

Bernard Kouchner appointed Minister of Foreign and European Affairs



Minister Kouchner is a 67 year-old renowned French doctor turned politician with socialist leanings who has earned wide-spread recognition throughout his career of his heavy involvement of international health and humanitarian issues. He has been Minister Delegate for Health (2001-2002), Minister of State for Health (1997-1999), Minister for Health and Humanitarian Action (1992-1993), Minister of State with responsibility for Humanitarian Action (1988-1992), Minister of State with responsibility for Social Integration (1988) in previous socialist governments.

The co-founder and president of "Doctors without borders" in the early 1970s, Minister Kouchner was instrumental in founding Médecins du monde (Doctors of the World) in 1980, a non profit organization whose volunteer doctors and nurses help third world victims of inadequate medi-

cal care in times of emergency. Both NGO have gained international fame and have inspired numerous similar ventures.

As one of the former members of the Socialist Party in Prime Minister François Fillon's government, the new Minister of Foreign and European Affairs has affirmed his commitment to working together through innovation, rather than allowing party politics to interfere in external affairs. Upon accepting his new position as minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Minister Kouchner published a personal reflection in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, stating that: "The foreign policy of our country is neither right or left. It defends the interest of France in a world that reinvents itself every day. It must be determined innovative." Through his personal determination and innovation, the new Minister of Foreign and European Affairs promises to hold foreign policy to that standard.

A strong advocate of political openness and diversity, Mr. Kouchner was listed among Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in 2004. Among his most recent engagements on the international scene has been his continued commitment to resolving the crisis in Darfur, an issue he has given top priority in his new role. On May 19, just one day after

574.8... rail speed record for TGV

On 3 April 2007, the TGV smashed the world speed record, reaching 574.8 kph (356 mph) on the new TGV-Est high-speed line. The previous record was set in 1990 with 515 kph (322 mph). From June, it will link Paris to Strasbourg in 2 hrs 20 mins at the commercial speed record of 320 kph (200 mph).

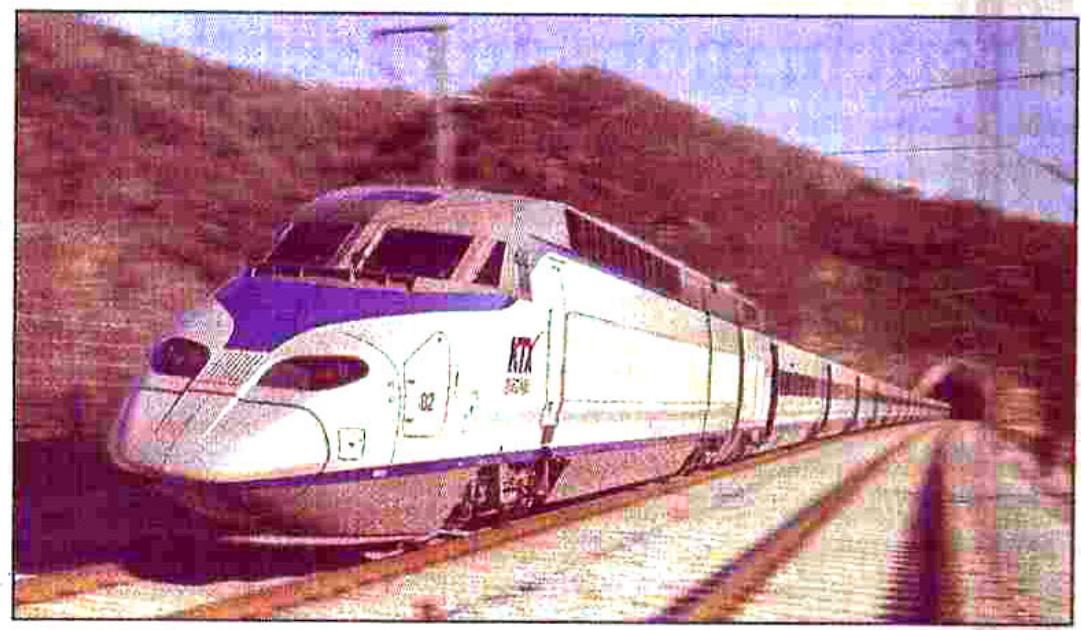
This new achievement confirms the TGV's success for more than 25 years. Since its launch in 1981 with the opening of the Paris-Lyon line, the TGV network has continuously expanded throughout France. It has safely transported 1.2 billion passengers.

