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WORLD news

INTERNATIONAL

A total of 56 Islamic nations and the Vatican are lobbying U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to reverse his January decision to grant spousal benefits to employees who have been joined in an official same-sex union in their home nation.

A spokesman for the Organization of the Islamic Conference said there is "no justifiable basis" for giving the benefits to employees from the dozen or so nations where same-sex couples can marry or enter into a marriage-like civil union or registered partnership.

CANADA

The Gay and Lesbian Center in Edmonton, Alberta, closed March 11 because of money problems, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. reported. A telephone support line and Web site are expected to continue operating.

Board co-chair Roz Ostendorff said governments were inconsistent in their financial support for the center, which resulted in reduced volunteerism. The facility had been in operation for 30 years.

UNITED KINGDOM

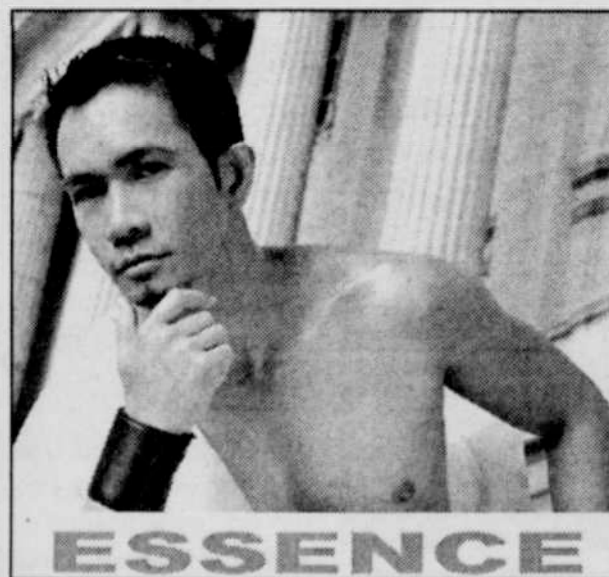
Gay pop singer George Michael, 40, says he has enough money and doesn't want to put up with record companies anymore, so he'll give away his new music online in the future. Downloaders will be welcome to make a donation, which he will route to charity, he told BBC Radio 1.

"I'll hopefully be a happier man, giving my music and also doing something really positive with my music if people are generous enough to donate to the site," Michael said March 10. "I'll remove myself from all that negativity. I'm sure it's unprecedented. It's definitely unprecedented for someone who still sells records. I've been very well remunerated for my talents over the years, so I really don't need the public's money."

SINGAPORE

Singaporean police March 12 banned three planned seminars on gay literature, Britain's *The Guardian* reported.

The symposiums were to accompany a gay play from Taiwan, *Lovers' Words*, which itself is awaiting official approval—but from the government's media development authority, not the police. Police officials deemed the seminars "contrary to public interest."


Singapore has ordered *Manazine* to tone down its "homosexual element"

The Singaporean magazine *Manazine* is too gay and must immediately tone down its "homosexual element," the government's media development authority said March 10.

"We have warned the publisher that the current state of the magazine, which features nudity and homosexual element, is unacceptable," the agency said. "They have agreed to modify the content to make it acceptable to the general Singapore audience."

Manazine editor Nijen Twilhaar, writing on the magazine's Web site, struck a conciliatory pose.

"*Manazine* is promoting a lifestyle that integrates arts, personal well-being and mental growth," he said. "We feel we don't need female models to convey that message and like to break away from the stereotyping for men's magazines in the market today. If this format appeals to a gay reader, *Manazine* acknowledges that and recognizes that there is strong support from the community."



Adam Woest (left) and Trevor Theys killed nine men at a gay massage parlor and escort service in Cape Town, South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA

The killers of nine men at a Cape Town gay massage parlor and escort service were sent to prison for life March 16.

Adam Woest, 27, and Trevor Theys, 44, tied up, shot and slit the throats of 10 men at the Sizzlers business Jan. 20, 2003. One of the men survived despite taking two bullets in the head.

"Your attitude to your fellow human beings is that of utter callousness and brutality," Cape High Court Judge Nathan Erasmus told Woest and Theys. "The court has the responsibility to act fearlessly to show the world the repugnance of your actions."

The two men never said why they committed the crimes. Speculation has centered on gang or drug wars as well as anti-gay hatred.

South Africa, population 43 million, has a high crime rate that includes an average of 55 murders a day.

AUSTRALIA

Prime Minister John Howard says his opposition to same-sex marriage is a matter not of intolerance but of common sense.

"The reason I don't support gay marriage is that I think it in different ways reduces the status of marriage as so commonly understood in our society," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on March 18. "There has to be a point at which you stand up for certain benchmark institutions. I don't think that is intolerant, I think it's common sense because they contribute to the continuity and the stability of society."

Howard also has spoken out recently against allowing gay people to adopt children, which is permitted in the Australian Capital Territory and the states of Western Australia and Tasmania.

Despite rain and wind, 6,000 marchers, 130 floats and 300,000 spectators turned out for Sydney's 26th gay Mardi Gras parade March 6.

Just prior to the parade's start, organizers attempted to set a world record for the most people to simultaneously do the hand motions for the Village People's hit disco song "Y.M.C.A.," which was broadcast over radio station 2JJJ at the appointed hour. The present record is 13,588 people, set in 2001 at a Nebraska baseball game.

"Our estimates are that there are 35,000 people who participated in that attempt, although we are yet to see how the Guinness Book of Records will deal with what we refer to as 'the umbrella issue,'" New Mardi Gras co-chairman Michael Woodhouse told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.