



Norway has a gay finance minister, Per-Kristian Foss

NORWAY

Per-Kristian Foss, a longtime Conservative member of Parliament who publicly acknowledged he is gay in February 2000, has been named finance minister.

That is the third-highest post in the government, after the minister of foreign affairs and the prime minister. Foss, 51, came out during his campaign for the chairmanship of the Conservative Party's Oslo branch, which he won.

Norwegian children raised by lesbians are not harmed in any way, University of Tromsø researchers have found.

These kids have no more problems than others in areas such as social skills, school achievement and general well-being, according to the study. "The results are somewhat surprising in view of the negative attitude that still exists towards homosexuality in society," said Margrethe Seeger Halvorsen, one of the researchers.

NEW ZEALAND

Georgina Beyer, the world's only transsexual member of Parliament, took center stage at the Midsumma Gay and Lesbian Arts and Cultural Festival this month in Melbourne, Australia.

"I get asked questions no other politician would ever have to answer," the 44-year-old told the Age. "Regarding the surgery, you know, 'Did it hurt?' Or 'When you have sex now as a woman, is it different to how you had sex as a man?' Well, honey, obviously."

Back home in New Zealand, Beyer is busy helping draft a civil unions bill extending most marriage rights to gay couples. The Midsumma festival runs through Feb. 3.

CHINA

A 68-year-old businessman in Haikou, Hainan, was sentenced to apologize and pay a 12-cent fine to each of three male co-workers he fondled and kissed, *Xinhua* reported Jan. 4.

Wang Guang told the court he thought the men were gay. One plaintiff told the court his wife filed for divorce and threatened to have an abortion after the case became public knowledge.

BRAZIL

The Parliament of the Minas Gerais state passed a bill last month banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and guaranteeing same-sex couples the right to show affection in public without being harassed.

Those who violate the law face fines of up to \$21,600. Businesses could be shut down, and public officials could be fired and barred from working for the government.

The measure also creates a referral center for gay, lesbian, bi and trans people who experience discrimination and places a sexual minority representative on the state Human Rights Council. Gov. Itamar Franco is expected to sign the bill into law.

At least three other Brazilian states—Bahia, Mato Grosso and Sergipe—and more than 80 cities also ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

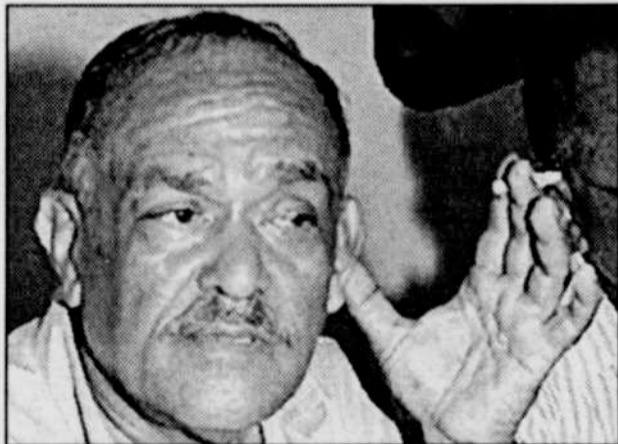
EAST TIMOR

The Constituent Assembly of East Timor removed gay protections from the new nation's draft constitution Dec. 13, PortugalGay.PT reported.

A total of 52 of its 88 members specifically voted to exclude "sexual orientation" from an anti-discrimination clause. Bias will be banned based on "color, race, gender, marital status, ethnic origin, economic or social status, beliefs or ideology, politics, religion, education and mental or physical condition."

One member of the assembly, João Carrascalão, called homosexuality "an illness" and "an anomaly" and said protecting gays would create "social chaos." Another member said the only homosexuals in East Timor are foreigners.

The people of East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999. In response, according to EastTimor.com, "Indonesian-trained militia in the country were unleashed across the



João Carrascalão

country—massacring civilians, cutting power and waterlines and burning 85 percent of the buildings in the country, including virtually all schools and nearly all businesses."

The nation is under U.N. protection, but power will be handed over May 20. Members of the assembly were elected by voters in August.

SPAIN

The 14th International AIDS Conference is set for July 7 to 12 in Barcelona. Organizers say the gathering will "focus on translating the knowledge gained from science and experience from all nations, particularly the most affected areas of the world—sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America—into action at all levels." □

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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