



Nicolas Sarkozy  
President of France

## 'Use your vote!'

FLORENCE RAYNAL

"HAS voted!". The phrase sung out in polling stations on election days when a citizen has dropped his ballot paper into the ballot box seems nothing out of the ordinary. Yet it is the end result of a complex process - and a long story.

In fact, the right to vote was instituted in France after the French Revolution, with the Constitution of 1791. At that time it was very restricted. "Universal" suffrage was only finally established after the Revolution of 1848 when it was still reserved for men over twenty-one years of age. Women had to wait until April 1944 to be granted the right to have a say in the government of the country. There would be one last alteration to the system: the lowering of the age of majority to eighteen, in 1974.

However there are conditions for participating in an election. The first is having French nationality, although European Union citizens resident in France can vote in municipal and European elections.

A second condition is enjoying civil and political rights, which excludes adults subject to legal incapacity, such as some prisoners. Lastly, would-be voters must be listed on the electoral register at the local town hall. To participate in ballots arranged abroad (as is the case for the presidential election), French citizens resident abroad must appear on the electoral register held by the consulates, which organise the polling stations.

Rigour and transparency  
Any citizen entitled to vote may take part in the electoral process, provided they have completed a few formalities which vary accord-

ing to the type of election. Thus, candidates standing for the post of President of the Republic or parliamentary deputy must be at least twenty-three years of age. Similarly, candidates for the presidency of the Republic must have collected the signatures of 500 elected representatives. In practice, if someone is not chosen and supported by a political party, it is not easy to stand for a national election and have any chance of winning.

Since 1988, a number of laws have established a better framework for party funding and campaign expenses. In particular, donations from businesses are prohibited and the parties benefit from public funding, to an amount established on the basis of the results achieved in parliamentary elections. There is also a ceiling on election expenses. These are reimbursed to candidates obtaining at least 5% of the vote. In addition, they must all keep campaign accounts which will be checked by the

Constitutional Council.

To publicise their programme, candidates have access to the broadcast media. This access is regulated by a public body: the higher audio-visual council (CSA), which, as guarantor of the expression of all shades of opinion, is responsible for keeping account of the time devoted to each. During the current presidential elections, for example, the CSA is ensuring that the equity principle is applied to candidates both declared and presumed, and will do so until 20 March 2007, the day before the publication date of the lists of candidates by the constitutional council.

Fairness between those standing should then be observed until the official start of the campaign on 9 April, when the principle of strict equality of time to speak (contributions by the candidate and his or her supporters) and of air time takes its place.

Florence Raynal is a Journalist



Arc de Triomphe

## AMBASSADOR'S MESSAGE

It is my pleasure and honour to address for the first time the people of Bangladesh on the occasion of the French National Day.

On the morning of 14th July 1789, a Parisian mob took by storm a royal prison where, upon a simple request by a member of the nobility, anyone could be detained for several years, with or without trial and sometimes for no reason. The fall of the Bastille, therefore, marked the first victory of the people of Paris against the reign of the arbitrary and despotism. More than commemorating the fall of a fortress, the French National Day, or Bastille Day as it is often called, is an opportunity for us to celebrate the values put forth on the occasion of this event, namely liberty, equality and fraternity, upon which every democratic society is founded. France as well as Bangladesh are strongly attached to these ideals which underlie man's eternal struggle for a better world. So I am very happy to celebrate this occasion with our Bangladeshi friends.

Ever since the call of André Malraux to the world community in support of the brave people of this land fighting for their independence and our early recognition of Bangladesh, events in your country are followed closely in France. We are pleased to note that it has been decided to establish a National Human Rights Commission and we hope that all the efforts deployed by the government to restore a state of law and to put the country on the track of democracy and good governance will be continued after the general elections next December. On many international issues, such as multilateralism, diversity of culture, protection of the environment, both our countries

share the same views. France greatly appreciates Bangladesh's foreign policy and particularly its involvement in the United Nations system and its important contribution to peace keeping operations, where French and Bangladeshi troops often operate side by side.

Our bilateral relationship is developing harmoniously. In the cultural field, a French Drama Festival was launched in March. Alliance Française de Dhaka inaugurated a new branch in Uttara last month. The two-week long annual musical festival, titled "Fête de la Musique", which just ended a few days ago, was again this year a success. After the 2007 floods and cyclone SIDR, France provided Tk 31.5 crore to NGOs working in this country. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1st July - 31st December 2008), France will make every effort to push forward the issue of climate change, which is of utmost importance to Bangladesh, in all relevant fora.

