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WORLD news

AUSTRALIA

Gay advocates Oct. 22 hailed the elevation of South Australian Sen. Penny Wong to the Labor Shadow Cabinet, declaring her to be the first openly gay member of an Australian parliamentary front-bench team.

In certain parliamentary systems, a duplicate Cabinet is set up by the party that is not in power, and those Shadow Cabinet members join the party's "front bench"—its group of spokespeople.

"At a time when sexual minorities are increasingly under attack in Australian politics, it's refreshing to see champions of diversity succeeding in the political arena," said national activist Rodney Croome of the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group.

Australia's Parliament has three openly gay members: Greens Sen. Bob Brown of Tasmania, Democrats Sen. Brian Greig of Western Australia and Labor's Wong.

Wong came out this year during caucus debate on Prime Minister John Howard's proposed ban on same-sex marriage, which passed and became law.



Penny Wong

Ahmed told the French Press Agency.

At least one of the hotel workers was said to be openly gay.

"They exercised immoral activities, which invade our tradition and culture," Ahmed said.

An InterContinental spokeswoman said the employees were reassigned to hotels in other nations.

According to the report, homosexuality is not illegal in Eritrea.

EUROPEAN UNION

The incoming president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, withdrew his 25 commission nominees Oct. 27 because of a gay-related controversy.

The European Parliament, which must approve or reject the nominees as a group, was set to reject them all because justice commissioner nominee Rocco Buttiglione had said he believes homosexuality is a "sin."

The justice commissioner oversees anti-discrimination and civil liberties issues.

Buttiglione withdrew himself from consideration for the job Oct. 30. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is expected to choose a new nominee.

The European arm of the International Lesbian and Gay Association hailed the development.

"This is an historical day in the EU from at least two points of view: The Parliament was able to play its role as watchdog of the commission, and it also restated its commitment to human rights as a core value of the European Union," said ILGA-Europe co-chairman Riccardo Gottardi.

Co-chairwoman Jackie Lewis added: "The Parliament has confirmed that rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are an integral part of human rights in the EU. It has also clearly demonstrated that it is inappropriate for commissioners to openly state that their moral values will prevail over their public duty."

BERMUDA

Bermuda's government plans to amend the Human Rights Act to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, *The Royal Gazette* reported Nov. 1.

The measure, which will cover housing and employment, will be introduced in the House of Assembly next summer.

"The changes will take us out of the Dark Ages and create an awareness about living openly rather than hiding these things in the closet," said Community Affairs Minister Dale Butler.

CANADA

The province of Saskatchewan granted same-sex couples access to marriage Nov. 5—following in the footsteps of British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec and the Yukon Territory.

Like judges in the other jurisdictions, Justice Donna Wilson of the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench Family Law Division declared the opposite-sex definition of marriage unconstitutional.

"The common law definition of marriage for civil purposes is declared to be 'the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others,'" she wrote.

Five couples had sued for the right to marry. About 85 percent of Canadians now live in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal. The next province expected to move on the matter is Newfoundland and Labrador.

COLOMBIA

Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled Oct. 28 that a gay man's foreign partner has the right to immigrate to the nation.

In a case from the island of San Andrés, the court declared that gay people cannot be denied due process or the right to freely develop their personalities.

The island's refusal to grant a residency permit to the foreign partner "created an obstacle to the intent of maintaining a stable relationship as a gay couple," the court said.

Legislative action is required to extend the ruling to cover other binational same-sex couples.

ERITREA

The African nation of Eritrea expelled three foreign InterContinental hotel workers in October concerning "a question of immorality," Information Minister Ali Abdu

GERMANY

Germany's lower house of Parliament, the Bundestag, granted more rights to registered same-sex couples Oct. 29.

The measure does not need assent from the upper house, the Bundesrat, and will take effect in January.

Registered gay couples will be allowed to access state widow/widower pensions, adopt each other's biological children and refuse to testify against each other. They also will be treated as married in the areas of separation, divorce, alimony and division of assets.

"Gays and lesbians are still not treated equally in how they are able to live their lives, and there is no reason for that," Justice Minister Brigitte Zypries said in support of the changes.

She hopes to eventually extend every right of matrimony to registered same-sex couples.

HONDURAS

Honduras' National Congress voted unanimously Oct. 28 to amend the constitution to ban same-sex marriage and gay adoption.

The amendment must be approved again by a future Congress before taking effect.

In response, gay rights groups threatened to oust prominent homosexuals in government, business and journalism.

About 5,000 Hondurans belong to the nation's eight gay organizations. Honduras has a population of 6.8 million.

KUWAIT

A top Kuwaiti Islamist member of Parliament has called on government ministries to clamp down on male-only massage parlors because, he says, they allow gay sex and prostitution.