

China censors squelch web searches in activist case

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An image grab taken from a video uploaded on YouTube on April 27 shows Chen Guangcheng, a blind Chinese lawyer, speaking following his escape from house arrest in Beijing. Chinese censors blocked web searches of a host of terms related to Chen, from his name to "Shawshank Redemption", the prison-break film being compared to his case.

Chinese censors Monday blocked web searches of a host of terms related to blind activist Chen Guangcheng, from his name to "Shawshank Redemption", the prison-break film being compared to his case.

Chen fled house arrest in eastern [China](#) a week ago with the help of supporters, slipping out under the noses of dozens of guards and into safety at the US embassy in Beijing, dissident Hu Jia and other activists have said.

The case figures to be a major embarrassment for China's government and a potential thorn in ties with Washington, and censors have sought to squelch all discussion.

Searches for Chen's name and the Chinese terms for "Shawshank", "blind person", "embassy", and Chen's home village of Dongshigu were all blocked on Sina Weibo, China's leading microblogging service.

Also blocked was "UA898", a United Airlines direct flight from Beijing to Washington, apparently after [web](#) users speculated online about the possibility Chen would gain US asylum.

On Monday, dissident Hu told AFP that Chen was at the US embassy. The embassy and State Department have refused to confirm or deny that.

Other blocked terms included the names of Chen's relatives and the Internet nickname of a woman, He Peirong, who reportedly helped him escape.

The searches triggered messages saying the results could not be displayed due to "relevant regulations".

Chen, 40, is best known for exposing abuses of China's "one child" policy, including forced sterilisations and abortions.

After completing a four-year [jail sentence](#) in September 2010, he and his family were put under what Chen has called "illegal" house arrest at their home in Shandong province.

Some web users had used the Chinese characters for "Shawshank" to refer to the case.

"The Shawshank Redemption" was a 1994 film based on a novella by US author Stephen King, about a convict's escape from an American prison.

The pervasive [web censorship](#) system run by China's ruling Communist Party routinely blocks content deemed politically sensitive or embarrassing to the government.

None of China's print or other media have made any mention of the Chen affair.

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