



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

*A weekly update of press freedom and censorship news
related to the People's Republic of China*

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Headlines

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BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

State media break silence on Bo Xilai fate

After weeks of silence regarding the fate of Bo Xilai, who had been removed as Chongqing Communist Party chief on March 15 (see CMB No. [52](#)), the state-run Xinhua news agency and state broadcaster China Central Television simultaneously issued a short statement on April 10 at 11 p.m. They announced that Bo had lost his seat on both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee and its Politburo, and was to be investigated by the CCP's Discipline Inspection Commission. Within minutes, the state-run media dropped another bombshell, revealing that Bo's wife was being investigated for murder in connection with the November 2011 death of British businessman Neil Heywood, and had been "transferred to judicial authorities." The news sent shockwaves through both online and offline media. Even before the announcement, CCP members were reporting on microblogs that they had been called in for an urgent meeting late at night, at which point the news was conveyed to them. Once it was made public, commentary and reactions to the Xinhua announcement circulated widely. One blogger highlighted its use of the term "disciplinary violations" to reflect the fact that Bo was not accused of a crime, which would be handled by the judicial system, and "comrade," which meant that he remained a CCP member,

though ousted from the party's top echelons. Well-known television personality Hung Huang hinted that Bo's wife was essentially being scapegoated because of her husband's fall from grace. "In this country, whenever men do something bad, it's all the woman's fault," he said. Meanwhile, another skeleton emerged from Bo's closet on March 23, when the U.S. government-funded Voice of America reported that journalist Gao Yingpu had been secretly sentenced to prison in 2010 for criticizing Bo and his controversial anticrime campaign in a blog.

- **Xinhua 4/10/2012:** [CPC Central Committee to investigate into Bo Xilai's serious violations](#)
- **Xinhua 4/10/2012:** [Police reinvestigate death of Neil Heywood according to law](#)
- **Beijing Cream 4/11/2012:** [Close reading Xinhua's statement on 'comrade' Bo Xilai](#)
- **China Media Project 4/11/2012:** [Bo Xilai scandals top today's headlines](#)
- **IFEX 3/30/2012:** [Journalist and critic reportedly jailed](#)



Editorials show ripple effects of Bo Xilai case

In the days before and after the official April 10 announcement that former Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai had been decisively purged from the central party's governing bodies (see above), a series of editorials in state- and party-run media gave an indication of the high-level political turmoil the Bo case had caused, as well as efforts by the leadership to restore a sense of unity and control. On March 31, the *Beijing Daily* ran an article arguing that "the general secretary should not be the highest authority over the party's Central Committee," an indirect jab at current Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary Hu Jintao. The paper ultimately reports to Beijing CCP secretary Liu Qi, who is seen as a member of a faction that includes Bo and is supported by former leader Jiang Zemin. Hu, reputedly the leader of a rival faction, was abroad at the time, but upon his return a few days later the article was reportedly removed from the paper's website, and a new editorial emphasized the importance of keeping "firmly in mind the general secretary's earnest instructions." Similarly, on April 6, shortly after rumors of a coup attempt circulated online, the military publication *Liberation Army Daily* ran a front-page commentary urging soldiers to ignore online rumors and ensure that at all times "the military absolutely obeys the command of the Party central leadership, the Central Military Commission and Chairman Hu." After the April 10 announcement of Bo's ejection from the Politburo, another round of commentaries were published. The CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily* ran an editorial titled "Strongly Supporting the Correct Decisions of the Party Central Committee." It touted Hu's correct actions as CCP general secretary and the authorities' adherence to "socialist rule of law" in Bo's case. Similarly, Xinhua ran a report on April 11 that said Chongqing officials and residents had expressed support for the decision to oust Bo, and a national television news segment featured various local leaders pledging loyalty to the Central Committee. A matching pattern of possible party infighting, followed by a bid to restore discipline, was apparent in online media (see below).