The TGV has helped develop regional cities and opened up

many erstwhile isolated parts of France by improving access to and connections between them. It has also helped bring European capitals like London, Brussels and Amsterdam closer to French cities.

Environmentally-friendly and economically-profitable, it is also a symbol of sustainable development in the transport sector. Indeed, the TGV network is the main revenue earner for SNCF (French railways).

The TGV was exported to South Korea in 2004 and Taiwan opened its TGV line in October 2006. Talks are under way on the construction of a high-speed line between Los Angeles and San Francisco.



One figure, one fact: 2.0

2.0 is the fertility rate in France, i.e. the number of children per woman.

It's the highest rate since 1981 and has almost reached replacement level (2.07). Over 830,000 births were recorded in 2006, 2.9% higher than in 2005.

This very dynamic fertility rate, combined with longer life expectancy and migratory movements, is contributing to increasing the French population, estimated at 63.4 million on 1 January 2007.

France, with Ireland, now has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe, far ahead of the EU average (1.52 in 2005), which has itself risen (1.48 in 2000).

It is far higher not only than those of other Mediterranean countries with a Catholic tradition, such as Italy and Spain, which don't exceed 1.35, but also than those of East European countries (Greece, Slovakia, Czech Republic, etc.) which aren't above 1.3.

French family policy also plays an essential role: family benefits start with the second child. Crèches are

subsidized by the State and all French governments, regardless of their political hue, try to increase the number of places available. Taxation is family friendly; proportionally families pay less tax than the childless. On public transport, large families (more than 3 children) pay lower fares. Parental leave allows parents to reconcile family and working life; maternity leave, during which women remain on virtually full pay, lasts 20 weeks for the first child and 26 weeks for the third.

In France, employment and motherhood are perfectly compatible. France has one of the highest proportions of working women in the European Union. Career women are simply having their children later, between the ages of 30 and 40. Quoting researchers, "Le Monde" links this demographic dynamism to the attractive situation of France's female population: 80% of those aged between 25 and 49 work outside the home.

To know more about France

To find the right information, or the right web address, visit the Web site of the French Embassy in Dhaka at www.ambafrance-bd.org. An English version is available by choosing the language in the upper left corner.

Not only will you find information about the Embassy, the French presence in Bangladesh, or French-Bangladeshi relations, but you will also find useful texts and links in the "Discover France" and "Information center" sections.

Laurence Parisot: The boss of bosses is a woman



NADIA KHOURI-DAGHER

But Laurence Parisot is setting out "to prove that liberal does not mean antisocial" and to do it by "explaining the economy to the French". Her credo: "When business wins, everyone wins", and she is demanding greater flexibility in the labour market and tax cuts. "Life, health, love are insecure, why should work not be subject to the same law?", she ventures to ask. Her formula? "What's good is what works."

Her versatility is her principal asset: industry and the service sector, the provinces and Paris, intellectual and down-to-earth, an heiress and a fighter. Laurence Parisot, who grew up in the East of France, graduated in law and from Sciences Po in Paris. She inherited Optimus, the firm she runs - France's leading maker of cupboard doors - from her grandfather, and the polling organisations in which she forged her career - Louis Harris and the Ifop, of which she has been CEO since 2000 - taught her to analyse reality.

The problems that await her are sensitive issues: the Medef, which includes 750,000 business managers, has to reckon with the trade unions on the subjects of reform of the Labour Laws, unemployment insurance, pensions, purchasing power, etc., but Laurence Parisot has chosen the path of conciliation. Two months after her appointment, she initiated meetings with trade union leaders, proposing "that they draw up a diagnosis of the situation together".

