

Headline **Govt backed Chinese gay bar stays empty**
Date **03 Dec 2009**
MediaTitle **New Straits Times**
Section **World**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **139,763 / 330,000**

Language **English**
Page No **30**
Article Size **96 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **1,329**
PRValue **3,988**



Govt-backed Chinese gay bar stays empty

BEIJING: A new bar in southwestern China aimed at educating gay men about AIDS stayed conspicuously empty during its official opening as potential customers shunned the spotlight, state media said yesterday.

The bar, which receives government funding from the health bureau in Yunnan province's Dali town, was slated to open on Tuesday to mark World AIDS Day, the *China Daily* reported.

But the intense media attention that greeted the announcement of its opening kept customers away, Zhang Jianbo, the bar's owner and a local AIDS doctor in Dali, was quoted as saying by

the newspaper. "They refused to show up at the opening for fear of media exposure and potential discrimination."

China has a growing AIDS problem with an estimated 740,000 HIV infections, the Health Ministry has said.

Same-sex transmission accounts for about a third of new HIV infections, while heterosexual transmission has soared to 40 per cent of new cases, a recent UNAIDS report said. The disease is also passed through dirty needles shared by drug users.

Zhang, a doctor at the Dali No. 2 People's Hospital, said the goal of the bar was to create a gathering spot where

groups at high risk for HIV, particularly gay men, can gather and obtain information on AIDS and prevention.

"As a long-term medical worker in HIV/AIDS prevention and control, I know how hard it is for us to reach these groups to promote self-protection messages like safe sex."

The health bureau had earmarked about 120,000 yuan (RM60,000) for Zhang's operation.

The bar opened informally last month, drawing dozens of gay men seeking information about AIDS and a sense of community, Zhang told Xinhua news agency. — AP