



Ultra Violet is Africa's first gay bookstore

SOUTH AFRICA

The education department in the South African province of Bloemfontein ordered Lereko High School to let a lesbian come back to school March 14 even though she refuses to wear a skirt.

Soliwe Ndamane, 17, had been wearing pants for three years, but teachers decided about a month ago that she was a bad influence. The education department told the school to stop discriminating based on sexual orientation, which is banned by South Africa's Constitution.

South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled March 17 that gay couples must receive the same financial benefits as straight couples.

Lesbian High Court judge Kathy Satchwell had sued to obtain work-related benefits, such as travel allowances and pensions, for her partner. She pointed out that the South African Constitution bans discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Africa's first gay bookstore has opened in Johannesburg. Ultra Violet Book Café is located at Second Avenue and Main Road in the Melville neighborhood.

"There are books for everyone—gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgendered people and anyone interested in gender politics and sexual identity," owner Michelle Kneisel told the gay newspaper *Exit*. "I envisage that Ultra Violet Book Café will become a central point for the gay community, a safe place for us to gather and network."

EGYPT

Verdicts were handed down March 15 in the retrial of 50 Egyptian men charged with habitual debauchery. As in the earlier trial, 21 of the men were convicted and 29 were acquitted.

They were arrested in May 2001 at a gay discotheque and elsewhere in Cairo. Following an international outcry from human rights defenders, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak declared the first trial invalid, saying it took place in the wrong kind of court.

The new sentences are harsher than the earlier ones. The men will be jailed for three years at hard labor, unless the convictions are overturned on appeal.

GERMANY

Gay Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit is promoting the city as a gay tourism destination. Joining with the German Headquarters for Tourism to unveil the travel guide *Gay-Friendly*

Germany at the International Tourism Exchange fair March 10, he said, "There is a huge market gap to be filled."

The publication reportedly is targeted primarily at U.S. citizens. Wowereit said that Berlin's gay scene is Germany's largest and that the persistence of anti-gay bias makes it important for the city to promote its welcoming attitude.

GREECE

Police raided the Athens gay bar Spices Club during an invitation-only party Feb. 20, activists said.

Six men were arrested and jailed for five days: the owner, the disc jockey, the bartender and three patrons who were found in the dark room. The bar has remained closed since.

Police said the raid was part of a crackdown on pedophilia and Internet child pornography. Among the charges filed against the men were indecent behavior, possession and use of narcotics, possession of pornography, pandering of pedophilia and Internet trafficking of child pornography.

Activists maintain there is no connection between the bar and pedophilia or kiddie porn. "It would seem that the police had their own reasons for investigating and raiding Spices," Maria Cyber said.

CANADA

The February/March issue of the U.S. lesbian sex magazine *On Our Backs* was distributed in Canada with three photos obscured by stickers. The photos, by Fakir Musafar, depicted lesbian bondage scenes.

"I'm shocked," the magazine's managing editor, Diana Cage, told Vancouver's *Xtra! West*. "I don't understand how we've been catapulted back to Victorian times."

The decision to sticker over the pages was made by the Canadian distributor Disticor on recommendation from the Periodical Marketers of Canada, a self-policing industry group. Canada's press obscenity laws are, in some areas, more restrictive than those in the United States.

RUSSIA

Starting July 1, the Russian military no longer will draft drug users, HIV-positive people or people with personality, emotional or behavioral disorders, including people with an "untraditional sexual orientation," the chairman of the Central Military Medical Commission, Maj. Gen. Valery Kulikov, told the Interfax news agency March 13. The government approved the restrictions Feb. 25.

Explaining the ban on gays, Kulikov said: "This is not a medical matter. The classification of diseases by the World Health Organization does not include such a disease. The new rules are based on international norms. So we are not calling this a diagnosis. However, people [of untraditional sexual orientation] suffer some psychological changes, while people with personality disorders are not eligible for the draft in compliance with medical examination rules for servicemen."

TANZANIA

About 300 Muslims marched against a planned visit by 100 U.S. gay tourists March 14 in Dar es Salaam.

They said that homosexuality is immoral and that those who practice it should be put to death. "Homosexuality is foreign to Africa, and it is totally against the teachings of Islam outlined in the Holy Koran," Sheikh Mussa Kileo told the crowd.

The protest was organized by the Council of Muslim Clerics. According to local reports, the unnamed gay tour group postponed its visit in response to the hostilities. **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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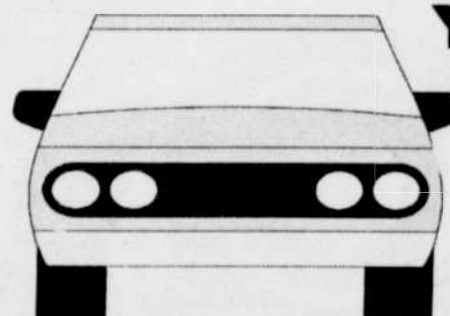
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