- **New York Times 4/12/2012:** [Chinese media fight scandal fallout; focus on Bo's family](#)
- **Epoch Times 4/9/2012:** [Beijing newspaper becomes billboard for party infighting](#)

- Reuters 4/6/2012: [China tells military to ignore rumors, obey party](#)
- *Liberation Army Daily* 4/1/2012 (in Chinese): [Request for strengthening political discussions](#)
- * *People's Daily* 4/11/2012 (in Chinese): [Strongly supporting the correct decisions of the Party Central Committee](#)
- Xinhua 4/11/2012: Chongqing supports CPC decision to investigate Bo Xilai

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Microblog comments suspended to allow rumor 'cleansing'

Amid official silence and unofficial online discussion of party infighting following the March 15 ouster of Bo Xilai as Chongqing Communist Party chief, the popular microblogging platforms Sina Weibo and Tencent QQ took the unprecedented step of disabling their comment functions on March 31, apparently on orders from the government (see above, CMB No. [52](#)). The function enables users to post comments responding to previously posted messages, thereby creating a discussion thread. While Sina suspended the feature without explanation, a notice posted on Tencent's site claimed that the three-day suspension would allow for "concentrated cleansing" of "rumors and other illegal and harmful information" that had spread through microblogs. Though the comment functions were restored on April 3, an extensive list of keywords related to the Bo case were banned. As of April 10, when new developments in the case were announced by the authorities, tests by *China Digital Times* found that the list of banned terms on Sina Weibo included references to Bo's wife, Gu Kailai; their son, Bo Guagua; and British businessman Neil Heywood, whom Gu has been accused of murdering. An English-language posting about Heywood's death was removed from Chinese historian Lei Yi's microblogging account, which has about 92,000 followers, signaling that information in foreign languages was also being censored. Meanwhile, the government stepped up its crackdown on leftist websites that had been supportive of Bo and his neo-Maoist propaganda projects (see CMB No. [51](#)). After experiencing a temporary shutdown in March, the popular pro-Mao discussion forum Utopia was closed indefinitely on April 6, with a notice on the homepage citing orders from the State Council information Office, the Beijing Public Security Bureau, and the Beijing Municipal Network Management Office.

- China Media Project 4/2/2012: [Control, with apologies to 'users and friends'](#)
- NTDTV 4/4/2012: [China lifts ban on microblog comments](#)
- *China Digital Times* 4/2/2012: [Sensitive words: the Bo Xilai edition](#)
- China Media Project 4/2/2012: [English post by Chinese historian deleted from Weibo](#)
- *Businessweek* 4/9/2012: [China cracks down on the websites of Bo Xilai's supporters](#)
- Danwei 4/6/2012: [Utopia, Maoist discussion forum, shut down for a month](#)



Online coup rumor leads to arrests

State-run Xinhua news agency reported on March 31 that six people had been detained and 16 websites shut down for spreading online rumors of a coup attempt (see above, CMB No. [51](#)). The reports, which included alleged sightings of military vehicles massing in Beijing, had first emerged on the internet on March 19, four days after Bo Xilai's ouster as Chongqing Communist Party chief punctuated a period of apparent high-level party infighting. According to the International Federation of Journalists, Beijing-based financial journalist Li Delin, who has been missing since March 23, is also thought to have been detained. On his microblog account, he had described "military vehicles everywhere," "several plain-clothes at each intersection," and "iron barricades" in downtown Beijing. The post was subsequently augmented and forwarded by other microbloggers, resulting in widespread speculation that a coup was taking place. In a related development, a Guangzhou netizen named Wu Guancong was detained on March 25 for allegedly "creating a disturbance," after his analysis of possible factional struggles in the Communist Party, aired in a series of microblog posts, attracted the attention of foreign media. Media and censorship expert Li Datong, a former editor at the Communist Party's *China Youth Daily*, criticized the government's response to the coup rumor, saying, "They could have easily solved it by having a press conference." He added, "How are rumours spread? Because of intransparent flow of news."

