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world briefs

BRITAIN

Britain's junior minister for the environment, Angela Eagle, came out of the closet publicly Sept. 11.

The 36-year-old representative for Wallasey, located in northwest England, is the first openly lesbian cabinet-level official in British history.

"I have a long-term and very happy relationship," Eagle said. "I happen to be with a woman."

CUBA

Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar and French designer Jean Paul Gaultier were among the several hundred people detained in the Aug. 23 raid on Havana's most popular gay discotheque, El Periquito, according to an unconfirmed report from the Cuban Independent Press Agency.

Cuban customers of the club were fined one dollar and released from a police station the next day. Two busloads of foreigners were transported to immigration authorities for a document check.

Mariela Ferriol, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Relations, said police targeted the disco because prostitutes, pimps and minors were present.

But sources in Havana and Miami say the raid was, in fact, the latest move in a wide-scale crackdown on all things gay.

According to Miami's *El Nuevo Herald*, several of the dozen or so other private gay clubs in Havana also have been raided.

In addition, the Cuban Association of Gays and Lesbians, which formed in 1994, has been squashed and its members were taken into custody from their places of employment, *El Nuevo Herald* said.

Article 303 of the Cuban Penal Code punishes "publicly manifested" homosexuality with up to one year in prison.

HUNGARY

About 400 people staged Hungary's first gay and lesbian pride parade Sept. 6 in Budapest's busiest shopping district.

They carried pink triangles, rainbow flags and signs reading "Proud to Be Gay" and "Equal Rights for Homosexuals."

Halfway through the 2-kilometer march, the group stopped at Vorosmarty Square—the traditional site for demonstrations in Budapest—to hear a speech by Hungarian Radio's Balazs Palfi, one of the nation's few openly gay public figures.

He urged the marchers to accept their gayness and come out of the closet.

Passersby and onlookers were surprised but tolerant, participants said. There were no anti-gay incidents. The police cooperated fully.

After the march, the group descended on Capella Cafe for a show and all-night dancing.

INTERNATIONAL

Gay male sex is legal in 108 of the world's 210 nations, while lesbian sex is legal in 147 countries, according to figures released by the International Lesbian and Gay Association.

Eighty-three nations ban gay male sex while only 44 prohibit lesbian sex.

ILGA was unable to determine the legal status of homosexuality in 19 nations.

In most of the 39 nations that ban gay male sex but not lesbian sex, male legislators simply forgot to include women in their laws.

JAPAN

Gay men and lesbians won Japan's first gay rights lawsuit Sept. 16.

Tokyo's high court ruled that the city Board of Education discriminated against the gay and lesbian group Occur in 1990 by refusing to let its

members hold an overnight study meeting at a city-run youth hostel.

Tokyo's District Court reached the same conclusion in 1994 but the city appealed.

"The rejection was unconstitutional as it denied gay people equal access to the public facility," the high court said. "The city government



Occur members march at San Francisco gay pride

should have given due consideration to homosexual people, and its indifference and ignorance will not be tolerated."

The court said young people are capable of understanding homosexuality and that education should be provided if confusion or tension results from the presence of gay people in public facilities.

Government agencies are "obligated to pay careful attention to the situation of homosexuals as a minority and to guarantee that their rights and interests be upheld," the court said.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality and the national Human Rights Commission have filed a high court suit against several laws that ban gay sex.

They hope to delete the common law offense of sodomy, the common law crime of unnatural offenses between men, a Criminal Procedure Act measure that allows anyone to arrest anyone else he or she suspects of committing sodomy, a Security Officers Act sodomy ban and a Sexual Offenses Act ban on gay sex.

Although South Africa's new constitution is the only one in the world to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, many older laws still discriminate against gay and lesbian people.

Named in the case are the minister of justice, the minister of safety and security, and the attorneys general.

Justice Minister Dullah Omar opposes the lawsuit. He said courts should clarify sodomy statutes but not delete them.

THAILAND

The Rajabhat Institute, which operates 36 Thai teacher colleges, has lifted its year-old ban on gay and lesbian students, "apparently under pressure from foreign...non-governmental organizations," reports the *Bangkok Post*.

However the institute simultaneously proposed a new rule banning "sexually abnormal" people. Rajabhat Council member Wanlop Piyamanotham said sexual abnormalities include copulation with inanimate objects, exposing oneself in public and deriving pleasure from sadomasochistic acts.

The earlier ban resulted from a misunderstanding of the nature of sexual deviance, Wanlop said.

"The institute misunderstood and used the wrong word," he said. "That's why it seems to violate human rights. The best way is to single out sexually abnormal people."

To do that, the institute will use a sexual abnormality screening test that Wanlop claimed was developed by the World Health Organization.

"Sexual deviants are not always sexually abnormal," he said. "Sexual abnormality is worse. They can't be good teachers—they're emotionally abnormal."

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