mission, emphasized that

capabilities must retain their compatibility with our allies' instruments on the technological and human levels to facilitate cooperation with them."

The French armed services already have state-of-the-art equipment in many fields, with the *Rafale* jets, stealth *Lafayette*-class ships and nuclear attack submarines in particular highly rated. Indeed, France accounts for 15 percent of all military exports in the world, placing it among the defense industry's top four nations. The *Mirage* fighter plane, for instance, is used in over 20 countries. The French government closely regulates French arms sales to ensure that the weapons do not get into the wrong hands, and most of France's clients are actually European countries, such as Spain, which recently purchased 24 "Tigre" helicopters.

Like the U.S., France has been reviewing its defense strategy and adapting its arsenal to better face the new military threats of today. In particular, the French government wants its forces to improve their capacity to deploy quickly and to go anywhere in the world. The government is also focusing on research and development. By next year, the French air force will be equipped with new *Scalp* cruise missiles, which countries like the U.K. and Italy have already ordered.

A Strong Global Presence

FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS, France has engaged in numerous military missions throughout the world, in conjunction with its friends and allies. As a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, created in 1949, France is today the second largest contributor of troops, after Germany, to the Alliance's operations. Currently, France has approximately 40,000 troops deployed overseas.

In the Balkans (Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo), Africa (Côte d'Ivoire and the now completed European humanitarian mission to secure Bunia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and



The Charles de Gaulle (middle left) with a British and two U.S. carriers.

(Courtesy: French Navy)

Afghanistan (as part of the International stabilization force and of Operation Enduring Freedom), France remains on the forefront of international military action in pursuit of a more stable world.

While remaining actively engaged in NATO, which is the basis of its collective defense, France believes that a strong European Union strengthens the transatlantic alliance and offers additional options. The E.U. and NATO are thus in no way rival organizations, but rather partners, cooperating efficiently and transparently. The recent success of the E.U.'s mission in Bunia is a clear example of the European willingness to act decisively and rapidly in crisis management. When NATO as a whole chooses not to intervene, the E.U. is now able to exercise its responsibilities in peace making operations and in the fight against terrorism.

French - U.S. Military Cooperation

THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARMED forces share a common history, with French General Lafayette's assistance during the American Revolutionary War and America's unflinching support to France in both world wars. French-American military collaboration remains strong and extensive.



Exchange Pilot Jean Borja in a U.S. Hercules

General Jones, commander of U.S. forces in Europe and NATO Supreme Allied commander in Europe, recently cited French forces as possessing particularly "impressive capabilities across the whole spectrum of operations."

After the September 11 tragedy, France offered its military resources to aid the American-led military campaign in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom). Since October 2001, French reconnaissance aircraft and air tankers have contributed to the air campaign

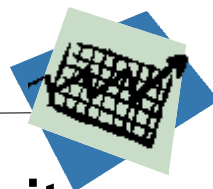
over Afghanistan, and France was the only country, along with the United States, to have flown bombing missions over Afghanistan in direct support of American ground troops. French forces were also quickly deployed on the

ground, with some 5,500 French soldiers sent to the region in total.

Today, 550 French troops are still deployed in Afghanistan as part of the International Stabilization Force, whose duty is to maintain security at the Kabul airport and its surroundings. Under U.S. command, French special forces are conducting combat operations against remaining Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces. France, alongside the U.S. and the U.K., is also playing a significant role in training the new Afghan army, having already organized three battalions of 500 men. The French navy continues to patrol the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, monitoring commercial seelanes, detecting and boarding suspicious vessels and escorting coalition boats.

France and America cooperate in many other spheres. The French armed forces have often taken a predominant role in evacuation operations from politically tumultuous areas. In the Ivory Coast, France's recent intervention saved 2,700 lives, including 142 Americans, and in Liberia France evacuated 535 people, 133 of whom were American. France participates in the proliferation security initiative to fight the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the French navy in the Caribbean offers a strong contribution to the fight against drug trafficking.

The French and American armed forces are long standing and faithful partners in all the different challenges facing the world's security.



