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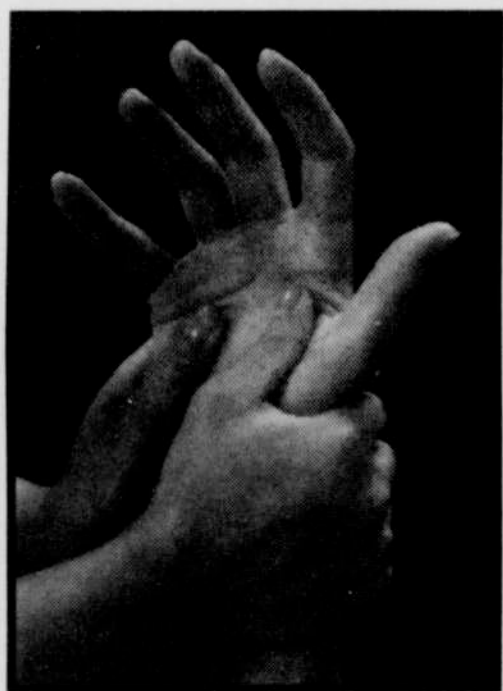
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world

ASIA/PACIFIC Human Rights Watch Criticizes India

Human Rights Watch denounced India on Jan. 11 concerning the arrests of four gay men in the city of Lucknow.

The men were nabbed at a picnic in a public location Jan. 4 and charged with operating a "gay racket" on the Internet and engaging in "unnatural" sex.

Police "accused them of belonging to an 'international gay club' centered around [a] Web site," the organization said. "Reports received by Human Rights Watch indicate that undercover police, posing as gay on the Web site, entrapped one man, then forced him to call others and arrange a meeting where they were arrested."

In a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Human Rights Watch said India's colonial-era sodomy law threatens human rights and encourages the spread of HIV.

"Lucknow police have a shameful record of harassing gay men as well as nongovernmental organizations that work with them," the organization said. "They are able to do so because India's government clings to the criminalization of homosexual conduct, which only prevents people from coming forward for HIV/AIDS testing, information and services."

In July 2001, Lucknow police raided the local offices of two HIV organizations, Naz Foundation International and Bharosa Trust. Four staff members, who were accused of running a gay sex racket and distributing "obscene" HIV education materials, were jailed for 47 days.

Charges of sodomy, criminal conspiracy, aiding and abetting a crime, and sale of obscene matter were later dropped after international human rights groups complained.

Some 25 gay activists staged a protest Jan. 12 in New Delhi demanding that those arrested be released. The demonstration took place outside a building owned by Uttar Pradesh state, where Lucknow is located.

Section 377 of India's penal code, titled "Of Unnatural Offenses," punishes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" with up to 10 years in prison. A case against the law, brought by the Naz Foundation, is pending before the Delhi High Court.

EUROPE

Police Investigate Muslim Leader for Anti-Gay Comments

London police are investigating the head of the Muslim Council of Britain, Sir Iqbal Sacranie, for anti-gay comments he made to the British Broadcasting Corp.

In a Jan. 3 interview, Sacranie called the United Kingdom's new same-sex Civil Partnership Act "harmful."

"It does not augur well in building the very foundations of society—stability, family relationships—and it is something we would certainly not...encourage the community to be involved in," he said. Sacranie also called homosexuality "not acceptable...in terms of health, in terms of the moral issues that come along in a society."

The Metropolitan Police launched an investigation after receiving a complaint from a member of the public, the BBC said. They will determine if



Sir Iqbal Sacranie, head of the Muslim Council of Britain, is being investigated for homophobic remarks.

the remarks violated the Public Order Act.

Gay Adoption Now Allowed in England, Wales

On the heels of the United Kingdom's new Civil Partnership Act, which grants reg-

istered same-sex couples the rights and obligations of marriage, England and Wales extended adoption rights to unmarried straight and gay couples Dec. 30.

Adoption previously was limited to married opposite-sex couples and single people. The change was passed by Parliament three years ago but only took effect now.

"This is very important at a time when too many children wait too long in temporary care waiting for an adoptive family or, in some cases, never have the chance of adoption at all," said Felicity Collier, chief executive of the British Association for Adopting and Fostering.

Spain to Take in Sexual Refugees

Spain is planning to alter its asylum laws to take in gays who face the death penalty or serious punishment based on their sexual orientation, according to a draft law obtained by the newspaper *El País*.

A report in Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper said the changes also would apply to women facing sex discrimination. The draft reportedly requires immigration officials to base decisions on an objective examination of the facts rather than subjective concerns, such as a hunch that an applicant might be lying.

Vicar Who Changed Sex to Sue U.K. Government

A vicar in Port Talbot, Wales, who changed her sex is planning to sue the U.K. government before the European Court of Human Rights because she will be forced to annul her marriage to her wife when recording the change in government records, *icWales* reported.

Dian Parry, 66, and her wife of 45 years, Anita, would have to end their union and enter a civil partnership instead—under the United Kingdom's new same-sex Civil Partnership Act. They will argue this violates the European Convention on Human Rights' guarantees of respect for privacy and family life as well as provisions on the right to marry and not be discriminated against.

Scottish Cardinal Denounces Partnership Act

The leader of Scotland's Roman Catholics, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, denounced the U.K. government in his new year's homily for enacting the new Civil Partnership Act, which grants registered same-sex couples the rights and obligations of marriage.

Speaking at St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh, O'Brien said the government had "promoted alternative lifestyles while undermining values which for generations have been treasured," London's *The Times* reported. "Human societies throughout history and across cultures have flourished only when they have built their human relationships on the rock of marriage."

A spokesman for the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association said O'Brien's remarks "could lead to an escalation of violence against gay people."