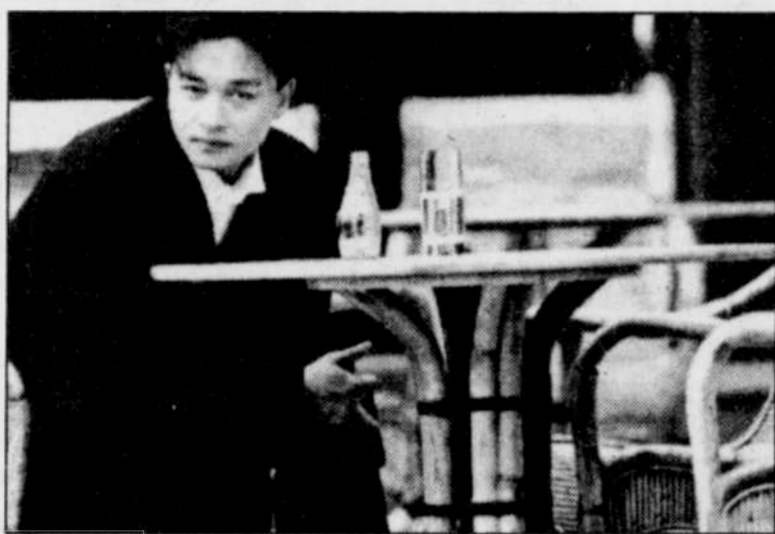


Africa's Constitution bans discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The women obtained sperm from an anonymous donor, and the fertilized ova from one woman were implanted in the other woman. The Department of Home Affairs had refused to register both women as the twins' parents.



Singer and actor Leslie Cheung jumped to his death March 31 in Hong Kong

South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign launched a civil disobedience campaign March 20 in hopes of forcing the government to make AIDS drugs available for the first time. About 110 protesters marched to the Caledon Square police station and demanded that Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and Trade Minister Alec Erwin be arrested for culpable homicide.

Cops agreed to open a case against the officials, then arrested the demonstrators for staging an illegal gathering. They were released with a warning to appear in court.

South Africa refuses to distribute HIV drugs, saying that they are toxic and that HIV may not be the cause of AIDS. One in five South African adults—about 5 million people—is HIV-positive.

Protesters continued their campaign March 25, chanting "Manto, shut up" as Tshabalala-Msimang tried to address a public health conference in Cape Town. Tshabalala-Msimang and campaign chairman Zackie Achmat got into a scuffle when Tshabalala-Msimang tried to grab a copy of a statement Achmat insisted on reading to the conferees.

Achmat eventually delivered the speech, which accused Tshabalala-Msimang of having "deceived, misrepresented, delayed and denied for too long.... We hope you will prove us wrong by making an unequivocal and irreversible commitment to anti-retroviral therapy," he said, according to the South African Press Association.

More civil disobedience is planned in the form of sit-ins, hunger strikes and illegal importation and distribution of AIDS drugs, campaign leaders said.

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea's National Human Rights Commission ruled April 1 that gay Web sites should not be classified as harmful to kids. The commission urged the National Commission on Youth Protection to remove gay sites from its list of dangerous sites.

South Korea blocks numerous gay Web sites under laws that also ban sites devoted to orgies, incest, sadism, masochism, prostitution and other sexual behaviors. The commission said that governments around the world are coming to see homosexuality as normal and that blocking gay Web sites infringes on constitutional rights to happiness, equality and free expression.

HONG KONG

Singer and actor Leslie Cheung, known to Western gays for the 1997 film *Happy Together*, committed suicide March 31 by jumping from Hong Kong's Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

The 46-year-old left a note that read: "Depression! Thank you to all my friends. Thank you to Prof. Mike [his psychiatrist]. This year has been tough, I can't stand it anymore. Thank you Mr. Tong [his husband]. Thank you to my family. Thank you to fat sister. I have not done one single bad thing in my life, why is it like that?"

The Hong Kong daily newspaper *The Standard* said Cheung might have been having problems with his partner, Daffy Tong. But Tong later told reporters the situation wasn't that simple.

"There were problems in his career. Many things. It's complicated," he said.

POLAND

The Polish gay organization Campaign Against Homophobia has launched a billboard campaign showing same-sex couples holding hands alongside the caption, "Let them see us!"