Teaching ability, dialogue, pragmatism: Laurence Parisot seems to have chosen these "feminine" virtues in order to help boost the French economy. Oh, and she has also had flowers placed in the entrance of Medef's headquarters ...

For further information: www.medef.fr

Nadia Khouri-Dagher is a journalist.

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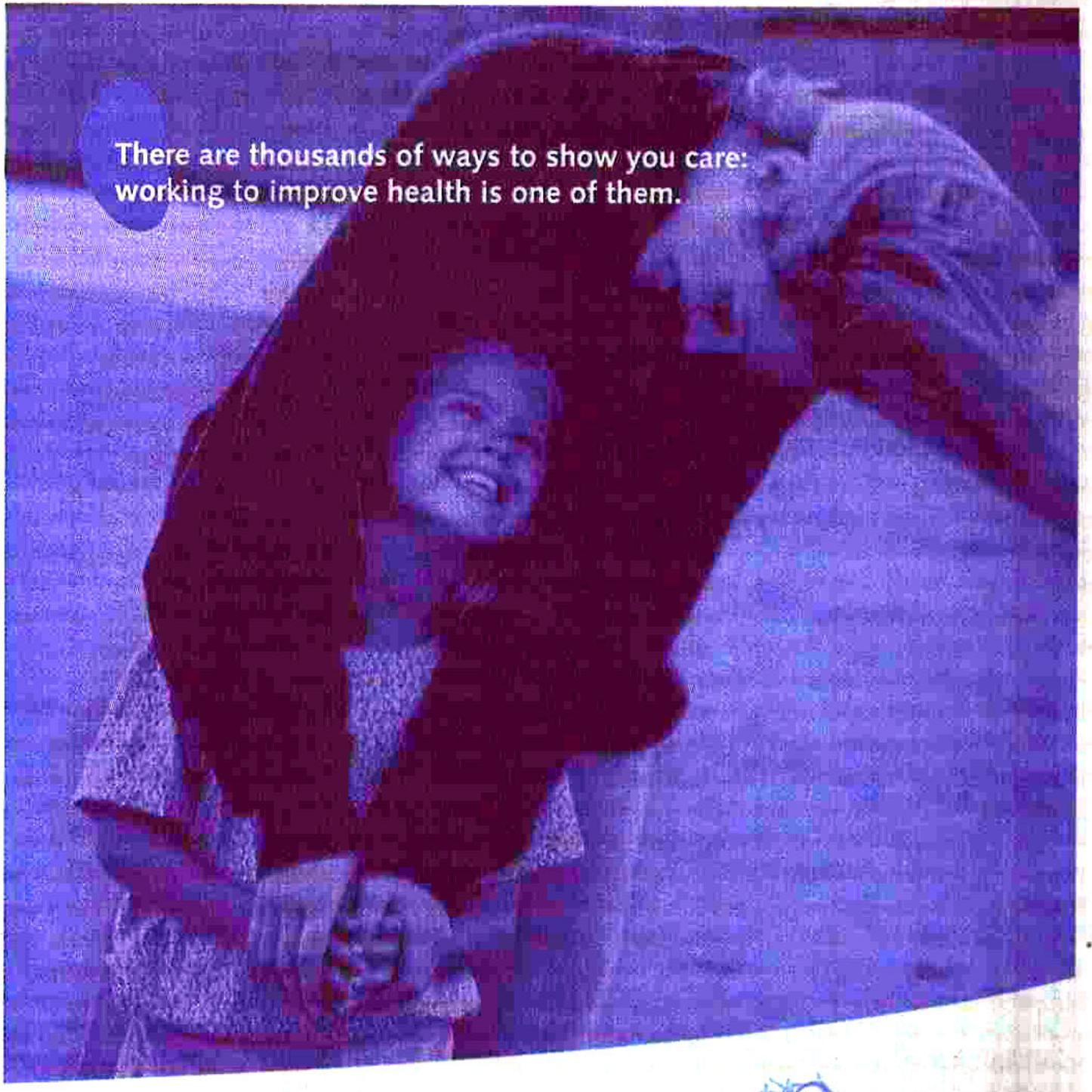
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