Scientists Find Gene Linked to Obesity

Discovery of GAD2 gene could lead to the development of treatments

A RECENT DISCOVERY by a French-English research team gives new hope for combating obesity. The team, made up of scientists from CNRS/University of Lille Laboratory for the Genetics of Multifactorial Diseases and London's Imperial College, concluded a research project which demonstrated the existence of the GAD2 gene that is clearly implicated in weight gain. The Lille group had already identified several rare genetic mutations linked to the problem of obesity in children.

Over the previous ten years, the team examined the genetic profiles of 575 persons considered to be obese and 646 who were not. From these test groups the scientists identified two categories: those who possessed a "protector" form of the

GAD2 gene, and those carrying an "at risk" form. The latter were much more likely to suffer from obesity.

They determined that the GAD2 gene regulates the production of a neurotransmitter called GABA, which stimulates an individual's appetite but also serves to signal when the stomach is full. When GABA is functioning correctly, a healthy equilibrium is achieved. Otherwise, overeating can result, causing obesity.

Although the scientists emphasized that it is unlikely that obesity is exclusively caused by genetic factors, it is hoped that this new information will aid in the prevention and therapeutic treatment of what has become a growing health issue in many countries. ■ ■

"Intelligent" Clothing Crosses the Catwalk

Smart fabrics and intelligent clothes could revolutionize fashion world

THE FUTURE OF FASHION is here! In support of the European Science and Technology Week (November 3-9), a consortium of companies put on the "i-Wear Fashion Show" in Paris at the Palais de Richelieu on November 5. Featuring technical textiles, intelligent garments, smart fabrics, and wearable electronics, the event's goal was to present the latest developments in intelligent clothing to European consumers and to target potential designers, buyers, and manufacturers.

The show, which was organized by Alexandra Fede, a stylist for Du Pont de Nemours, Mitsubishi, and Wolford, consisted of demonstrations of some 40 prototype garments from companies like France Telecom and Philips. The European Space Agency's



'Absolute Zero,' containing Aerogel, the world's best insulating material, protects against harsh weather conditions.

(Courtesy: Corpo Nove)

Technology Transfer Program also presented various garments incorporating space technologies, such as a shape-memory shirt, a McLaren cooling suit, a Spacebra, a UV suit and baby pajamas that could help prevent cot death.

The i-Wear consortium seeks to promote cross-sector collaboration and the creation of new markets. By researching the theories, methods, and techniques that could make intelligent clothing a reality, i-Wear hopes to change the role of clothing as a means of expression, social embedding, communication, and well-being. Sectors that could benefit from intelligent clothing include fibers and textiles, design, microelectronics, biochemistry, accessories, communications, health-care, sports, and security. ■ ■

France Debuts New Rail-Truck Route

This transport innovation should cut down on accidents and pollution

FRANCE BEGAN TESTING a new rail route linking the province of Savoie to a suburb of Turin, Italy, on November 4. This route inaugurates an innovative transport service that consists of shipping trucks by train, thus saving truck drivers about 3 hours of driving time and reducing harmful emissions. The drivers will also benefit from first-class service, with spacious seats, a fast-food service, and videos.

The test trains carried 14 tractor-trailer trucks, each atop its own railcar. For its initial week, the service ran one round-trip for free. On November 12, service was expanded to 2 round-trips per day. Dominique Buserau, the secretary of state for transportation, said, "The testing [of the new route] will allow us to monitor the conditions and function-

ality of the service, as well as determine its suitability faced with the clients' expectations." November 18 marked the service's actual commercialization, with prices starting at 290 euros (\$341) to transport one truck, and its expansion to four trips per day.

The new route will provide an alternative for shipping companies who rely on trucks to transport their products to Italy and to other European destinations, thus opening France to faster and more efficient trade. By 2007, the government hopes to reduce truck traffic in the Savoie-Turin route by 25 percent as a result of the train service, which would account for about 300,000 trucks. The route will also help determine the suitability of a new rail link between Lyon and Turin, which would be launched in 2015. ■ ■

FRENCH SCIENCE ON THE WEB

The European Community's Research and Development Service (CORDIS) launched its newly revamped Web site on November 5. Developed by the French Ministry for Research in collaboration with CORDIS, www.cordis.lu/France offers up-to-the-minute coverage of news and policy developments. The site also offers an extensive overview of the administration of research and technology.

