

Chinese fugitive briefly a web sensation

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File photo shows people using a laptop computer at a wireless cafe in Beijing. A microblog purportedly set up by a longtime Chinese fugitive attracted more than 10,000 followers within hours before it was shut down, state media reported Thursday.

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A Sina.com microblog in the name of Lai Changxing, a property investor who is accused of smuggling goods worth billions of dollars into China before he fled in 1999, was set up early Wednesday, the Global Times newspaper reported.

"In Vancouver" was the only posting on the Twitter-like microblog before the account -- marked with a "V" sign to indicate its user's

identity was authentic -- was shut down by noon, the report said.

However, within seven hours it had already attracted 13,000 [followers](#), the report said.

AFP saw no trace of the account on the site on Thursday.

Lai, 53, fled to Canada after he was accused of smuggling \$8 billion-worth of oil, cars and cigarettes from overseas into the eastern city of Xiamen between 1996 and 1999, the report said.

[China](#) asked the Canadian government to extradite Lai in 2000, but no extradition treaty exists between the two nations, the report said.

For an account to obtain verified status on Sina.com, the user has to be well-known and use their real name. Applicants must provide evidence to confirm their identity along with a mobile phone number or e-mail address.

A Sina.com official declined to say whether proper verification procedure was followed in this case or why the account was removed, the report said.

[Twitter](#), the world's best-known microblogging service, is blocked by China's web [censors](#), but several closely monitored Chinese services have risen as alternatives.

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