- *Economist* 4/5/2012: [The anatomy of a coup rumor](#)
- IFEX 4/2/2012: [Six netizens arrested, sixteen websites shut down](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 4/9/2012: [Wait, wait—don't tell me: China's anti-rumor campaign](#)
- Chinese Human Rights Defenders 4/11/2012: [Guangdong netizen criminally detained for spreading views on party power struggles](#)
- *Sydney Morning Herald* 4/2/2012: [China moves to silence free flow of net debate](#)



Apple faces new copyright lawsuits

A lawyer for 12 Chinese writers, including prominent novelist and blogger Han Han, reported on March 19 that they had filed lawsuits in a Beijing court accusing U.S. technology giant Apple of copyright infringement. The writers alleged that the company's iTunes online store had sold unauthorized versions of their work. The case represents a reversal of the usual pattern in which foreign corporations complain of copyright infringement in China, though Apple had faced suits from Han Han and other Chinese writers in October 2011 (see CMB No. [37](#)). State media expressed outrage at the alleged violations, quoting netizens who scolded Apple and demanded that it respect China's intellectual property. According to the writers' Beijing-based lawyer, Wang Guohua, the lawsuits demanded a total of 23 million yuan (\$3.5 million) in compensation. The new litigation added to Apple's legal woes in China, as it was already locked in a court battle with a Chinese firm over the name of its popular tablet computer, the iPad (see CMB No. [47](#)). State-run Xinhua news agency reported that on March 27, Apple chief executive Tim Cook met with Chinese vice premier Li Keqiang in Beijing to discuss ways to improve cooperation between the government and

multinational companies. The report did not specify whether they touched on Apple's legal problems.

- **Associated Press 3/21/2012:** [Chinese writers say Apple is online book pirate](#)
 - **China Daily 3/28/2012:** [Apple's alleged piracy sparks cyber debate](#)
 - **Washington Post 3/29/2012:** [Apple's Tim Cook meets with China's vice premier Li Keqiang](#)
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Ai Weiwei video project forced offline

Prominent Chinese blogger and artist Ai Weiwei said on April 4 that the Chinese authorities had ordered him, without explanation, to take down his new online video project (see CMB No. [51](#)). The website, which had been up for just 46 hours, featured live feeds from four web cameras he had installed in his Beijing home, effectively mocking the Chinese government's monitoring of his every movement. Ai set up the cameras on the one-year anniversary of his forcible detention in Beijing, which took place amid anonymous online calls for Tunisian-style antigovernment protests and ultimately lasted 81 days. He has been under police surveillance since his release in June last year, and security cameras have been installed at the entrance of his home to record visitors and prevent him from leaving the city. On April 5, Ai told Agence France-Presse that he had explained his project to the official who ordered him to shut off the cameras, saying, "You have 15 cameras on me, and the camera I set up in my bedroom is exactly the same camera that I had above my head during my 81 detention days....So I am doing you a favor to (let you) really know what I am doing and have a close watch."

- **New York Times 4/4/2012:** [Ai Weiwei's self-surveillance is shut down](#)
 - **China Digital Times 4/4/2012:** [Ai's Weiwei cam forced offline after 46 hours](#)
 - **Global Post 4/3/2012:** [Ai Weiwei sleeps like a log](#)
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Facebook's Instagram buy raises China access questions

After the U.S.-based social-networking site Facebook announced on April 9 that it had purchased Instagram, a popular photo-sharing application for smartphones, analysts said the acquisition might provide Facebook with an opportunity to enter China, where its site is blocked by the authorities. However, the deal could also complicate Instagram's still relatively small presence in the country. Chinese netizens can currently use a Chinese-language version of the application in tandem with their accounts on the popular Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo, which is required to comply with Beijing's censorship directives. Several users reportedly expressed concerns that Facebook could require them to log in to Instagram accounts through its social-networking hub, effectively cutting off China-based users. Summing up the acquisitive habits of cash-rich U.S. internet companies and the Chinese government's determination to control access to their uncensored

services, one netizen joked, “Google: I will buy anybody who’s got a bright future. Facebook: I will buy anybody who’s got platforms. China: I will block anybody you buy.”

- *Wall Street Journal* 4/10/2012: [Will Instagram help Facebook crack China?](#)
 - *New Yorker* 4/10/2012: [Instagram, Facebook, and China](#)
 - *New York Times* 4/9/2012: [Facebook buys Instagram for \\$1 billion](#)
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TIBET



