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world briefs

ASIA

An Indian AIDS expert has predicted that Asia will surpass Africa as the world center of the AIDS epidemic by the year 2000. The prediction is based on projections made by the U.N. World Health Organization that ten million people in India will carry HIV by the next decade. Currently, India's Council of Medical Research reports that India has 2.5 million HIV-positive people. Thailand reports a possible 500,000. Only five years ago India was the least AIDS-affected nation in the world. A study conducted in Bombay's poorest sections revealed that ignorance around sex education and sexuality, two subjects unspoken of in Indian culture, were the epidemic's greatest ally.

AUSTRALIA

In what gay and lesbian activists called a "last-ditch battle" of "crucial importance," the parliament of New South Wales has adopted a gay and lesbian civil rights law. The law, which drew strong opposition from right-wing legislators, is identical to other civil rights laws that ban discrimination based on race and other categories. If violated it calls for jail terms of up to six months and allows for damages of up to 40,000 Australian dollars (\$26,000 U.S.). The bill gained a majority after lawmakers accepted an amendment that exempts churches from the protections for gay men and lesbians.

CANADA

Gay men and lesbians in Montreal say that the recent murder of a gay Anglican priest may be the work of a possible serial killer targeting gay men. Father Warren Ealing, 53, was found dead in his home, handcuffed to his bed after parishioners became concerned when he failed to keep several appointments. Ealing's car, computer and other valuables were missing and the house had been ransacked. Activists say the death is the fourth murder of a gay man in the city this year and the 14th within the past few years.

FRANCE

The lawsuit against the Italian clothing firm Benetton, for ads showing photos of body parts tattooed with the words, "HIV Positive," has been thrown out of court. In the suit brought by the French Fight Against AIDS, the court found that the public awareness charity was not qualified to bring suit in the names of people with AIDS. In another suit brought by a person with AIDS, the court held that the plaintiff sued Benetton's French subsidiary rather than the parent company that commissioned the ads. In a final ruling the court said that the photos used in the ads served the public by showing how HIV infection can occur through drug abuse and sexual practices.

French researchers in Paris have created a type of molecule they say is able to block HIV infection. In test-tube research the molecule CDR3 blocked the entry doors on three cell types targeted by HIV, according to the team at North Marseilles Hospital. Researchers compare the discovery to "a pass key that allows one to block all the locks to stop the virus from entering healthy cells." The process must still be verified in mice and monkeys.

GREAT BRITAIN

A collection of love letters from the author Oscar Wilde to Philip Griffiths was recently purchased for \$27,580. The letters, dating back to the 1880s, and which included a photo of the famous gay playwright, were offered for sale through Christie's by a descendant of Griffiths. It is the first documentation of the author's brief affair with the wealthy young Griffiths.

ICELAND

Researchers with the medical school of St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London have found a drug that kills HIV-infected human white blood cells in concentrations harmless to uninfected cells. The drug known as EF13 is being developed by Scotia Pharmaceuticals. Scientists are currently testing the drug in laboratory experiments. The researchers also said that healthy white blood cells, specifically lymphocytes, developed resistance to HIV infection after being exposed to EF13.

JAPAN

The country's capital, Reykjavik, hosted Iceland's 1993 Gay Pride Day. About 80 gay men and lesbians participated in the parade which was followed by a reception attended by two elected officials. The Icelandic parliament decriminalized sex between persons of the same sex in 1992 and has since recognized gay men and lesbians as a group vulnerable to social injustice. The parliament has appointed a committee to prepare legislation that will strengthen the civil rights of lesbians and gay men.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement of Japan has reported that the Japanese government has a policy restricting the entry of people with HIV or AIDS into the country. The International Lesbian and Gay Association said that, "although the many exceptions to the law make it almost impossible for anyone to be denied entrance, the policy does stipulate that the entry officer has the power to judge whether the individual will be engaged in behavior which has the possibility of infecting a number of people." The 1994 AIDS international conference is scheduled to be held in Yokohama.

UNITED STATES

A report in a Johannesburg newspaper states that black South Africans may be prohibited from donating at blood banks because of their higher rates of HIV infection. The report, hailed by some black South Africans as more of the "old apartheid mentality," is based on figures provided by the nation's blood donor service which show that, of first-time donors, nearly one in 70 black South African donors tested positive for HIV compared to one in 4,000 for white South African donors.

ZIMBABWE

The World Health Organization has called on governments to eradicate laws that discriminate against lesbians and gay men. The U.N. health agency said that such laws act as "barriers" to effective AIDS prevention efforts. WHO also called on countries to rescind laws that ban the promotion of condoms and laws that mandate compulsory HIV antibody testing. "With well over 5,000 new infections every day, time is of the essence in the fight against AIDS," WHO warned. "Without urgent action, the number could reach 40 million by the end of the century."

In a country of 10 million people, health officials estimate that approximately 60,000 people have AIDS and another 800,000 are infected with HIV. According to the social welfare department, some 600,000 children in the country will be orphaned as a result of the epidemic during the next six years. Since the country's orphanages are already filled with children, the government is researching alternative ways to care for the growing population of children orphaned by the disease.

Compiled by Lee Norwood