NEAREST GALAXY DISCOVERED

French astronomers at the Observatory of Strasbourg in France announced on November 5 the discovery of a new mini-galaxy, our own Milky Way's nearest neighbor. The galaxy, called "Big Dog," is so close in fact, that it is slowly being cannibalized by the Milky Way. The French team detected "Big Dog" by analyzing the infrared data gathered by the University of Massachusetts, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the California Institute of Technology.

THOMSON SA AND TCL INTERNATIONAL MERGE

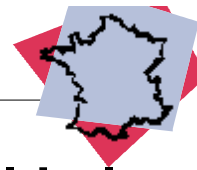
French electronics company Thomson SA and China's TCL International Holdings Ltd. agreed on November 3 to set up a joint venture by mid-2004 that should eventually become the world's largest manufacturer of television sets. TCL-Thomson Electronics, with Thomson owning 33 percent, will market the TCL, Thomson and RCA brands. The announcement was followed by the French government's sale of its remaining stake of 20.8 percent in Thomson for 950 million euros.

ASPIRIN CELEBRATES 150 YEARS!

In November 1853, Charles-Frédéric Gerhardt of Strasbourg first synthesized Aspirin, making its industrial production possible. Strasbourg's University of Louis-Pasteur celebrated the 150th anniversary of the most consumed medicine in the world by planting a white willow tree in its botanical garden. Components of Aspirin have been used for over 4,000 years to combat common ailments such as headaches, fever, and congestion.

GIANT PIRANHAS FOUND

In late October, scientists from France's Research Development Institute discovered two new, large, and previously unknown species of fish. Found in the Maroni River in French Guiana, the two species belong to the piranha family. These monsters, which measure over two feet long and weigh over 13 pounds, are vegetarians. Previously unknown to western science, local Amerindians have feasted on the "kumaru" for longer than they can remember.



15,000 MEETINGS ON THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

The French government had the first of what will be no less than 15,000 scheduled public meetings to debate the future of France's school system on November 15. The debates will cover 22 subjects revolving around three themes: "defining the mission of school, "helping students succeed," "improving how schools function." The debates will promote thought on these issues and lead to a proposed law by the French government by the end of 2004.

RADAR HELPS FRANCE IMPOSE SPEED LIMITS

In a plan to make its motorways safer, France has introduced permanent radar fitted with cameras that automatically fine speeding motorists. Around a dozen of the machines were set up in early November, with another 80 to be installed by the end of 2003. Over the next two years, 1,000 of these devices will help decrease the number of fatalities on French roads. "We don't want to trap drivers," Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy said at the release of the first machine. "We just want them to know that there are spots that are especially dangerous and that if they are going too fast they should know that they will be nabbed."

FRANCE AND U.K. FIGHT DRUGS IN SPORTS

France's minister for sports has teamed up with his British counterpart to assure the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) of their support in the fight against the use of illegal drugs in sports. Jean-Francois Lamour and Richard Caborn announced that they would help UNESCO draft an international convention that would officially enshrine

WADA's Anti-Doping code. WADA President Dick Pound thanked the two ministers "for their help in getting the Code accepted and implemented."

FRENCH LOVE THEIR RADIO

Recent results from an annual study found that the French are deeply attached to their radios. The study conducted by the Médiamétrie Institute found that 86 percent of French people listen to the radio at home, at work or in the car. "The French are generally radio listeners every-day," said Arnaud de Saint-Roman, director of Médiamétrie's radio department. "Not only do they have a well anchored habit, particularly in the morning, but they are also equally attached to their stations and to their programs."


Fund to Assist Handicapped and Elderly

Major \$10.5 billion reforms will benefit society's most vulnerable members

FRANCE IS PLANNING TO IMPROVE the social welfare of those citizens who are dependent on others by creating a new aid program. The reform, involving the creation of a new national fund, will be aimed at increasing aid to the elderly, the sick, the handicapped, and those with work-related injuries. Approximately \$10.5 billion over the next four years will be put into the *Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l'autonomie* (CSNA), which will finance, in cooperation with the government, a new branch of social protection.

The government will continue to give priority to personal autonomy, making it easier for the elderly and handicapped to stay in their homes rather than in special-care facilities.

