

WORLD news

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban leaders in Kabul attempted but failed to execute a 60-year-old man Jan. 16 for sodomizing a 12-year-old boy.

Thousands of people watched as a tank pushed a 15-foot-tall brick wall down onto Shuma Khan—the punishment generally handed down to convicted homosexuals under the Taliban version of Islamic law.

But when Khan was pulled from the rubble after 30 minutes, he was still alive and, in accord with Taliban law, his sentence was then reversed.

Speaking from his hospital room, Khan told reporters: "I was wrongfully convicted for sodomy. And God has proven my innocence. My whole body aches with pain, but thank God I have returned from the jaws of death."

The Taliban regime has executed several people since coming to power across much of Afghanistan. Khan, meanwhile, is thought to be at least the third person to survive the allotted 30 minutes under a collapsed wall.



ARGENTINA

The country's first television program for queer folks debuted Feb. 2 on TCI Cablevision Channel 27, the "Ideas" channel.

The weekly *Asterisk.gay* will offer news, interviews, street surveys, events promotion, and reviews of books, music and films.

Sixty percent of Argentineans have cable, and TCI is one of only two cable providers. The program will also be seen in portions of Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile.

CANADA

The nation is expected to change dozens of laws that discriminate against same-sex couples, Reuters reported Jan. 20.

The news comes on the heels of a lawsuit filed Jan. 7 by the Foundation for Equal Families, which is seeking revision of 58 laws that define "spouse" as someone of the opposite sex.

Among the laws targeted by both the lawsuit and government bureaucrats are those dealing with social security benefits, pensions, retirement plans, income taxes, bankruptcy, conflict-of-interest guidelines and immigration.

On Jan. 13, a gay bar in Victoria, British Columbia, was fined \$2,000 (US \$1,311) for banning a preoperative male-to-female

transsexual from the women's restroom after female patrons objected to her presence.

The transsexual, Tawney Sheridan, had male genitalia when the incident occurred in 1995. She has since undergone gender reassignment surgery.

B.J.'s Lounge owner Bruce Winkler says he may appeal the ruling, which was handed down by the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal.

"It declared open season for any guy who wants to throw on a dress and go look at women in the washroom," he sniffs.

But "transsexuals in transition who are living as members of the desired sex should be considered to be members of that sex," according to the tribunal.

"I didn't really expect any other result because B.C. is so accepting of different lifestyles," Sheridan told Reuters.

FRANCE

French tennis pro Amelie Mauresmo, 19, came out of the closet Jan. 28 after beating Lindsay Davenport at the Australian Open.

She leapt into the arms of girlfriend Sylvie Bourdon and later told reporters: "Looking up at Sylvie during the match was that little extra support that I needed. It gave me strength. Finding Sylvie and having such a good personal life now has made the difference in my tennis. It had been the missing part of my life."

According to *USA Today*, Mauresmo met Bourdon several weeks ago—through mutual friend and former French pro Isabelle Demonjeot—and moved from Paris to Bourdon's house in St. Tropez.

After losing to Mauresmo, Davenport said: "She's a very, very strong girl. A couple of times I thought I was playing a guy, the girl was hitting it so hard. She's so strong in those shoulders. She hits the ball, you know, not like any other girl. She hits it so hard and with so much topspin. Women's tennis is not usually played like that."

Davenport later clarified that her remarks were not a comment on Mauresmo's sexual orientation.

GERMANY

On Jan. 26, gay people were remembered for the first time during annual Holocaust services at the former site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Gay segments of the event included a wreath-laying, lectures and a performance by the Berlin gay men's choir.

It is believed that as many as 10,000 gay people were killed by the Nazis and roughly 90,000 others imprisoned. More than 1,000 were housed at Sachsenhausen due to its proximity to Berlin, which had a thriving gay subculture prior to the rise of National Socialism.

Sachsenhausen's gay inmates were marked with a pink triangle and forced to work in back-breaking brick-making factories because it was believed hard work would make them masculine.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLIEWER



"There were different groups of victims, but all were victims and all should be commemorated in the same way," says Sachsenhausen memorial spokesman Horst Seferens.

INDIA

Indian lesbians have formed an organization to respond to the ransacking of theaters showing the lesbian-themed film *Fire*.

Recently, members of the right-wing Shiv Sena party pillaged more than a dozen cinemas across the nation, intimidating managers into suspending screenings of the film. They smashed windows and snack counters and destroyed posters.

The party's leader, Balasaheb Thackeray, told *The New York Times*: "[The film] can corrupt tender minds. It is a sort of a social AIDS."

Announcing the formation of the Campaign for Lesbian Rights, organizers said, "The attacks on the film, the responses to the film and to the protests have pushed women's groups, human-rights groups and secular organizations to address the lesbophobia which prevails within large sections of Indian society."

They added: "In the case of lesbians, their isolation and invisibility has meant the absence of collective identity... The campaign seeks to make lesbianism visible and dispel the myth that there are no lesbians in India, to create awareness about lesbian issues and concerns, and to develop public and state recognition of the rights of all lesbians to a life of dignity, acceptance, equality and safety."

The group plans to disseminate information, engage in public debate and stage protest actions.

JAPAN

In an apparent first, two gay men held a commitment ceremony at a Shinto shrine, the facility's priest reported Jan. 20.

The union between a 28-year-old musician and a 23-year-old office worker at Wakamiya Hachimangu Kanayama shrine in Kawasaki will not be officially recognized, but the priest, Hirohiko Nakamura, admired the couple's commitment.

"I was very surprised when I got the request from them, but I was impressed by their strong will," he told reporters. "I turned down their request at first because I was really busy and didn't have time to rewrite a Shinto prayer. But their keen request moved my heart. I wish them good luck for their married life."

Regional Shinto officials say they disapprove of Nakamura's action.

Shinto is widely practiced in Japan and was the state religion until 1945.

ZIMBABWE

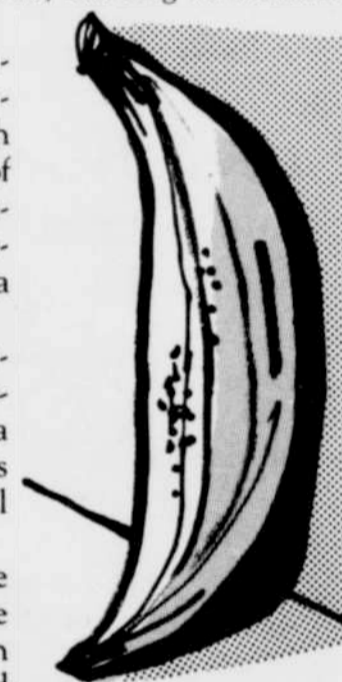
The group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe forcefully denounced former President Canaan Banana Jan. 28, claiming he defamed gay people.

On Jan. 18, Banana, 63, was sentenced to prison with labor on 11 counts of forcing himself sexually on aides, bodyguards, a cook and a gardener—all males.

Yet in a new interview with the *Financial Gazette*, Banana said homosexuality is a "deviant social behaviour."

Members of the gay organization were appalled. In an open letter directed toward Banana they wrote, "It is one thing for you to remain silent or neutral about homosexuality—it is quite another for you to castigate us when you have been convicted of engaging in homosexual activity."

They continued: "Rumours of your homosexuality have abounded within the gay community for many years. Nevertheless, we have consistently maintained a policy never to out people, believing this to be highly dangerous in a homophobic climate which borders on hysteria. Now you have the audacity to contribute to the hate campaign against us... You should hang your head in shame."



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