

WORLD news

For the first time, Britain's Conservative Party has chosen an open lesbian as a parliamentary candidate, *The Independent* reported March 3.

Millionaire businesswoman Margot James, 46, will challenge Labor's Frank Dobson in the London seat of Holborn and St. Pancras, according to the paper. "It is one of many signs that the Conservative Party has changed," James said.

There is one openly gay male Conservative MP, shadow Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs Alan Duncan.

Britain's Conservative Party will stage a gay summit to broaden its appeal, the British Broadcasting Corp. reported Feb. 25. About 140 organizations are slated to attend.



Charles Hendry

"In the past we have often been seen in terms of what we are against rather than what we are for," the Tory spokesman for young people, Charles Hendry, told the BBC. "My hope is that people across the party will recognize that to win elections we have to show that we are representative."

Tory leader Michael Howard supports the summit, which will be held March 29 in the House of Commons' Grand Committee Room, the report said.

THE VATICAN

Pope John Paul II lashed out at same-sex unions again Feb. 28.

"This [is] a time in which there is no lack of attempts to reduce marriage to a mere individual contract, with characteristics very different from those that belong to marriage and the family, and that end up degrading it as if it were a form of accessory association within the social body," the pontiff said. "It seems to me opportune to remember that the legislator, and the Catholic legislator in particular, cannot contribute to the formulation or approval of laws contrary to the primary and essential norms that regulate moral life, an expression of the highest values of the human person, which proceed in the final instance from God, the supreme legislator."

CAMBODIA

Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, 81, said Feb. 24 that he is not gay. The remark, published on his Web site, NorodomSihanouk.info, followed by four days Sihanouk's coming out in favor of same-sex marriage.

"I am not gay, but I respect the right of gays and lesbians," he said. "It's not their fault if God makes them born like that. Gays and lesbians would not exist if God did not create them. As a Buddhist, I must have compassion for human beings who are not like me but who torture nobody, kill nobody."

Sihanouk wrote Feb. 20, "I think [Cambodia] should allow marriage between man and man or between woman and woman if they desire it." He has no executive powers but is deeply revered by many Cambodians.

ISRAEL

The Israeli State Attorney's Office has extended the spousal exemption from property-transfer taxes to same-sex couples, *Haaretz* and *The Jerusalem Post* reported Feb. 25.

The office announced its decision during a Supreme Court hearing in the case of two men who were hit with the tax after one transferred half of the rights to their apartment to the other. Tax officials had maintained the exemption was available only to opposite-sex couples living as a family.

"It's a great step forward," activist Hagai El-Ad, executive director of Jerusalem Open House, told the *Post*. "[But] it's a far cry from the marriage-like arrangement in Western European countries. We can check off item No. 7 on our list of 200 [spousal rights we don't have]. If we continue this way, it will take 50 years. I'm a patient person, but I'm not that patient."

JAPAN

The Tokyo District Court rejected Feb. 26 an asylum request from a 40-year-old gay Iranian who fears he will face the death penalty because of his homosexuality when he returns home.

"Not being permitted to express himself sexually in his own way does not fall under the kind of persecution in the refugee convention," Judge Yosuke Ichimura said. Ichimura also speculated that it is unlikely the man would be targeted based on his sexual orientation because he is closeted.

The man had lived in Japan since 1991 and was arrested in 2000 for being an illegal alien. He plans to appeal to the Tokyo High Court.

According to *The Japan Times*, Iranian adults who have anal sex can be put to death, two men who sleep naked under a cover face 99 lashes, and two men who kiss "with lust" can get 60 lashes. Repeated lesbian sex acts also can result in the death penalty, the paper said.

POLAND

Poland's Council of Ministers refused Feb. 24 to create a government office charged with promoting equality between men and women and battling discrimination, including against gays. The council cited budget problems.

In 2002, the council itself had instructed the Government Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men to draft the legislation that would have created the office. The move was aimed at harmonizing Polish law with that of the European Union, which Poland is set to join this year.



After becoming the world's first openly transsexual member of parliament, Georgina Beyer (left, with *Xena: Warrior Princess* actress Lucy Lawless) is calling it quits

NEW ZEALAND

The world's first openly transsexual member of parliament is quitting when her term is up in 2005, *The Scotsman* reported March 4.

New Zealand MP Georgina Beyer said, "Politics and I don't seem to sit too well together." She said that the "discipline and rigors" of an MP's life "have become more and more difficult" and that she wants to "disappear into the woodwork" for a time.

Beyer represents the rural constituency of Wairarapa. [E]

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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