

Britain has had two openly gay Cabinet ministers—former Culture Secretary Chris Smith and Agriculture Secretary Nick Brown—and at least seven openly gay members of Parliament. In addition, Ben Bradshaw, the Foreign Office minister whose portfolio includes Malaysia, is openly gay.

Mahathir fired Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, accusing him of having gay sex. Anwar was convicted of engaging in sodomy and sent to prison for 15 years but says he was framed because Mahathir feared he was scheming to replace him.

The maximum punishment for having gay sex in Malaysia is 20 years in jail and a flogging.

Smith has been openly gay for more than a decade. Brown came out Nov. 7, 1998, to preempt plans by an ex-boyfriend to tell their story to the media. Another Cabinet minister, Welsh Secretary Ron Davies, resigned after being mugged in 1998 while cruising for male sex on London's Clapham Common.

Shortly thereafter, *Times of London* columnist Matthew Parris outed Trade Secretary Peter Mandelson on BBC2-TV's *Newsnight* program. He later resigned in an unrelated scandal.

GERMANY

Openly gay Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit was re-elected in a landslide Oct. 21.

Legislators appointed him June 16 after the collapse of the city's ruling coalition. "The signal from this election is that Berlin is a tolerant city, an international city, and it doesn't matter which skin color or religion or life orientation a person has," Wowereit commented.

He came out of the closet June 10 in his candidate's speech at the Social Democratic Party's convention. "I'm gay, and that's a good thing," he said.

"And that's a good thing" has become a cult phrase in Germany since June.

According to a Reuters report, Wowereit has kept his life partner out of the public eye and even has taken a "beard" to public functions. "To sidestep potentially awkward situations for protocol, he has 'borrowed' the wife of another [party] leader—for instance at a recent reception for Russian President Vladimir Putin," the wire service said.

CHINA

Chinese AIDS educators are eager to reach out to gays to stem increasing HIV transmission.

"Although there are no statistics on homosexual behavior in our country, one thing is sure: The number of homosexuals is alarming," Vice Health Minister Yin Dakui told the *South China Morning Post*. "We must pay important attention to the spread of AIDS through our country's homosexual community and cannot be lax in strengthening education among the high-risk homosexual community."

China has 28,133 recorded infections, but officials say at least 600,000 residents are HIV-positive. The nation's first conference on AIDS was held Nov. 13 to 16 in Beijing.



Yin Dakui

ZIMBABWE

The group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe has reactivated after an infusion of cash from Dutch funders.

"Over the past three months, GALZ has been experiencing severe financial problems," spokesman Keith Goddard said. "We ran out of

money, and as a result the phone was cut off and we lost contact with the outside world. Luckily, we have been able to sell a fridge to pay for the water and the phone bill."

The organization's new funding cycle with Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries started in the first week of November. "We are all very sorry indeed for the long silence," Goddard said.

When the group finally accessed its e-mail, 1,566 messages were waiting.

"Not all of them were junk mail trying to sell us Chinese chemicals or offering us free holidays to places we have never heard of," Goddard said. "It will take some time for me to go through all the mails."

CYPRUS

Cyprus will equalize the legal age for gay and straight sex at 16, the government said Oct. 23.

The announcement follows criticism from members of the European Parliament. At present, male-male sex is not legal until the age of 18.

"We have received reactions and protests and pressure from the [European Union] concerning our failure to harmonize our gay laws to levels acceptable to the EU," government spokesman Michalis Papapetrou said. "There were some cases of [members of the European Parliament] who contacted the government and other political quarters and told us they voted against Cyprus [becoming a member of the European Union] because of our inactivity in harmonizing with what they consider to be human rights."

URUGUAY

The Chamber of Deputies unanimously approved an amendment to the Penal Code to protect gays Oct. 18. The bill now moves to the Senate.

The measure states: "Anyone who publicly or via any other means sufficient for public dissemination incites hate, contempt or any other form of moral or physical violence against one or more persons based on sex, sexual orientation or identity, profession, work or physical condition will be punished with three to 18 months in prison. Anyone who commits acts of moral or physical violence, of hate or contempt against one or more persons based on sex, sexual orientation or identity, profession, work or physical condition will be punished with six to 24 months in prison."

The sponsor of the bill, Batlista Washington Abdala, told fellow legislators, "To call someone 'fag' is pejorative, but to call someone a 'shit fag' is discriminatory."

BULGARIA

About 76 percent of Bulgarians don't want to have a gay neighbor, and 50 percent don't want to live next door to a "gypsy," a U.N. Development Program study has found. A total of 55 percent don't want a drug addict as a neighbor, 47 percent don't want an ex-convict next door, and 45 percent want people with AIDS to live elsewhere. **JM**

Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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