Indeed, over 16,800 new home-nursing positions will be created. The plan also involves the modernization of 6,500 retirement homes and the creation of 200 new ones. As for the handicapped, they will benefit from a "right to compensation" for costs related to their infirmities, and new measures will be implemented in order to facilitate their insertion into society.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin is determined to bring about the success of this reform and is calling on France's spirit of solidarity to make it a success. In order to raise money for these programs, he is requesting a contribution of 0.3 percent from France's employers and the elimination, starting next year, of Pentecost Monday as a holiday. The aid program will go into effect before the end of 2004. 

Windsurfing Into the History Books

Raphaëla Le Gouvello of France is the first person to windsurf across the Pacific Ocean

MORE THAN 5,000 MILES OF OCEAN and 89 days of travel did not keep French windsurfer, Raphaëla Le Gouvello, from accomplishing her solo voyage across the Pacific, the first ever accomplished.


Le Gouvello's adventure began early August when she set out from the Peruvian capital, Lima, on her specially designed sailboard which permitted her to eat and sleep onboard without any help from other boats. Destined for Tahiti, 43-year-old Le Gouvello arrived on November 3 after traveling for about seven hours a day in all kinds of weather conditions.

A backup vessel was in place to track her progress but was not allowed within 600 feet so that the expedition could be considered a solo achievement. Within three hours of Tahiti, an entourage of 300 people - in yachts, canoes, and jet skis -- joined her for the final leg of the voyage. Upon

completion of her adventure, and having faced both terrible storms and prowling sharks, Le Gouvello said that "on the Pacific Ocean one must deal with the huge dimensions. Everything is multiplied by the scale of this ocean."

Top of the line technology, provided in part by the European Space Agency, helped make the trip a success. Electricity generated by solar panels located across the top of the board, and the power of the wind rushing across her six sails assisted her in reaching her destination safely.

This is not the first solo journey in Le Gouvello's life. She is the only woman in the world to have windsurfed across the Atlantic

Ocean (2000) and the Mediterranean Sea (2002). This latest adventure in the Pacific will certainly not be her last as she already has plans to finish the voyage by sailing to New Caledonia and then on to Australia. 




Raphaëla Le Gouvello arriving in Tahiti.
(Courtesy: Christian Durocher / Tahiti presse)

European Social Forum Held in Paris

FROM NOVEMBER 12 TO NOVEMBER 15, the European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Paris, Saint-Denis, Bobigny and Ivry, with over 50,000 people in attendance. The city of Paris, which places a great importance on dialogue and solidarity with the rest of the world, contributed 1 million euros towards the forum's organization.

The three-day forum provided an opportunity to debate a wide range of issues, including the creation of a "Europe of rights" and the development of a new form of globalization that would more fairly integrate people from the industrial-

ized world and people from developing countries in order to create a more equitable global society.

A recent survey conducted by EOS Gallup on behalf of the European Commission confirmed that a solid majority of Europeans, including the French, is in favor of globalization. Sixty-three percent of the poll's respondents expressed their support for the globalization process. At the same time, many share French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's caution, best expressed when he called for the "necessary humanization of globalization." 



Versailles Palace to get a Lift

Europe's most visited historic building will remain open during the renovations

FRANCE UNVEILED A 390 MILLION-EURO renovation project for the Versailles Palace on October 30. In announcing the project, Minister for Culture Jean-Jacques Aillagon said, "the objective of this vast project is to give Versailles back its dazzle." Indeed, the renovation is the palace's most ambitious since Louis-Philippe's reign from 1830 to 1848. Work will start this year and continue to 2020 in three stages.

The first stage, which will cost 135 million euros - including 29.2 million provided by the private sector -- will be completed in 2009. This stage aims to enhance safety at the site, reorganize the reception of visitors, and restore the palace, royal courtyards, gates and gardens. Safety improvements will include installing better fire alarms, modernizing the fire exits and replacing aging electricity systems. For visitors, the overhaul will simplify entrances -

groups will enter through the "Gabriel Pavillon" on the north and individuals through the "Dufour Pavillon" on the south - and add four new tour routes through the palace.