The billboards and posters went up in several cities, but not in Warsaw and Krakow, where they were banned by officials, according to the French Press Agency. The campaign was created by photographer Karolina Bregula, who said she had a hard time finding models.

"I had the idea for the campaign after a two-year stay in Sweden," she said. "There homosexual couples live freely, are part of society. We want to open people's eyes—show that homosexuals live just like they do, in their midst. The people in the photos are mainly young people and students who are interested in changing the current situation. Their attitudes regarding their own homosexuality gave them the ability to display it publicly despite the fact that they still risk a lot doing so."

The campaign received funding from Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, the federal minister for the equal status of women and men.

"It's very good to live in a pluralistic society that respects everyone's rights, tolerates various lifestyles, religions and sexual orientations," she said. "Up to now, we have not yet had a public discussion on the topic of homosexuality in this society; hence, we're overrun with stereotypes and fears. We should get rid of our phobia of homosexuals. Poland will soon join the European Union."

ITALY

The city of Gela, Sicily, elected a gay mayor in mid-March.

Rosario Crocetta actually lost the election last May by 107 votes but challenged the outcome in court and now has been declared the winner. "I will struggle against marginalization of every kind," he told London's *The Independent*.



Rosario Crocetta

CANADA

A total of 13 gay couples won \$1,340 each from the province of Alberta on March 25 because the health ministry refused to let them pay family insurance premiums under the government health plan. Following an earlier ruling by the provincial human rights commission, the couples received refunds of the money they spent paying premiums as individuals instead of as families.

But the commission did not award general damages, so the couples filed an appeal that ended with the \$2,000 settlements. In the meantime, Alberta's Legislature extended the rights, obligations and benefits of common law marriage to same-sex couples. [7]

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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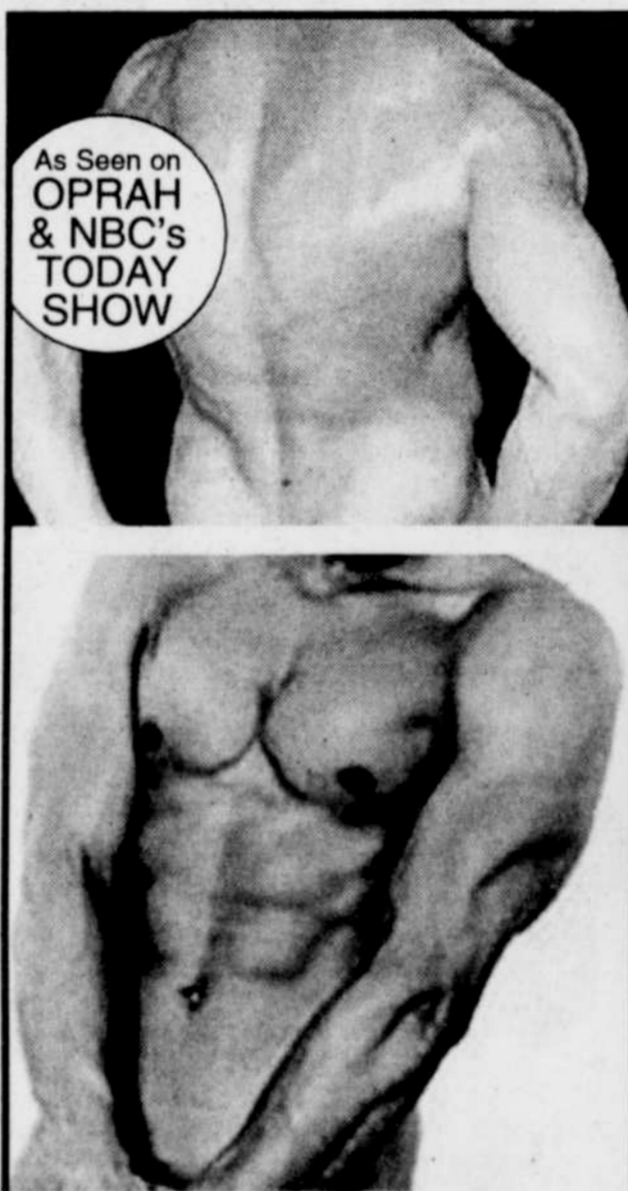


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