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China AIDS activist goes on trial – state media

BEIJING: A 23-year-old Chinese man who contracted the HIV virus as a boy and campaigns for the rights of AIDS sufferers has stood trial in central China for damaging property, state media said yesterday.

Tian Xi was arrested in Henan province's Xincai county in August after causing damage at a local hospital where he believed he got the virus from a tainted blood transfusion, the official Xinhua news agency said.

The Xincai county court is to announce its verdict "another day", the report added.

Calls to the court went unanswered on Wednesday, a public holiday in China.

Tian has lobbied for compensation for thousands of Chinese people who have contracted HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, through contaminated blood supplies.

Henan was hugely affected by an AIDS scandal in the 1990s that saw entire villages devastated by the condition.

Many people were infected after repeatedly selling their blood to collection stations

that pooled it into a tub and then injected it back into them after extracting the plasma.

Tian learned recently that local officials had urged police to detain him to curtail his activism, according to the Chinese AIDS campaign group Aizhixing.

Tian's father has written a letter to the head of Unaid.

China asking for help, saying his son was diagnosed with AIDS, hepatitis B and C when he was 17, according to the group.

"This was a serious blow for my family. My wife suffered from mental illness," he wrote in the letter published on the group's website.

He said Tian was invited back to Xincai from Beijing by the county's Communist Party secretary to settle the issue, but he never saw him despite several visits to his office.

Tian then ran out of medicine and went to see the director of a hospital, who did nothing.

"In the end, Tian Xi could not bear it. In a moment of

anger, he dropped a teacup and some office supplies," the letter read.

Police detained him on August 6 and formally arrested him more than two weeks later, the group said.

Xinhua said he had also been charged with damaging property "at or near the home of the hospital president on five occasions".

At least 740,000 people are living with HIV in China, according to official figures, but campaigners say the actual figure could be far higher.

The government has become more open about HIV prevention and control in a nation where 50 million people are at risk of contracting the AIDS virus, mainly through unprotected sex or needle use, according to Unaid.

But independent campaigners like Tian still face harassment.

Wan Yanhai, head of Aizhixing, fled to the United States with his family earlier this year because he said he feared for his safety. — AFP