

WORLD news

A Spanish sailor who declared himself transsexual will be allowed to return to work as a woman. A military medical tribunal declared helicopter mechanic José Antonio Gordo Pantoja, 30, fit for service March 25.

"I am so happy I have screamed for joy," he told reporters. Gordo Pantoja has served for eight years and is taking hormones in advance of gender-reassignment surgery.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia lifted its bans on GayMiddleEast.com and 365Gay.com on March 30, Reporters Without Borders said.

GayMiddleEast.com posts gay-related news from Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Neither it nor 365Gay.com publishes pornography.

"Officially [Saudi] filtering is only supposed to be applied to pornographic publications or those directly harming Islam. In fact, the Saudi Internet blacklist extends to other areas, from political sites to nonrecognized Islamist sites.... We condemn this extension of censorship, which is in the process of reducing the country's network to an Intranet, as in Burma or Cuba," Reporters Without Borders said March 22.

Responding to an appeal from the group, the head of Saudi Arabia's Internet Services Unit, Eyas Al-Hajery, said: "After receiving your letter, we carried out a new examination of these sites. Since no pornographic content was found, the ban has been lifted."

The government is reportedly also blocking access to Gay.com, which allows users to post nude photos of themselves in their personal profiles. The Reporters Without Borders press release did not indicate whether it remains blocked.

Gay sex is punished in Saudi Arabia with imprisonment or flogging.



Michael Hendricks (left) and René LeBoeuf seal Quebec's first same-sex marriage with a long kiss April 1

CANADA

Gay men and lesbians began getting married April 1 in Quebec. It is the third Canadian province to open up ordinary marriage to same-sex couples.

The first pair to tie the knot were Michael Hendricks, 62, and René LeBoeuf, 48, the plaintiffs in the lawsuit that led the province's highest court to strike down the ban on same-sex marriage as unconstitutional. They have been together for 31 years.

The ceremony at Montreal's courthouse ended with several French kisses, reports said.

"Everything changes," Hendricks told the Canadian Press wire service. "We're now recognized as a couple—socially and even to ourselves. It's a commitment that's unbreakable."

Same-sex couples, including foreigners, also can get married in Ontario and British Colum-

bia, Canada's two other most populous provinces. In those provinces, couples can buy a license and marry the same day. Quebec has a 20-day waiting period, though it can be waived if advance arrangements are made with the person who will conduct the marriage.

The federal government has said it supports last summer's rulings that legalized same-sex marriage in Ontario and British Columbia and will introduce legislation to open up marriage nationwide, but it has yet to act except for sending procedural questions and a brief supporting its position to the Canadian Supreme Court.

The newest question, which was added Feb. 20, had the effect of delaying the Supreme Court's consideration of the matter until October. No parliamentary action is expected until the court answers the questions.

Gays can marry in British Columbia, but the province still doesn't like them reading smutty books. As its 20-year battle against Customs seizures drags on, Vancouver's gay bookstore, Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, is feeling so beaten down by the fight that it has applied for government funding to continue the struggle.

The store's Mark Macdonald says the owners have spent a half-million dollars fighting Customs through the years and probably need another million to push on. The latest skirmish concerns *The Meatmen* gay S/M comic books.

"It boils down to freedom of expression for all Canadians, and in the hands of Customs, it's been handled badly for decades," Macdonald told the Canadian Press.

JAPAN

The city assembly of Yame, in Fukuoka Prefecture, passed a draft anti-discrimination ordinance March 22 but refused to include gays, *Japan Today* and *Kyodo News* reported.

A rejected clause banned discrimination "related to sexual identity disorder and other gender issues," which city officials said was meant to cover same-sex relationships. Assembly members said the language was too ambiguous and could have been used to protect pedophiles.

MEXICO

Gay soccer players in Mexico City have formed their own league, Falcons. Five teams—The Clan, Fashion, The Fuckers, G Force and Your Mama—will play weekly in Chapultepec Park.

League president Aarón Rojas said the group has not encountered any opposition except from some gay people. "We have distributed advertising in the Zona Rosa [gay neighborhood], and when we inform them that we're interested in building our soccer team, they break out laughing and say to us in a mocking way, 'Don't tear your hose or break your nails.'"

TANZANIA

The government of the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar, which is part of the nation of Tanzania, has drafted a bill to ban same-sex marriage and punish gay sex with life in prison. An existing national law punishes gay sex with 14 years in prison, but it is rarely enforced.

The Zanzibari proposal also would punish men who marry men with a 25-year sentence and women who marry women with a seven-year sentence. "We have heard that same-sex marriages have taken place here, and we want to guard against this trend," Deputy Attorney General Omar Makungu told the British Broadcasting Corp. **J**

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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