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China exonerates doctor reprimanded for warning of virus

March 19, 2020



BEIJING (AP) —
China has
exonerated a

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doctor who was officially reprimanded for warning about the coronavirus outbreak and later died of the disease, a startling admission of error by the ruling Communist Party that generally bodes no challenges to its authority.

The party's top disciplinary body said the police force in Wuhan had revoked its admonishment of Dr. Li Wenliang that had included a threat of arrest.

It also said a "solemn apology" had been issued to Li's family and that two police officers, identified only by their surnames, had been issued "disciplinary punishments" for the original handling of the matter.

In death, Li became the face of

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simmering anger at the ruling Communist Party's controls over information and complaints that officials lie about or hide disease outbreaks, industrial accidents, natural disasters and financial frauds, while punishing whistleblowers and independent journalists.

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After seeing thousands of new cases daily at the peak of the city's outbreak a month ago, Wuhan on Friday had its second consecutive day with no new confirmed or

suspected cases.

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VIRUS OUTBREAK:**

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The National Health Commission said all of the 39 new cases recorded Friday in China were brought from overseas, showing that rigid travel restrictions and social distancing requirements appear to have had their desired effect.

China has loosened some travel restrictions in Hubei, the province surrounding Wuhan, although its provincial border remains

closed and Wuhan
itself remains
under lockdown.
Officials say they
will only lift the
quarantine after
Wuhan goes 14
consecutive days
with no new cases.

Police in December
had reprimanded
eight doctors
including Li for
warning friends on
social media about
the emerging
threat. China's
supreme court
later criticized the
police, but the
ruling party
continued to
tighten its grip on
information about
the outbreak.

The party has
faced similar
accusations of
bungling or
thuggish behavior
following previous
disasters. They
include the 2003
outbreak of Severe
Acute Respiratory
Syndrome, a 2005
chemical spill that
disrupted water
supplies to
millions of people

in China's northeast, sales of tainted milk that sickened thousands of children and the failure of private finance companies after the global economic crisis.

In each case, officials were accused of trying to conceal or delay information people said they needed to protect themselves.

The party often responds by allowing the public to vent temporarily, then uses its control of media and the internet to stifle criticism. Critics who persist can be jailed on vague charges of spreading rumors or making trouble.

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The treatment of
Li's case may
reflect concerns
among the
leadership about
public anger over
the failure to
properly honor the
sacrifices of front-
line health workers
while praising the
party and its head,
Xi Jinping, who has
tightened controls
on society since
taking power in
2012.

The most powerful
Chinese leader
since at least the
1980s, Xi gave
himself the option
of remaining
president for life
by changing the
Chinese
constitution in
2018 to remove a
two-term limit.

In Wuhan, local

leaders were accused of telling doctors in December not to publicize the spreading virus in order to avoid casting a shadow over the annual meeting of a local legislative body.

As the virus spread, doctors were ordered to delete posts on social media that appealed for donations of medical supplies. That prompted complaints authorities were more worried about image than public safety.

Li was detained by police after warning about the virus on a social media group for his former classmates.

Full Coverage: [Virus Outbreak](#)

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