Police notice warns of torture for separatist speech

According to the India-based Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, on March 9, as part of the “Strike Hard Campaign” to curb Tibetan protests, Chinese authorities posted public notices in Tibetan regions of Gansu Province that threatened violence against those who disrupt “social stability.” Copies of the notice, written in both Chinese and Tibetan, were reportedly visible in the streets of eight counties of Ganlho (Gannan) Prefecture. A translation provided by the Tibetan news website *Tibet Post International* and republished by Reporters Without Borders lists several actions that are to be punished with “violent beating/torture” by the Public Security Bureau. They include incitement of the public to “illegal activities” and the distribution of “ideas of splitting the nation” via written documents, cartoons, videos, websites, e-mail messages, audio files, and text messages. The notice offers a reward of at least 5,000 yuan (\$730) and “personal protection” to members of the public who report instances of the proscribed actions to the Public Security Bureau. China is a signatory to the UN Convention against Torture, and such police brutality is technically illegal in the country, but it is believed to be widespread in practice, particularly against Tibetans.

- *Reporters Without Borders* 3/29/2012: [Authorities openly threaten those who circulate information with torture](#)
 - *Phayul* 4/5/2012: [China to ‘strike hard’ on ‘criminals’ destroying ‘national unity’](#)
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BEYOND CHINA



Hackers strike Chinese government sites

On March 30, a Twitter microblog account called Anonymous China, ostensibly affiliated with the global hacker group Anonymous, announced that the group had attacked nearly 500 websites based in China. Though the central government’s main websites remained intact, a number of sites owned by lower-level authorities in cities such as Chengdu and Dalian were defaced with a message that said, in part, “Dear Chinese government, you are not infallible, today websites are hacked, tomorrow it will be your vile regime that will fall.” In addition, it provided a link to information on how Chinese netizens can circumvent China’s internet controls. China is known as one of the leading sources of cyberattacks around the world, with many targeting websites that are critical of the

regime. For example, the *Epoch Times*, an international newspaper run by practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual group, which is persecuted in China, has reported that both its Chinese and English-language news sites were hit with denial-of-service attacks on March 29 and April 1. Traffic to the *Epoch Times* sites from China has apparently increased in recent weeks, as readers seek uncensored information on the political intrigue surrounding ousted Chongqing leader Bo Xilai (see above). While the source of the cyberattacks remained unclear, the paper's chief website editor, Jan Jekielek, said that only hardline elements in the Chinese Communist Party would have an interest in disrupting the news outlet.

- *Wall Street Journal* 4/4/2012: [Anonymous hacks Chinese government websites](#)
- *Al-Jazeera* 4/5/2012: [Anonymous hacks Chinese websites](#)
- *Epoch Times* 4/2/2012: [Denial of service attack targets Epoch Times](#)



U.S. interviewer, exiled Chinese dissident remembered

Prominent American journalist Mike Wallace, who died on April 7 at age 93, was the only television host in the United States who had interviewed multiple Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders. He was remembered by China watchers for openly challenging both Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin in ways that would have been impossible for his counterparts at Chinese state-run news outlets. In a 1986 interview, Wallace asked Deng to assess the record of CCP founder Mao Zedong. And in a September 2000 episode, he pointed his finger at Jiang and called him the leader of “the last major communist dictatorship in the world.” The characterization had outraged then foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan, who reportedly wanted to interrupt the interview. However, Jiang carried on and later praised Wallace's boldness. By contrast, current president Hu Jintao and most other top Communist officials have avoided unscripted interviews with foreign journalists (see CMB No. 49). Separately, the April 6 death of Chinese physicist and famed political dissident Fang Lizhi at age 76 served as a reminder of the repercussions faced by Chinese critics of the Communist regime. Fang's open letter to Deng in 1989, which had called for the release of political prisoners in China, helped inspire protests that later led to the Tiananmen Square massacre. In the hours after the bloodshed, he and his wife fled to the U.S. embassy in Beijing, where they remained for more than a year. They sought refuge in the United States in 1990 and never returned to their homeland.

- *South China Morning Post* 4/10/2012: [Newman's memorable forays into China](#)
- *Foreign Policy* 4/9/2012: [Is Mike Wallace the reason Chinese leaders don't give interviews?](#)
- *World Affairs* 4/9/2012: [Chinese dissident, Fang Lizhi, dies](#)
- *New York Times* 4/8/2012: [Fang Lizhi, Chinese physicist and seminal dissident, dies at 76](#)

For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see:
[Freedom in the World 2012](#)
[Freedom on the Net 2011](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2011](#)

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