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WORLD news

BELGIUM
 The House of Representatives voted 91-22 with nine abstentions Jan. 30 to legalize same-sex marriage.

However, it withheld adoption rights. In addition, foreigners are allowed to marry in Belgium only when the marriage also would be permitted in their home country.



Marc Verwilghen

The Senate already had approved the measure, which will come into force in June. It modifies the civil code by inserting a clause stating that "two people of different or the same sex can contract a marriage."

"Mentalities have changed," Justice Minister Marc Verwilghen said. "There is no longer any reason not to open marriage to people of the same sex."

The only nation with no distinctions between same-sex and opposite-sex marriage is the Netherlands. Foreigners can marry there after a brief period of residency.

Numerous nations have registered partnership, civil union or other laws that give gay couples up to 99 percent of the rights and obligations of marriage. Those countries include Canada (Quebec's law is the most comprehensive), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greenland, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and, in the United States, the state of Vermont. Gay couples have certain spousal rights in Australia, Austria, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom and four other American states.

INDIA
 The High Court in the central northern state of Madhya Pradesh ruled Feb. 3 that the eunuch mayor of Katni, Kamla Jaan Mausi, is male and thus must step down after serving four years in that position, which is reserved for a woman.

Many Indian eunuchs are castrated males, but some also are transsexuals or hermaphrodites. Jaan's biological history is unclear, reports said.

Indian eunuchs, who are widely ostracized, are best known for singing and dancing at weddings and births. Recently, however, some have begun to enter politics.

SPAIN
 The Ministry of Defense announced Feb. 4 that Madrid's Gómez Ulla Military Hospital has ended its ban on gay and bisexual blood donors. Pamphlets had prohibited donations by people with "homosexual or bisexual, promiscuous or unstable relationship habits."

Officials said that policy is "antiquated." In the future, people who have engaged in risky behaviors will be asked to exclude themselves from donating, and all blood will be screened twice for HIV.

GERMANY
 The Los Angeles office of Berlin's Convention & Visitors Bureau sent a press release to the U.S. media Feb. 4 promoting gay leathermen's events in the city.

"Berlin's Leather and Fetish Club is once again organizing 'Easter 2003 Berlin,' inviting local and international gay fetish enthusiasts to join in the fun at over 70 different events and celebrations scheduled to take place in the German capital during the long weekend of April 17 to 21," Kirsten Schmidt said. "A highlight of the festivities will be the selection of the German Mr. Leather 2003, who will represent the German leather scene at the International Mr. Leather contest to be held in Chicago in May 2003."

CANADA
 Statistics Canada is counting the nation's gays. In its ongoing Canadian Community Health Study, the agency asks, "Do you consid-

er yourself to be heterosexual, homosexual—that is lesbian or gay—or bisexual?"

Gay activists praised the effort but noted that some gays won't tell Statistics Canada the truth, which will result in an undercount. The 2001 census found that one-half of 1 percent of Canadian couples acknowledged they were in a same-sex partnership.

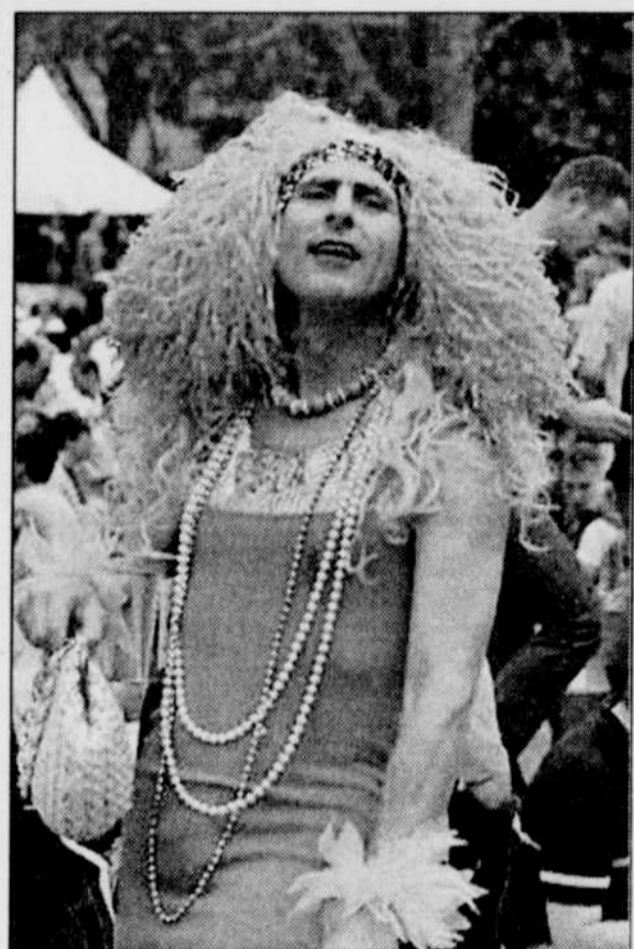


PHOTO BY JAMIE DUNBAR

A scaled-down version of Sydney's famous gay Mardi Gras parade will hit the streets next month

AUSTRALIA
 Dramatically scaled down and under new management following a bankruptcy, Sydney's famous gay Mardi Gras parade is ready to roll March 1.

The 25-year-old blowout lost \$413,000 last year, and the organization was liquidated. It was rescued by several community groups calling themselves New Mardi Gras and operating mostly within a volunteer, grassroots framework.

The number of floats will drop to around 80 from last year's 180. The associated arts festival, which cost \$460,000 to produce in 2002, is being staged for \$3,000.

Salaries, which last year topped \$600,000, have been limited to about \$41,000. Disc jockeys will play for free at the massive post-parade party, which in 2002 cost \$1.18 million to produce.

"There's a huge amount of resources, energy and creativity within the community, and that's actually come to the fore this year," New Mardi Gras co-chairman Michael Woodhouse told *The Sydney Morning Herald*. "We've had a large number of new people come up and say, 'I want to make Mardi Gras mine.' A lot of people value Mardi Gras immensely, and they actually had a real scare when they realized it was all over."

Gay activists failed Jan. 30 to dissuade Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Denis Hart from throwing his support behind American psychologist Peter Rudegear, who teaches that homosexuals can be cured of their "affliction." In the United States, all major mental health organizations and associations reject the ideas that homosexuality is an illness and that gays can be turned straight.

Rudegear was visiting the city with Father John Harvey, founder of the Catholic organization Courage, which counsels gays not to have sex. The archdiocese paid some of Harvey and Rudegear's expenses, and Hart issued a written endorsement of their work.

Harvey told the Melbourne daily newspaper *The Age* that Courage teaches chastity because it doesn't know how to cure homosexuality. "At