

WORLD news

be the gay and lesbian community's answer to the Olympics, generating more than \$100 million for the economy," the paper said.

But only 10,000 of 120,000 tickets have been sold so far. "The event will be struggling to break even," the report said.

Mardi Gras, meanwhile, escaped bankruptcy in early July via an infusion of \$222,400 from a mystery donor and a promise to its bank that the parade and festival will be profitable, according to the *Australian*.

The state of Victoria, where Melbourne is located, has seen a nearly 50 percent increase in annual HIV diagnoses since 1999. Up until then, the rate was decreasing.

"These figures in Victoria are a clear warning sign," Bill Whitaker, Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations president, told the *Sunday Age*. "We have got a window of opportunity to fix up Australia's AIDS response."

Officials and activists blame the assumed increase in unprotected sex on "safe-sex fatigue" and optimism about treatments. "The fear of AIDS has lost some of its bite," said Nick Crofts of Melbourne's Burnet Institute.

RUSSIA

Russian cult writer Vladimir Sorokin was charged with distributing pornography July 11 because his 3-year-old novel *Blue Lard* depicts Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev having gay sex. "We received a complaint from a man who bought Sorokin's book, [and] we launched an expert investigation," Svetlana Petrenko of the Moscow Prosecutor's Office told Reuters.



Vladimir Sorokin

Some officials denounced the arrest. "Persistent attempts by law enforcement...to break writers of their incorrect writing habits never achieved anything, either for literature or the citizens of this country as a whole," said Alexei Volin, deputy head of administration for President Vladimir Putin.

Culture Minister Mikhail Shvydkoi said: "I am not a fan of Sorokin, but I will defend his right to speak.... This is a highly dangerous precedent."

CANADA

A three-judge panel of the Superior Court of Ontario ruled July 12 that it is unconstitutional not to recognize marriages between people of the same gender.

The two couples who instigated the case, Joe Varnell and Kevin Bourassa and Anne and Elaine Vautour, were married at the gay Metropolitan Community Church via the process of reading banns—asking in church on three Sundays if anyone objects to the marriage, which is a legal way to marry in Ontario. They were given marriage certificates by pastor Brent Hawkes, but provincial officials later refused to register the documents.

The court's decision will not become law for two years to give the federal Parliament the option of changing the law itself. Activists called the decision unprecedented, ground-



Joe Varnell and Kevin Bourassa respond to the crowd June 30 during the Toronto Pride Parade

breaking and historic, although the government might well appeal the case all the way to the national Supreme Court.

Forget Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Elton John's upcoming Canadian tour is heading to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Kelowna, British Columbia.

"Some artists are of such a high caliber that they don't need to play by the 'stay in the major markets' rule," ChartAttack.com explained. "While we're overjoyed for Elton fans in Saskatoon and Kelowna, you gotta admit, it's a little bit weird."

Saskatoon boasts a population of 209,000. Kelowna, located 237 miles northeast of Vancouver, has a population of 96,000.

CHINA

Beijing's AIDS Action Project was evicted from its office at a private university after officials told the school to stop cooperating with the organization, the *South China Morning Post* reported July 4. "It will be very difficult for us to apply for funding without being connected to an institution," founder Wan Yan Hai said.

He believes authorities targeted the project because its Web site published the names of 170 farmers who died from AIDS in the Henan province after selling their blood to unsanitary, government-sanctioned collectors between the late 1980s and mid-1990s. Wan told the *Post* that up to 2 million residents might have been infected.

MALTA

For the first time, a political party in Malta has come out in support of gay equality, the *Independent* newspaper reported. The Alternative Democrats called July 6 for state recognition of partnerships, fairness for couples in housing and social welfare, a constitutional amendment banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and criminalization of harassment.

"We would like other parties and institutions to follow us, as they did with regards to the environment," chairman Harry Vassallo said. "I just hope they won't take another 10 years to get to agree with us on this issue."

Representatives of the year-old Malta Gay Rights Movement appeared with party officials as the proposals were announced. The organization staged a week of Pride celebrations in early July, including an art exhibit and a festival.

"There must be around 40,000 gays and lesbians in Malta, but people ask, 'Where are they?'" coordinator Sandro Mangion said. "We all know that social stigma forces a lot of gays to remain in the closet, but we also know there are politicians, people in the media, in show business, teachers and public figures who are gay and who could serve as positive role models to eliminate stereotypes." □

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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