



Taiwan is planning to legalize same-sex marriage, President Chen Shui-bian says

TAIWAN

Queer rights groups protested Dec. 23 outside the headquarters of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party demanding that a lawmaker be punished for anti-gay remarks and that the government present a timetable for enacting protections, *The China Post* reported.

Lawmaker Ho Shui-sheng had called for a ban on gay marriage, saying the unions would destroy the nation because same-sex couples cannot reproduce. He later apologized, saying he was speaking from a "medical" point of view and is not prejudiced against homosexuals.

More than 30 groups reportedly took part in the demonstration, including the Taiwan Tongzhi (gay) Hotline Association and the Gender-Sexuality Rights Association Taiwan.

In November, Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian said the government is planning to legalize same-sex marriage. "The human rights of homosexuals have been gradually recognized by countries around the world. To protect their rights, [gay] people should have the right to wed and have a family based on their free will."

The protesters said the government needs to turn its words into action.

About 36 percent of gays and lesbians in Taiwan have been harassed or discriminated against because of their sexuality, a survey has found.

The Taiwan Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Association questioned 1,641 homosexuals along with a smattering of heterosexuals and bisexuals. About 13 percent of the 336 heterosexuals quizzed said they had been harassed after being misidentified as gay.

According to a summary of the research published in *The Taipei Times*, 36 percent of the harassment cases occurred at universities, 32 percent at home, 24 percent at work and the remainder elsewhere.



Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt wants to give same-sex couples access to adoption

BELGIUM

Belgium, one of the three nations in the world where same-sex couples have access to full marriage, is planning to erase the final distinction between same- and opposite-sex matrimony: access to adoption.

Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt's Dutch-speaking Liberal Party will introduce the mea-

sure in Parliament, where it is expected to pass with help from the Socialists and the Greens, Reuters reported. The change is opposed by three parties: the French-speaking Liberals, the right-wing Vlaams Blok and the French-speaking Christian Democrats.

In a statement, the Dutch-speaking Liberals said, "Research and the practical experience of countries which already allow adoption by same-sex and bisexual couples show that children raised by same-sex parents are not affected in a negative way."

Same-sex couples also have access to full marriage in the Netherlands and in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, where courts opened up the institution in 2003. Canada's Parliament is expected to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide sometime this year, barring any unanticipated changes in the political or judicial landscape.

THE VATICAN

Pope John Paul II attacked gays again Dec. 28.

Speaking during his traditional Sunday greeting, the pontiff said: "In our times, a misunderstood sense of rights has sometimes disturbed the nature of the family institution and conjugal bond itself. It is necessary that at every level, the efforts of those who believe in the importance of the family based on matrimony unite."

The Vatican declared war on same-sex marriage and civil union and domestic partnership laws July 30.

The church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asserted: "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. Homosexual acts close the sexual act to the gift of life.... Under no circumstances can they be approved."

"Those who would move from tolerance to the legitimization of specific rights for cohabiting homosexual persons need to be reminded that the approval or legalization of evil is something far different from the toleration of evil," the church warned. "When legislation in favor of the recognition of homosexual unions is proposed for the first time in a legislative assembly, the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral."

Letting gay couples adopt children, the declaration added, amounts to child abuse.

"Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in [same-sex] unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development," it said. "This is gravely immoral."

BOLIVIA

Members of Bolivia's National Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS disrupted a speech Dec. 1 by Vice Minister of Health Oscar Larrain in Santa Cruz, the nation's second-largest city.

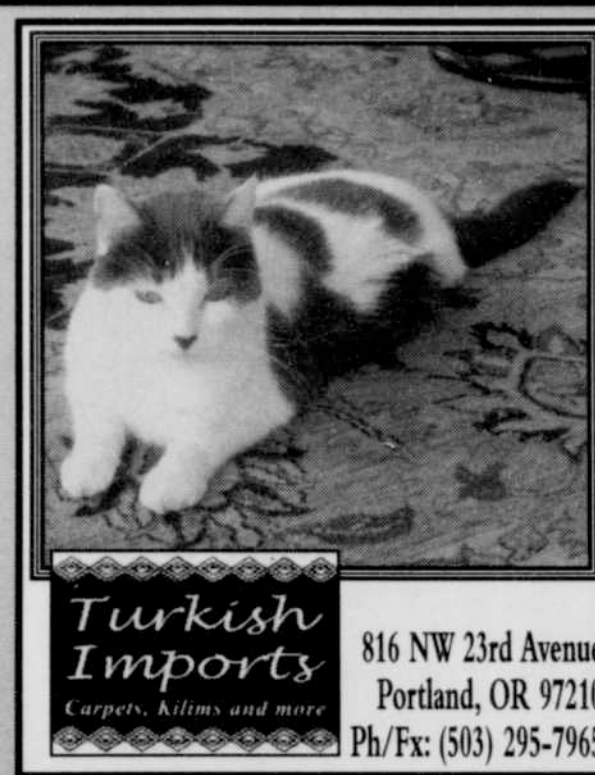
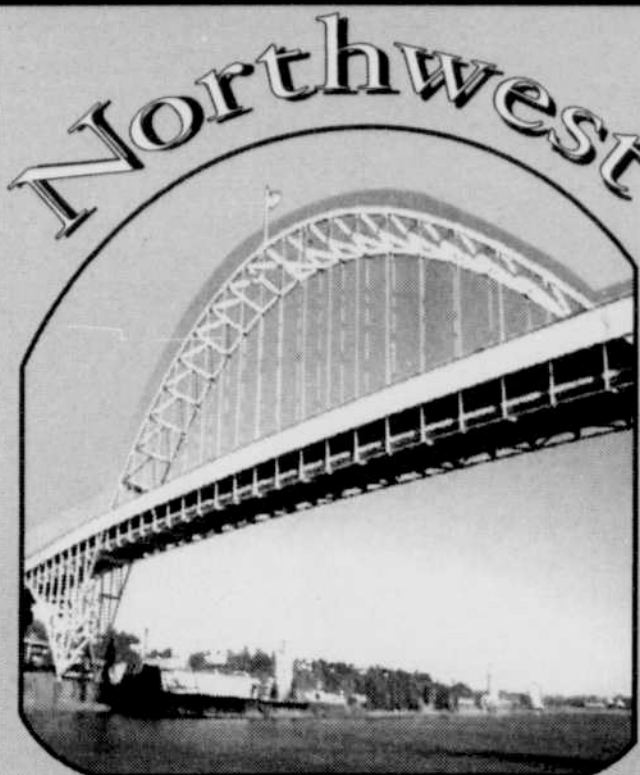
As Larrain began his address to the nation's first World AIDS Day ceremony, 19 members of the group stood and brandished placards bearing crosses and names of group members who have died.

"We are not here to celebrate World AIDS Day," activist Julio César Aguilera said. "We are here because this is a day of mourning for us. Our friends continue to die because our government will not give them anti-retroviral medications."

Activist Violeta Ross seized the microphone from Larrain and declared that people living

Continued on Page 23

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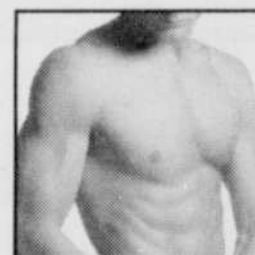


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