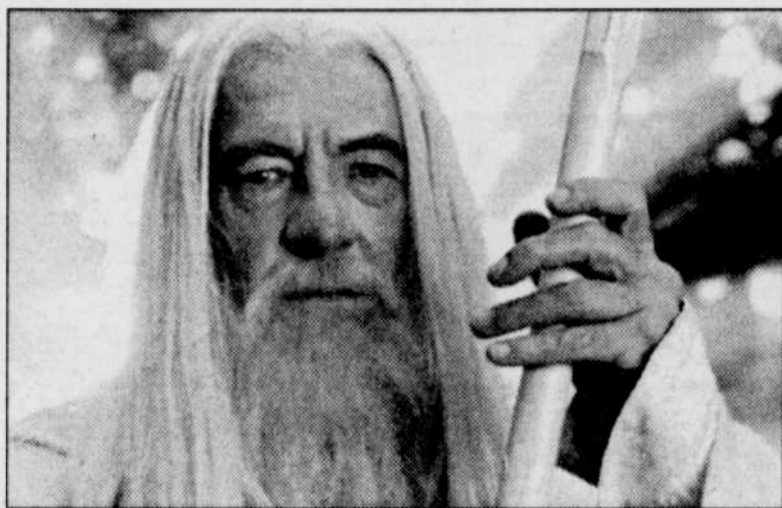


**WORLD news**



Sir Ian McKellen sends personal responses to fans who e-mail his Web site

said. "Most heterosexual people have learned to become more sensitive and develop subtle ways in dealing with homosexual people without being patronizing."

**B**angkok police raided the Babylon Sauna Bar in the Thung Maha Mek neighborhood Dec. 27 and drug-tested all 207 patrons; 20 of them—all foreign tourists—tested positive. The raid was led by Thai Deputy Interior Minister Pracha Maleenond, the *Bangkok Post* reported.

Operators were charged with running an unlicensed hotel. The facility contains sauna rooms, a swimming pool, a restaurant and four floors of hotel rooms.

The incident followed a Nov. 22 raid at the gay bar Pharaoh in the Sapan Kwai neighborhood. About 300 officers from the Crime Suppression Division arrested the owner, several employees and about 100 underwear-clad customers on charges related to "lewd shows" that were taking place.

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**P**ride Scotland, unable to pay creditors an estimated \$96,000, was put into voluntary liquidation in late December, Glasgow's *The Herald* reported Jan. 3. The 7-year-old parade and festival alternated between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The 2002 events suffered from infighting, bad weather and a switch from free to paid admission, *The Herald* said. Fewer than 3,000 tickets were sold.

Gay leaders lamented the news, but Neil Baxter, founder of Glasgow's Festival of Love, had a different take. "Much of the enthusiasm that fueled the early Pride marches and events has inevitably dwindled because the acceptance that everyone was fighting for has substantially been achieved," he told the newspaper.

Scotland is not the only place with Pride problems. New Zealand's big Hero Parade went under last August, as did Sydney, Australia's famous gay Mardi Gras parade, which later was rescued by other organizations. London's gay Mardi Gras festival was reported to be \$628,000 in debt last August.

**A**ll new staff of Britain's National Health Service whose jobs involve invasive procedures that might expose a patient to a worker's blood must test negative for HIV as well as hepatitis B and C, the government said Jan. 2.

Such exposures could occur in, among other areas, surgery, obstetrics, gynecology, dentistry and midwifery. "These new measures, based on expert advice, are designed to improve protection for patients still further by extending existing health checks," said Pat Troop, the agency's deputy chief medical officer.

**F**ans who visit British gay actor Sir Ian McKellen's Internet site, [www.mckellen.com](http://www.mckellen.com), and send him an e-mail likely will receive a personal response, Toronto's *The Star* reported Jan. 5.

"His well-designed Web site invites fans to really get to know him, by perusing his stage and screen work of the past five decades and by communicating directly with him via e-mail—which he actually answers, in a section called E-Post," the newspaper said. McKellen plays Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings* films.

**G**ay Britain is on the verge of a historic breakthrough," journalist Colin Richardson wrote in the Dec. 27 *Guardian*. "Equality before the law is at last within our grasp."

In recent months gays won equal rights in adoption and tenancy law, the Crown Prosecution Service announced a crackdown on homophobic crimes, and the lord chancellor appointed Adrian Fulford as the first openly gay high court judge. This year several gay sex "crimes" will be wiped from the lawbooks, work will begin on a national civil partnership registry, and a bill to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation will take form.

"All that will be left," Richardson said, "will be Section 28, the measure that prohibits local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality.'"

**CANADA**

**P**olice in Ottawa have filed 35 charges against a man they said met men on the Cruiseline phone-sex service, then went to their houses and robbed them. Lawrence Pigeon, 37, faces counts of robbery, being unlawfully in a dwelling, forcible entry, forcible confinement, assault causing bodily harm, mischief, extortion, possession of a dangerous weapon and break-and-enter, the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper reported.

"There is always a possibility there are predatory people in chat rooms," said Cynthia Cousens, chairwoman of the Ottawa police liaison committee for lesbian, gay, bi and trans communities. She recommended that people who hook up via the Internet or phone-sex services should meet new acquaintances in public and take a friend along with them.

**A** new survey of Canadians found that about half support legalization of gay marriage, gay adoption and marijuana use. Strategic Council pollsters questioned 1,400 people for CanWest Global Communications and *Macleans*' magazine.

**INDIA**

**I**ndian fashion designer Wendell Rodricks tied the knot with his French partner, Jerome, Dec. 30 in Goa.

The couple were united by a French government consular official under France's civil unions law, according to Planet-Out. Other reports said some of India's biggest celebrities attended the wedding.



Wendell Rodricks

**C**hina will begin making generic versions of AIDS drugs this month and will sell them for a 10th of the price of brand-name drugs, Health Minister Zhang Wenkang said Dec. 27. Officially, about 1 million people nationwide have been infected with HIV, mostly from sharing needles and via unsanitary blood-collection services. **J**

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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