

Activist jailed for treason

IN an expanding nationwide crackdown against pro-democracy activists, a central China court has sentenced the leader of a group calling for a multi-party system to five years in prison for treason, according to court documents obtained yesterday.

The sentence against Zhang Minpeng, handed down in August, also stipulated that 12 other members of the previously unknown Republican Party "would be handled in separate cases", implying that members of Zhang's groups will soon stand trial for similar crimes.

The sentencing of Zhang, 37, and pending trials of up to 30 other activists nationwide, underscore China's growing determination to crush dissent in spite of efforts by Western governments to engage Beijing in a human rights dialogue.

In addition to five years behind bars, the Wuhan People's Intermediate Court in Hubei province deprived Zhang of all political rights for two years for "organising a counter-revolutionary clique", read the documents.

Prosecutors charged Zhang, a veteran activist who served three years in a labour-through-education camp in the early 1980s for publishing an illegal magazine, with leading his dozen followers in attempts to overthrow the government during a 16-month period from 1991 until his capture in July of 1992.

"The accused, Zhang Minpeng, wrote a manifesto for the Republican Party to 'eradicate the autocracy and re-establish a republic' . . . using such phrases as 'we must blow this stubborn fortress up with bombs' and 'start a revolution with the aim of installing a republican system'," the document said.

Zhang did not speak in his defence, but his counsel argued that although Zhang had established an illegal organisation, "there were no facts or laws to support the contention that his actions and motives were to topple the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist system", according to the document.

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