

WORLD news BRIEFS

BRITAIN

Gay pop star Elton John, 50, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II on Feb. 24 at Buckingham Palace in honor of his contributions to pop music and AIDS charities.

"They don't come much bigger than this," John said afterward. "I am extremely proud. I love my country and to be recognized in such a way—I can't think of anything better."

John took his parents and partner, David Furnish, to the ceremony.

Officials of Britain's Caribbean Dependent Territories—Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands—are angry over the British government's demand that they legalize homosexuality.

Britain took the stance due to its concerns of being found in violation of international human rights agreements.

Anti-gay sentiment in the region was highlighted recently when the Cayman Islands denied docking privileges to a cruise ship carrying 900 gay men. The tourism ministry said gay people could not be counted on "to uphold the standards of appropriate behavior expected of visitors to the Cayman Islands."

"We are a simple Christian society," Anguilla head minister Hubert Hughes said in response to London's demand. "That is the foundation of our society. People say homosexuality is sinful. We would like Britain to understand that even though we are dependent on British aid, we will not, definitely, compromise our principles when it comes to Christianity."

London previously forced abolition of the death penalty on the colonies in defiance of local public opinion.

ITALY

Rome police have launched a series of raids against gay bars and outdoor cruising areas, activists report.

Among the clubs closed down on legal technicalities are the very popular Qube and The Drag Cafe.

Activists charge that the actions suggest the beginning of a "cleanup" in advance of Rome's year 2000 jubilee and a reaction to plans for the gay and lesbian Rome World Pride 2000.

JAPAN

In a new biography, writer Jiro Fukushima, 68, has outed the late novelist Yukio Mishima.

Mishima is perhaps best remembered abroad for his sensational 1970 harakiri (ritual suicide) at a Tokyo army post. His more widely translated books include *Forbidden Colors* and *Runaway Horses*.

Fukushima said he and Mishima were lovers for four months in 1951 when Mishima was 26, and again for five years in the early 1960s.

Mishima's biographer, Henry Scott-Stokes, commented to reporters, "It's astonishing it's taken nearly 30 years for this [outing] to happen."

MEXICO

Trans people in Tijuana have been targeted by the city police department's Special Forces, reports the local newspaper *Frontera Gay*.

The paper cites "constant arrests of young men dressed as women or simply wearing make-up, abuse during arrest...body searches that include ripping off clothes, insults, and sexual harassment."

Those taken into custody are charged with offenses to public morality, prostitution, drug possession or theft.

Jose Barroso Chavez, president of the Mexican Red Cross, has defamed people with HIV and should be removed from his post, says the Mexican Federation of Sexual Education and Sexology.

In a media interview, Barroso Chavez said, "We have many other needs and if 10,000 die from AIDS, there are a million people with respiratory or digestive health problems. I believe it is far more important to help the 1 million than the 10,000."

He also recently said, "I really feel that the more you promote condom use as means to prevent becoming infected, the more infected people there will be."

ROMANIA

President Emil Constantinescu signed a decree March 3 releasing Mariana Cetiner from prison.

Cetiner, 40, had served two years of a three-year sentence for "luring another woman into sexual intercourse." In December, she had been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

In a statement, Amnesty welcomed Cetiner's release but said it remains concerned for her welfare.

"She suffered repeated beatings whilst in prison. She is unwell and is extremely isolated with little support from friends and family in her country," said Linda Wilkinson of Amnesty's British gay and lesbian network.

In January, Constantinescu promised foreign gay and lesbian activists he would pardon all gay men and lesbians jailed under the nation's anti-gay laws.

"Homosexuality is the last remaining human-rights problem we have to address in Romania, and we will address it," he told the visiting activists.

RUSSIA

Well-known journalist and former Culture Minister Andrei Cherkizov has outed himself on the television show *Man in a Mask*.

Cherkizov, himself an anchor of the popular program *Hour of a Bull*, appeared on *Man in a Mask* wearing the customary mask and answered



questions about homosexuality. At the end he removed the mask, revealing himself to the shocked audience.

