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WORLD news

AUSTRALIA

Mardi Gras, Sydney's annual gay blowout, attracted about 500,000 people to Oxford Street. The famous parade was led off by 300 dykes on bikes and featured 175 floats and about 8,000 marchers March 3.

This year's theme was gay and lesbian parenting. The lead float, Behind the Pink Picket Fence, carried pink flamingos holding wrapped babies in their beaks.

The parade and its satellite events inject more than \$60 million into the local economy, according to tourism officials. It is the highest-earning sporting or cultural event on the Aussie tourism calendar.

Australian lesbian Sarah Johanson has won her lawsuit against a Sydney butcher shop that gave her a dog bone purposely carved to look like a penis.

Michael's Meats must pay \$2,385 for sexual harassment and \$16,000 in court costs. Johanson also had sought damages for depression counseling and stress.

"If they had apologized in the first place it would not have cost them all this money," she told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "I just wanted an apology."

SOUTH AFRICA

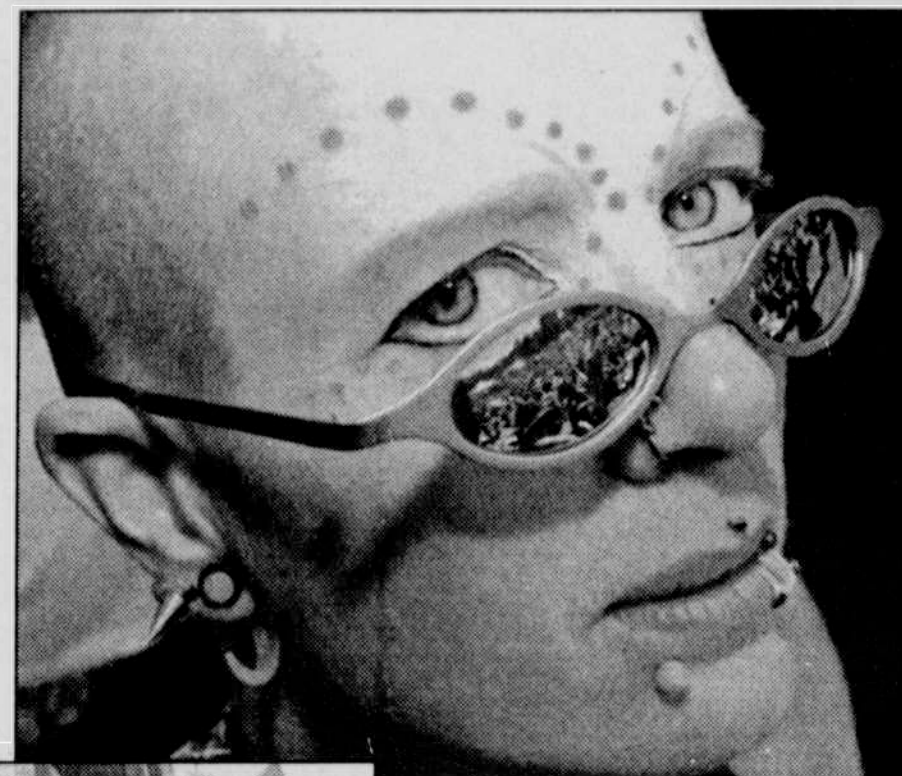
More than 40 drug companies—including Boehringer-Ingelheim, GlaxoSmith-Kline, Merck, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Roche—took the South African government to court March 5.

They are fighting a law passed by parliament allowing HIV drugs and other life-saving medicines to be imported from countries where they are produced generically rather than from countries where they are available only as patented brand-name drugs. The pharmaceutical companies claim the law infringes intellectual property rights.

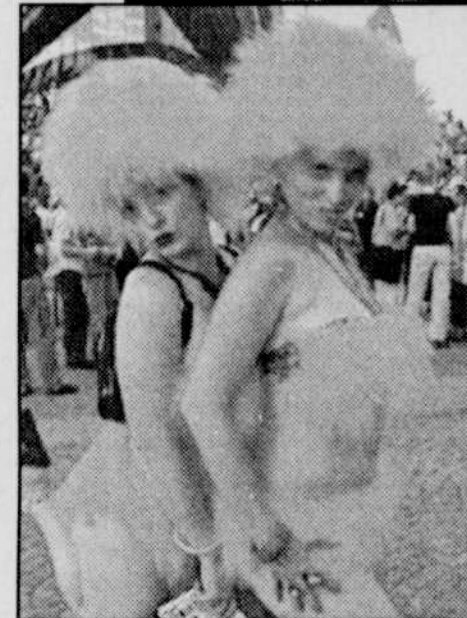
Almost 5 million South Africans carry HIV. Only a tiny minority can afford the patented drugs that have enabled richer countries to transform AIDS from a killer into a frequently manageable illness.

"These companies, with the support of some Western governments, are protecting their monopolies at the expense of millions of lives," South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign said. "This legal action shows that the pharmaceutical industry is more concerned with staving off competition and protecting their high profit margins than with genuinely increasing access to medicines."

"We believe that this lawsuit is legally flawed and morally reprehensible," the group said. "We call on the companies involved to drop the case and on Western governments to provide clear support to the South African government as it strives to tackle the urgent HIV/AIDS epidemic."



Aussies get down (under) during Mardi Gras 2001



UNITED KINGDOM

Following up on his three Grammys, rapper Eminem won the Best International Male Artist trophy Feb. 26 at the U.K. counterpart, the Brit Awards.

Openly gay singer Elton John presented the prize. About 20 people protested outside in the rain, accusing Eminem of homophobia.

The British government has proposed legislation that would let gay people claim compensation if their lovers are killed.

Activists demanded the change after the 1999 bombing of London's Admiral Duncan Pub, in which compensation was paid to heterosexual but not gay partners, the *Independent* reported Feb. 20.

"This is a hugely significant move," the gay lobby group Stonewall said. "It shows something about the value attached to lesbian and gay relations and is the biggest boost to equality between gay and heterosexual relationships since the equalization of the age of consent."

Field Marshal Montgomery, Britain's most famous World War II commander, was a repressed homosexual who fell in love with numerous young men, according to a new book, *The Full Monty*.



Field Marshal Montgomery

Montgomery won the battle of El Alamein in 1942, turning the tide of the war in North Africa.

Nigel Hamilton did not write about Montgomery's sexuality in an earlier

book but said he felt compelled to do so this time after reading hundreds of letters the war hero sent to young men, some of them not even in their teens. The official biographer said he has no proof Montgomery had sex with the boys he befriended but has no doubt he was passionately in love with them, the *Sunday Times* reported Feb. 25.

AUSTRIA

Amnesty International has denounced Austria for having a higher age of consent for male-male sex (18) than for male-female or female-female sex (14). The organization said Feb. 26 the discrepancies violate the country's obligations under international law to prohibit discrimination and arbitrary interference with the right to privacy.