

# China lifts microblog controls that sparked outcry

April 3 2012, By DIDI TANG , Associated Press

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(AP) -- China's two biggest microblog sites resumed normal service Tuesday after a three-day ban on posting comments that sparked complaints about censorship amid the country's worst high-level political crisis in years.

The temporary suspension by Sina's Weibo.com and Tencent's t.qq.com followed a flurry of rumors online about the downfall of a prominent Communist Party figure, Bo Xilai. Authorities have closed a dozen websites and detained six people for circulating rumors of a coup that rattled Beijing.

The two companies said in statements on their websites that the shutdown was aimed at "cleaning up" illegal and harmful information posted on some microblogs but gave no details. During the suspension, users could post on their own microblogs but were barred from making comments on others' accounts.

The clampdown underscores the party's anxiety over an Internet-wired public that is eager to discuss political events despite censorship and threats of punishment. Sina and Tencent say they have a total of nearly 700 million microblog accounts.

Bo, a populist once seen as a contender for a seat on the party's ruling nine-member Politburo Standing Committee, was dismissed March 15 as party secretary of Chongqing, a giant industrial city in the southwest.

State media have provided little information on Bo, fueling speculation that spiraled into talk of troop movements and gunshots around the leadership's Zhongnanhai compound in central Beijing on March 19.

The rumors and crackdown show how Bo's firing has brought typically concealed leadership struggles out into the open. They came as the senior leadership gears up for a handover of power to a younger generation of leaders later this year.

Zhao Xiao, an economics professor at University of Science and Technology Beijing, said the public was sharing rumors because the government releases so little information.

"I'd like to call upon the government to release information in an open, timely and transparent manner," Zhao wrote on his microblog.

It was unclear whether the suspension on Sina and [Tencent](#) was ordered by regulators or the companies took action on their own after being scolded about comments on their sites. State media said the two sites were "severely criticized" by regulators.

The surprise suspension triggered indignation from microbloggers.

"Commenting is our inalienable right," microblogger Li Xuepeng wrote Tuesday after full service was restored. "What we need to do and must do is to speak up, until the right will not be taken away."

Beijing encourages Internet use for education and business but tries to block Web surfers from seeing material deemed subversive or obscene. The government tries to block Internet users in [China](#) from seeing the U.S.-based microblog site Twitter and has begun requiring Chinese sites to confirm the identity of users.

The main party newspaper People's Daily warned earlier that "rumors and lies packaged as 'facts'" would "disrupt social order" and "harm social integrity."

During the suspension, users tried to circumvent the ban by reposting microblog entries that already were online and sometimes adding their own words.

"The result of banning comments was a surge in reposting. It did nothing to stop rumors from spreading," Han Han, a popular online commentator, wrote on his own microblog. "This has nothing to do with regulating but power-flaunting and warning. What it says is if I can take away commenting from you for three days, I can make you lose microblogging forever."

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