

WHEN BEAUTY COMPETITIONS LEAD TO UGLINESS

Female beauty and religion are undergoing a tug-of-war in Malaysia. While some beauty contest winners are dissolving in tears of joy, others are being tossed out of high school.

Newspaper pictures of contest winners wearing swimsuits look markedly out of place in predominantly Muslim Malaysia. But with a mixed population of Malays (60 percent), Chinese (30 percent) and Indians (eight percent), Malaysia promotes itself as a tolerant, multicultural nation and so far beauty contests have survived.

Organisers of such contests increasingly insist it takes more than a pretty face to win. Michelle Chong, 23, named Miss Chicago in a contest run by a local advertising agency last week, was asked questions on pollution, road bullies and abandoned babies—all key local issues.

"We do not want to create a new generation of beauty queens who know nothing about the issues pertaining to their own country," organiser Catherine Moir-Bussy said.

But participation in beauty contests is not being tolerated by school officials.

Seventeen-year-old student Fahyu Hanim Ahmad was warned after emerging as a finalist in the Miss Teen Malaysia/International pageant that she could be expelled from school. But she persisted and ended up with the title along with M\$500 (HK\$1,500), a M\$2,500 scholarship for further studies and a return air ticket to Costa Rica for the international pageant.

C I P S

The Form Five pupil was escorted home from school by four teachers, one of whom handed an expulsion letter to her father. But she will be able to take her final exams in November.

Education Minister Najib Tun Razak said the ministry would no longer let students enter beauty contests because of "possible adverse effects".

Source: South China Morning Post, 7 August 1996

CHAD: FATWA AGAINST ZARA AND HER PRESENT CONDITION

A fatwa (death penalty) was pronounced against a young female film producer by the Mufti of N'Djamena after her film "Feminine Dilemma" was shown on public television. Her film, which was aimed at raising awareness about female genital mutilation (FGM) in Chad, showed parts of the operation on a young girl and this brought the wrath of the most influential Muslim leader in N'Djamena.

The Inter-African Committee (IAC) along with many other associations and individuals sent letters asking for the decision to be reconsidered. A reply has been received from the government which stated that no measures are being taken against Zara and that the government has nothing against her. Recently, an association known as "Women living under Muslim laws" sent us excerpts of a letter it received from Zara in which she stated the following:

"If you hadn't stepped in, there would have been no reaction, and God knows what would have happened to me by now..."

"Your call for action led the President of the Republic to tell the Imam to calm down and forget this case... People's attitude has improved a lot, but there are still suspicious looks..."

"The situation is now calm. The hardest is past. I have stopped taking (security) precautions and am trying to regain confidence..."

"It is time to say thank you to all the people who helped... I am still receiving support letters."

Source: Inter-African Committee Newsletter No. 19, June 1996

BELGIUM GRIEVES DEATH OF 2 CHILD SEX VICTIMS

LIEGE, Belgium (Reuter)—Silent crowds began gathering in this eastern Belgian town ahead of the funeral of two 8-year-old girls who died while in the hands of a convicted child sex offender.

Melissa Russo and Julie Lejeune were buried after an emotional memorial service in the Saint Martin basilica in their hometown of Liege which was televised live across a shocked nation.

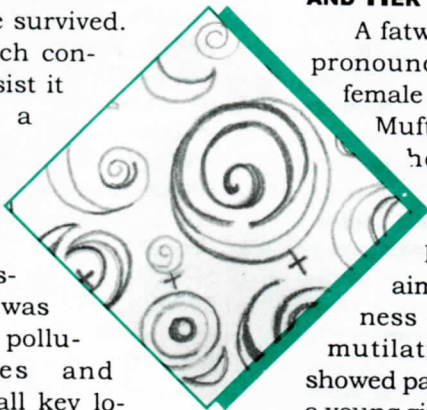
Up to 100,000 people are expected to attend the service which will be held after a private commemorative ceremony for the close relatives of the two friends. The burial of the two white coffins with the girls' remains will be private too.

Those who will not be able to enter the church can follow the service on a large video screen outside.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 23 August 1996

COUPLE SLAIN FOR BEING HOMOSEXUALS

MEDFORD, Oregon—A man accused of killing a lesbian



couple said he did it because he hates homosexuals and bisexuals.

Previously, Robert James Acremant had said he shot the women during a robbery that went awry, and their homosexuality made it easier.

Acremant said in a letter to his hometown newspaper, the *Stockton (Calif.) Record*, that he invented the robbery motive because he was nervous about how other jail inmates would react.

"Now I just don't care what people think, including the jury," Acremant, 27, wrote from the jail where he is awaiting trial on aggravated murder and related charges. "They can kill me for all I care. I've never liked life anyway."

Trial was set for February.

In the August 8 letter, Acremant also said he killed a man last year in a drunken rage after the man made a pass at him.

The bound and gagged bodies of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill were found in December in the back of a pickup truck. They had been shot in the head.

Gay community leaders expressed fears they were killed because they were outspoken champions of homosexual rights.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 23 August 1996

GAMES HELP FUEL WOMEN'S REVOLUTION

While the US men's 4 x 100 relay team was busy being trounced, their distaff counterparts were on the same track—four fast females running for gold.

Chryste Gaines, Gail Devers, Inger Miller and Gwen Torrence thus joined what became an ever-increasing circle during the Olympics: women who delivered big performances and received a lot of notice for doing it.

Amy Van Dyken left the swimming pool with four golds.

Kerri Strug became a poster girl for athletic fortitude.

Marie-Jose Perec of France produced the

same 200- and 400-

metre double that

Michael Johnson did,

and not much less impressively.

It would be absurd to suggest that Olympic heroines are

some kind of a 1996 innovation.

Long before there was Gail Devers, there was Wyomia Tyus, and Fanny Blankers-Koen. Before Van Dyken, there was Dawn Fraser of Australia. Nadia Comaneci and Olga Korbut were gymnastics wonderkids before Strug and Dominique Dawes were born.

Still, there's no doubt the Atlanta Games catapulted women's sports to a new level of interest in those achievements.

"These Olympics, probably more than any before, are showing a lot of little girls it's okay to sweat, it's okay to play hard, it's okay to be an athlete," tennis gold medallist Lindsay Davenport said. "It shows how far women's athletics has come, just in my lifetime."

Davenport was born in 1976. That year, in Montreal, 1,247 women competed in the Games. Eight years before that, in Mexico City, a total of 781 women participated.

In Atlanta, the number of women was an all-time high of 3,779—or 37 percent of all athletes.



What accounts for such vast increases? To Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, it has much to do with what Davenport referred to—a marked shift in cultural attitudes toward women in sports. It also has to do with an ever-growing number of girls who are playing sports at a young age, creating what Lopiano called "a critical mass" of participants.

"The progress made to date has been made possible by the first generation of mothers and fathers whose daughters (not only) play sports but can get athletic scholarships doing it," Lopiano said.

But the biggest factor of all was the passage in 1972 of Title IX in the US, legislation that demanded men's and women's sports be treated equally. Title IX meant scholarships. It meant increased respect, funding, opportunity.

The more that women began to play, and play well, the more a market began to develop. Corporations saw the upward attendance curve.

They saw a chance to reach female consumers, who were not only playing, but watching, too.

Even sports that did not get huge air time flourished.

"It was another step, bigger than most," Mia Hamm said, speaking of women's soccer's Olympic debut.

"Maybe it will help start a league, give girls who want to play soccer something to look forward to."

The same can be said for a whole spectrum of women's sports at the Olympics, where change is coming faster than a Lisa Fernandez heater.

Ask Dot Richardson about that. When she was 10,