France mainly contributes to the development of Bangladesh through the projects funded by the European Union, in which it is a major contributor, international organisations and NGOs. But it believes that in export oriented countries like Bangladesh, trade is as important as aid. In 2007, the bilateral trade amounted to \$1.2 billion and France has become the fourth largest export market of Bangladesh. These exports which mainly consist of RMG and textile products, have steadily increased in the last five years at an average growth rate of around 10% per year.

Major French companies have also identified Bangladesh as a place to invest and they count among the major foreign invest-

ors in their respective sector of activity. To name a few, Lafarge Cement has invested in the largest cement plant in the country to supply the fast-growing domestic market, Total Gas has been operating an LPG bottling plant for almost ten years, Total Exploration and Production has started offshore gas exploration in 2007 and Sanofi Aventis is now a leading pharmaceutical company manufacturing its products in Bangladesh. Recently, worldwide leading French companies such as Danone in agribusiness and Veolia in the water sector, have decided to invest in Bangladesh in partnership with the Grameen group to develop social-oriented businesses and play an active role in the poverty reduction drive in the country.

Let me assure you that the Embassy of France in Bangladesh will continue to play an active part to further strengthen the friendly relations between our two countries. I wish every success to Bangladesh and its people in their march ahead towards socio-economic progress and prosperity.



Charley Causeret  
Ambassador of France to Bangladesh

## Studying in France: A passport to success

MÉLINA GAZI

FIFTH world economic power, land of art and culture, the favourite destination for tourists in the world, France is one of the leading host countries for foreign students. There were over 250,000 of them in France.

Essential France: its beautiful

landscapes, its rich history, its reputation for a wonderful way of life, the prestige of the body of knowledge that forms part of its culture! But foreign students are not just choosing our country for the art, literature and social sciences. Nor is the attraction a recent one.

In 1996 Kevin, a British financial management student, did an

intensive three term management course at the Ecole des ponts et chaussées (France's national engineering higher education institute): "A real opportunity to be able to live and study in Paris for a whole year." Chemistry student Omar still benefits from the grant he obtained to do his doctorate in Paris... and in recent years the percentage of foreign students at the Institut

d'études politiques de Paris (Paris Institute of Political Studies) has grown from 18 to 30%. Over 70% of those who come for a period of study then want to stay on to complete their degrees!

A certain desire for excellence

So studying in France is a dream for many people, a certain desire for excellence too. Something that Fumihiko Yamada, director of the cultural and information service at the Japanese Embassy in Paris, who has written a book about the excellence of the French education system for his young compatriots would not contradict! (See interview). Nor would the 250,000 foreigners who came to study in France in 2005, a figure which ranks it third among host countries.

Among the most diverse and effective in the world, the French education system has a tremendous amount to offer. Alongside its specialist institutes, including colleges of art, fashion, design, architecture, medical and paramedical studies, France has over 3,500 establishments, including 87 universities and nearly 500 Grandes Ecoles ("Ivy League" institutes of higher education) - 240 engineering colleges, 230 business schools and 4 Ecoles normales supérieures (which provide high-level cultural and scientific education).

Furthermore, as well as offering a wide range of highly regarded courses of study, the French university system provides almost free access for everyone, without distinction. This is far from the case in every country. Tuition fees here are more than competitive. For example: fees for a bachelor's degree are 350 euro per year and 400 euro for a master's degree, and these sums include protection within the social security system.

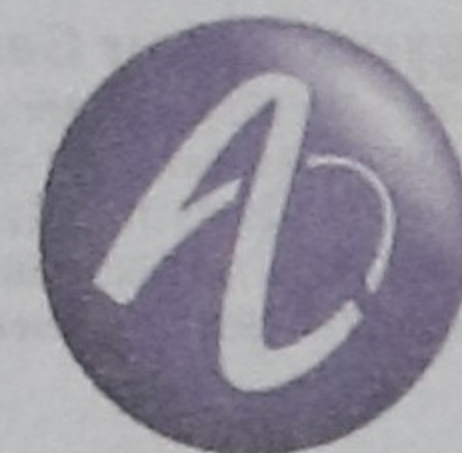
Equal treatment

The reason why the costs are so low in comparison with English, American or Australian universities is that the French State considers that money should under no circumstances be a curb on the acquisition of knowledge. It therefore subsidises visiting foreign students to a large extent - to a level of 2 billion euro - and confers on them the same status, i.e. the same rights, in terms of awarding grants, and the same degrees as French citizens. Again, a situation that does not apply everywhere.

