

## Activists on Beijing mission

INDEPENDENT Chinese activists marked World AIDS Day by accosting wary shoppers in central Beijing to hand out information leaflets on the deadly disease.

About 15 independent campaigners gathered in the morning at McDonald's in Beijing's central Wangfujing shopping district and nearby Dongdan Park – a well-known meeting point for the homosexual community by night – to disseminate 1,500 pamphlets entitled "Know about AIDS".

They also handed out fly-sheets explaining the aim of World AIDS Day.

Public reaction to the campaigners' activities was mixed. At Dongdan Park, passers-by showed interest, with some approaching the activists with questions after examining the material, while many shoppers in Wangfujing refused to take the leaflets or simply dropped them in the street.

"A lot of people aren't willing to be seen accepting

material on something like AIDS in the street – it's not the sort of thing an upstanding citizen should show interest in," said one activist.

AIDS remains a highly sensitive subject in China, where, according to state-run newspapers yesterday, 1,500 people have tested positive for HIV.

Health Ministry officials concede that the actual figure is closer to 10,000, but independent activists believe the number may have already surpassed 100,000.

Meanwhile, Chinese officials warned that the number of AIDS cases could quadruple in the next decade through HIV contamination of its largely unscreened blood supply.

"China should swiftly and effectively implement screening for AIDS antibodies in all blood donors," the official *Health News* said, echoing calls this week by Chinese and foreign AIDS experts at two national seminars in Beijing.

Agencies