Cherkizov, 43, told London's *Pink Paper* he was out to co-workers when he served in President Boris Yeltsin's government.

SLOVENIA

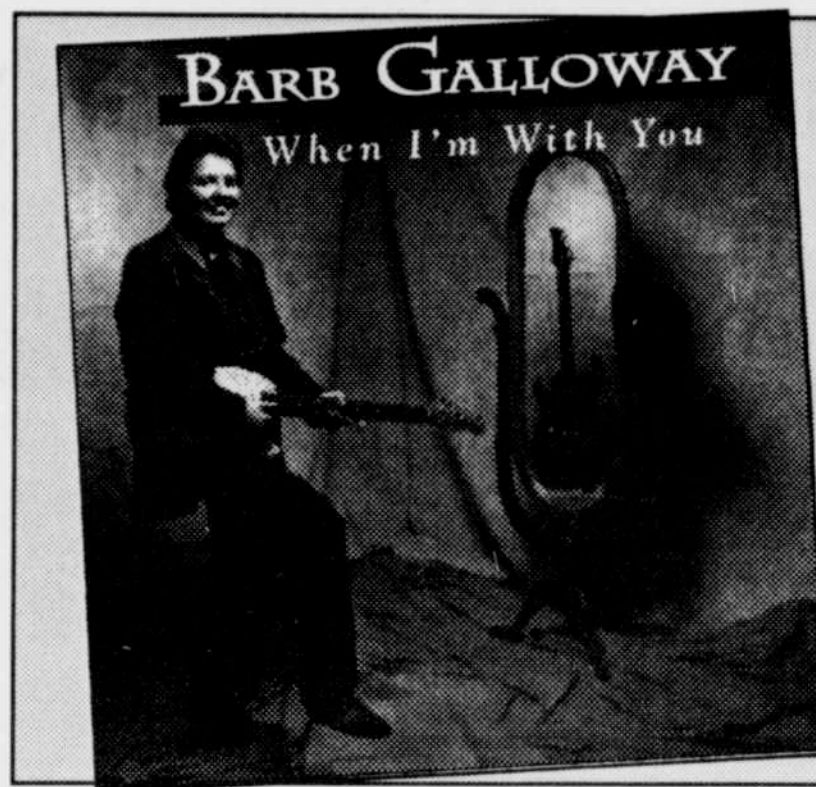
The government has formed a workgroup to consider formalization of same-sex partnerships. Two of the body's six members are gay activists. The group's main task is to draft a registered partnership law.

THAILAND

HIV infections have dropped five-fold in Thailand following a five-year government campaign promoting condom use. Other sexually transmitted diseases have declined 10-fold.

The new statistics come from the testing of 4,000 army draftees in six northern provinces.

Compiled by REX WOCKNER



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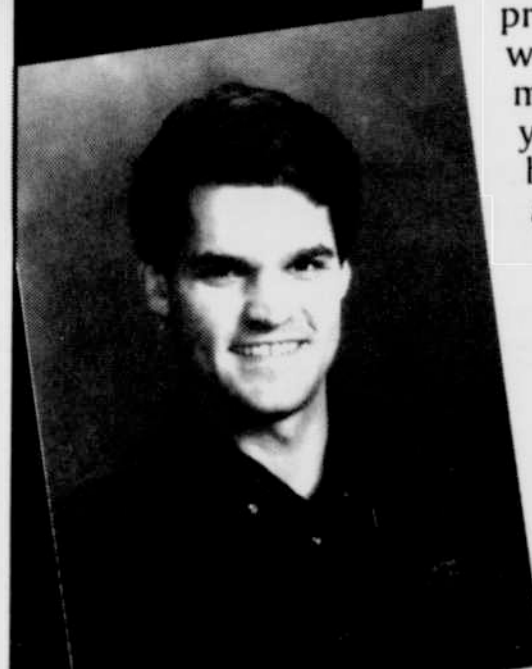
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