

WORLD news

AUSTRALIA

The manager of the Townsville branch of the Queensland AIDS Council was stabbed in the throat with a syringe July 21 in the parking area of his office building.

According to media reports, the attackers were two men with skinhead-like haircuts, and the incident is believed to be part of a "hate campaign" against gay men and lesbians.

The victim, Darrel Colbert-Whitford, 28, was also injured in a June 10 bombing of the AIDS Council's offices.

Townsville is located more than 500 miles north of Brisbane, the state capital.

BELARUS

On July 23, police in Minsk confiscated a rainbow flag from a display of AIDS quilt panels after the chairman of the Russian NAMES Foundation, which arranged the exhibit, charged that "exposing the gay flag discredits heterosexuals" living with AIDS.

The flag was brought by the gay group Belarus Lambda League. When group members ignored Mikhail Nedelski's demands to remove the flag, Nedelski called police, who in turn confiscated the flag.

Police officers also ordered Lambda to stop distributing its magazine, *Forum Lambda*, during the event.

CANADA

Same-sex couples in British Columbia are set to get equal rights in matters of wills, estates and inheritance. They currently have equal rights in areas such as adoption, spousal support and pension benefits.

The provincial government has introduced a bill to expand the definition of spouse in several laws to include "a person who has lived and cohabited with another person, for a period of at



least two years immediately before the other person's death, in a marriagelike relationship, including a marriagelike relationship between persons of the same gender."

Provincial Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh said: "This government is committed to supporting stable family relationships whether they involve traditional families, common-law families or same-sex relationships. That support is essential in the healthy, thriving and diverse society that forms British Columbia. All British Columbians deserve the same rights and benefits in life and in death."

Following the action, John Fisher, head of the national lobby group Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere, noted: "The federal government is rapidly falling behind the courts and the rest of Canada in its commitment to equality. EGALÉ calls on the federal government to stop following and start showing some leadership by introducing omnibus legislation as soon as the House [of Commons] resumes in the fall."

COLOMBIA

The Constitutional Court ruled unanimously July 14 that the armed forces cannot bar gay people.

Magistrate Vladimiro Naranjo Mesa said gay service members are now free to reveal their sexual orientation, live on base with a partner and be affectionate with their partner away from work.

GUATEMALA

Ninety people living with AIDS gathered in Guatemala City's Luis Angel Garcia Clinic at San Juan de Dios Hospital June 29 to find

out which four of them would get a year's worth of antiviral treatment.

The clinic had secured enough donated drugs from the United States to treat four people for one year and held a lottery to determine which patients would receive them.

"It was the most depressing lottery I have ever seen. In fact, to call it a lottery is really a misnomer, because one envisions cash prizes and television sets handed out to gleeful winners," says Costa Rican AIDS activist Richard Stern, who attended the event.

"I told them that I hoped this would be the first and last lottery of this kind, and I encouraged them to commit themselves to the kind of activism that has brought stunningly successful results to people with AIDS in two of the region's six nations: Costa Rica and Panama, where all people with AIDS can now receive retroviral treatment provided by their government," Stern says.

Only 15 percent of Guatemalans are covered by the nation's health insurance system.

MALAYSIA

An Islamic court in Kuala Lumpur fined 22 transvestites \$210 and one transvestite \$105 on July 27 as punishment for competing in a beauty pageant in the northern state of Kedah.

Judge Sheikh Zainol Embon declared: "Based on the photographs taken [at the pageant], all of you as participants of the beauty pageant wore women's clothes and lipstick."

Cross-dressing is illegal for Malaysian Muslim men.

MEXICO

A gay pride group is organizing in Guadalajara.

More than 50 people attended a July 23 meeting to set up the Tapatio Gay Pride Committee. Participants hope to stage pride events and a parade in the nation's second largest city.

Meanwhile, the city of Veracruz on Mexico's southeast Caribbean coast saw its first pride march July 18. Thirty-five people marched without incident.

Between 1995 and 1998, roughly 165 people were murdered in Mexico because of their sexual orientation, the Citizens' Commission Against Homophobic Hate Crimes reported July 28.

The actual number of killings may be three times higher than what has been documented, says Carlos Monsivias, co-author of a report that was delivered to the Mexico City Human Rights Commission.

In three of the 1998 murders the victims were castrated.

Anti-gay crimes are rarely solved because of societal homophobia, Monsivias says. He also blames the Catholic Church and right-wing organizations for fomenting anti-gay hatred.

"More than anything else, these hate crimes are characterized by society's complete indifference," Monsivias says.

SOUTH AFRICA

Andrew Barnes, the news editor of Radio KFM in Cape Town, is vowing to sue after the Western Province Blood Transfusion Service refused his donation because he is gay.

"Everyone is being urged to go [give blood] so I went to Picbel Arcade in Strand Street," Barnes told the *Cape Argus* newspaper. "I was asked to fill in a form asking for medical history, any recent operations or current medication. Then there was a section on HIV and AIDS asking about sexual history. One of the questions asked was whether, as a male applicant, you have ever had sex with another male. I circled yes on the form."

Barnes says he was then informed by a nurse that his blood was unwanted.

"I told her I was gay and was engaged to my partner," Barnes explains. "I was shocked and asked her why my blood was not good enough. She replied that, according to the World Health Organization, gay men were a high-risk group with regard to the spreading of HIV."

He adds: "I've spoken to the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality and my complaint is with their national executive. I'll take it to the International Court of Justice in The Hague if I have to. All people sympathetic to gay rights should consider boycotting the call to donate blood until the rules have changed. Homosexual men are not the highest risk group [in South Africa]. I don't think they should have a blanket ban on gay men giving blood."

The blood service's medical director, Arthur Bird, responds: "I accept totally that these type of questionnaires and safety margins that we have do cast a net. We accept that we sometimes sweep in safe donors unnecessarily. But that's the nature of the beast."

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UNITED KINGDOM

Manchester, England, has launched an ambitious campaign to attract lesbian and gay visitors from the United States.

With funding from the European Union and local bars, hotels and nightclubs, Marketing Manchester will run advertisements across the States promoting the city as "an international centre for gay culture and lifestyle," the *Manchester Evening News* reports.

"We have to look at Manchester's strengths," says campaign spokesman Andrew Stokes. "It does have a thriving gay community. We've got the gay village, the fantastic Mardi Gras event and the Queer Up North festival. We have a really marketable gay product and it's good business sense. It's a valuable niche market and we are building on what we have."

According to research conducted by the British Tourism Authority, the United States has 18 million gay men and lesbians with a typical income 70 percent above the national average.

On July 29, a British Court of Appeal upheld a ruling that the National Health Service's North West Lancashire Health Authority was wrong in refusing to pay for three men's sex-reassignment operations.

The judges said the surgery is a necessary medical treatment, not a cosmetic procedure.

"The health authority's policy...does not in truth treat transsexualism as an illness but as an attitude or state of mind which does not warrant medical treatment," wrote Lord Justice Auld.

The cases were filed by Miss A, 21, Miss D, 50, and Miss G, 50, after they were refused operations because they failed to show "overriding clinical need."

VENEZUELA

On July 19, the Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of Health to provide all AIDS-related drugs to all HIV-positive Venezuelans and foreign residents of the country.

The ruling was spawned from a lawsuit filed by 168 people with AIDS and the organization Citizens' Action Against AIDS.

The health ministry was also ordered to provide viral-load testing and all tests necessary for the treatment of AIDS-related opportunistic infections.

Compiled by REX WOCKNER

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