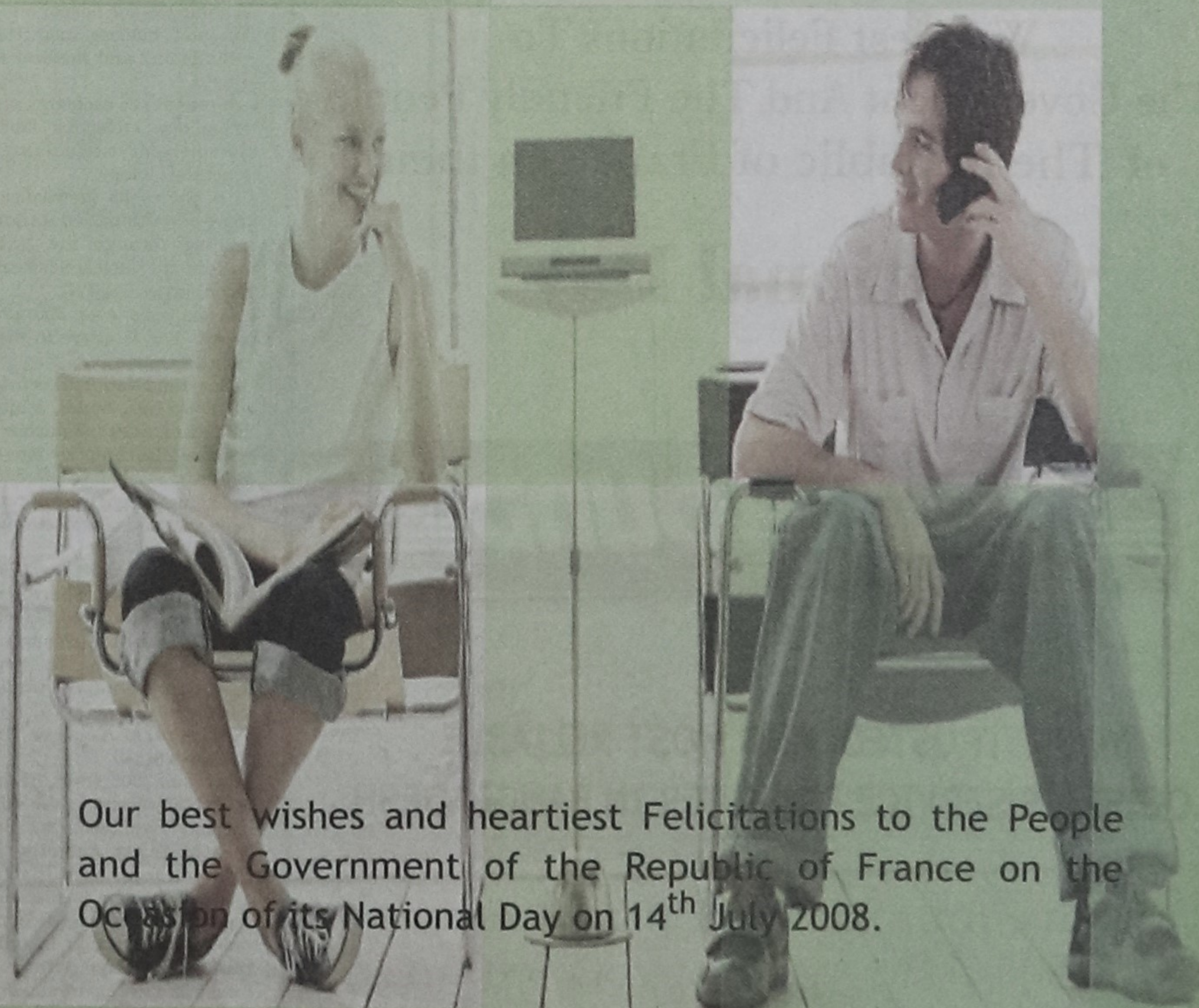
With regard to degrees, France has been involved in a major drive to harmonise European degree courses since 1997, and this is currently being completed. In fact French universities have all adopted the three European degrees, bachelor's, master's and doctorate (the BMD system).

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Our best wishes and heartiest Felicitations to the People and the Government of the Republic of France on the Occasion of its National Day on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

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Commercial Bank felicitates France & salutes the achievements of the French people on their National Day



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