As for the renovations, the two main priorities are the restoration of the big palace's facade on the gardens, and the restoration of the marble and royal courtyards. Later in the renovation program, the Château's administrative offices will move to the Grand Commun, a 17th-century outlying building. A research center on life at the Sun King's Court will also be created there.

The site of Versailles is on the Unesco world heritage list and is the most visited historic building in Europe, attracting 10 million visitors a year. Versailles will remain open during the work, and scattered scaffoldings will not obscure the view of the Palace's majestic beauty. ■ ■



Château de Versailles on a winter's evening
(Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Culture.fr Web site Launched

THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S Ministry of culture and communication launched a brand new Web site, www.culture.fr, on October 7, which serves as a portal for web-surfers worldwide to learn about a variety of topics on French culture.

This site should not be confused with the Ministry of culture's official site (www.culture.gouv.fr), which mainly focuses on presenting government policies dealing with culture in France. The culture.fr site was designed to provide a service for the French and international communities, featuring exclusive articles on cultural trends in France, a calendar of events for more than 13,000 events at 420 venues, 600 museums, and 170 festivals, as well as links to other sites that promote cultural life.

In addition to serving as an agenda and newsletter for culture in France, the site has 14 "thematic portals" featuring facets of French culture, ranging from archeology and architecture, to heritage, monuments and gardens. The site also features an "Espace Jeunes," a special portal that is similar to the main page of culture.fr, but that focuses on topics of interest to young people.

Highly interactive in design, culture.fr provides a special column where visitors can suggest cultural sites of interest as well as give commentary on the site, in order to help facilitate its evolution and improvement. Additionally, a multimedia artist is selected each month to design the welcome page. ■ ■

French Rugby Team in Top Four, Ready for 2007

THE FRENCH NATIONAL RUGBY team was in the process of writing itself into the history books, but its World Cup hopes were dashed by a surprising loss to the British on November 16. Having won all of their previous 2003 Rugby World Cup matches in a definitive fashion, the rainy weather and a strong showing by the British erased their hopes of a tournament sweep. "Woodward has made England the best team in the world. They are very professional," said Bernard Laporte, coach of the French national team.

The French team is already preparing for the Rugby World Cup that will take place in France in 2007. Referring to the 15 men who played in the game against New Zealand, French team manager Jo Maso said, "This XV represents not only the team for the next match but for the medium and long-term

future of French rugby." This year's placing in the tournament has shown the world that France is now secure in its position as one of the four rugby superpowers, and one of the top two in the northern hemisphere.



Much of their previous success was due to the professionalism of former captain, Fabien Galthie. Galthie, 34, who retired after France's game against Britain, gallantly represented France 64 times over his 17-year career. He was praised by Maso, who said that Galthie, after having participated in four World Cups, is probably the best known French rugby player in the world. Galthie's next role will be as a consultant to the mayor of Paris to help oversee the preparations for the 2007 World Cup, where both the semi-finals and the final will be played at the Stade de France. ■ ■

FRANCE'S FIRST CATHEDRAL FOUND

Archeologists recently discovered in Arles, in Provence, the vestiges of one of the first Christian cathedrals built in Europe. Experts from the National Institute of Preventive Archeological Research (NIPAR) assert that the remains belong to France's first cathedral, built in 350 in Arles, then the main fourth-century ecclesiastic city of the kingdom of Gaul (a territory which covered present-day France, Belgium, the south of the Netherlands, and part of Germany and Switzerland).

NEW PICASSOS IN PARIS

An exhibition celebrating the life of Picasso, 30 years after his death, is currently on view in Paris. On November 7, the Paris Pinacothèque opened a show dubbed "Picasso in Time" which features art pieces and family photos by the artist that have recently come to light. The exhibition will actually focus on Jacqueline Picasso, who modeled for the painter for many years, inspiring him to create the paintings that will be revealed during this show. The exhibition is scheduled to last until March 2004 and may travel afterward to New York.

RENOVATING LES HALLES

Les Halles, one of Paris's most popular areas, will undergo renovation in 2005. After a stint as a market in the sixties and a labyrinth-like mall until recently, Les Halles will get a new make-over, as part of Mayor Bertrand Delanoë's plan to make Paris cheerier and more livable. A new farmers' market will be set up, the garden will be made more welcoming, and Parisians will also be consulted for other suggestions. Renovating les Halles, however, will present a great challenge since the area, located a few steps from the Pompidou Center, is also heavily utilized as an underground metro station, where 800,000 commuters pass through every day.

CONFUCIUS EXHIBIT

The National Museum of Asian Arts in Paris is currently presenting an exhibit on Confucius as part of the celebration of the "Year of China" in France. The show, entitled "Confucius, Precursor of Chinese Humanism" will last until January 2004 and feature paintings, drawings and translated texts. The exhibit places Confucius' ideas in their historical context and describes their interpretation over time, giving the public an insight into the life of the Chinese philosopher and into his contribution to his country's culture and politics.



The 7th Festival of New French Cinema takes place in Chicago from December 5 to 11. Jointly organized by the Embassy's Cultural Service and Facets Multimedia, the festival will feature 12 movies, including five U.S. premieres, by new French directors. According to the Chicago Tribune, "With each passing year, this ambitious winter festival becomes more engaging." For more information, please visit www.facets.org/asticat.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nathalie Loiseau

EDITOR

Emmanuel Gagniarre

MANAGING EDITOR

Amaury Laporte

SENIOR WRITER

Aude Rabault

WRITERS

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FRENCH EMBASSY PRESS & INFORMATION SERVICE

4101 Reservoir Road, NW
Washington, DC 20007-2182
Tel: (202) 944-6060
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Email:

info.washington-amba@diplomatie.fr

<http://www.ambafrance-us.org>

<http://www.france.diplomatie.fr>

An Empress-ive Exhibit

Empress Josephine's life is chronicled in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

IN CELEBRATION OF THE BICENTENNIAL of the Louisiana Purchase, which occurred under the reign of French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte and his wife Josephine, the Louisiana Arts and Science Museum (LASM) opened an exhibit chronicling the life of the Empress. The exhibit, which runs until February 1, 2004, is part of a joint effort between the capital city, Baton Rouge, where LASM is located, and Montreal, where it was on display in the Stewart Museum.

Eighty percent of the artifacts on display come from the French National Museum of Malmaison. Under the rule of Napoleon, Malmaison served a dual function as the summer headquarters of the French Government as well as the site of Josephine's extravagant parties and dinners. But the exhibit does not aim to emphasize her life of privilege but rather to highlight, according to Kendra Kimmons, the LASM marketing and public relations director, "the intimate and personal items that show the Empress as a serious woman who overcame many hardships and loved her family dearly."

One of the first major displays to chronicle Josephine's life, the exhibit begins with her childhood, progresses to her marriage with Napoleon and ends with the years that followed her divorce in 1809 until her death in 1814.

Born Marie-Joseph Rose Tascher de la Pagerie in 1763, Josephine, the daughter of a French sugar plantation owner, spent her childhood in her native country of Martinique. Her subsequent teenage years were spent in Paris where she met and married her

first husband, French aristocrat Alexandre de Beauharnais. During these years Josephine endured the hardships of a troubled marriage, which ended with the beheading of Beauharnais in 1794 during the Reign of Terror, as well as the joyous births of her two daughters, who were later adopted by Napoleon. The first part of the exhibit focuses on this lesser known period of Josephine's life through the use of images and documents, including her birth certificate.

The first section ends with the marriage of Josephine and Napoleon, which ushers in the second and most important part of the entire exhibit, the lavish life of Josephine the Empress, love of Napoleon's life. The exhibit provides a glimpse of Josephine's life as an empress through a display of royal robes, exquisite artworks as well as a period room fashioned in the style of Malmaison, along with furniture, jewelry and various other artifacts from her chateau.

The third and final section of the exhibit is dedicated to Josephine's life after her 1809 divorce from Napoleon because she was deemed unable to produce an heir. This portion portrays Josephine as a woman devoted to her family despite her impressive social position in society as a former empress. The artifacts on display

include the divorce certificate, artwork depicting her continued engagement in society, and correspondence with several European aristocrats, her family, and Napoleon.

The life and legacy of Emperor Napoleon's first and true love can be viewed at the Louisiana Arts and Science Museum. For more information, please visit www.lasm.org.



Empress Joséphine, Hector Viger, 1863.

(Courtesy: Louisiana Arts & Science Museum)