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According to an amendment to China's Criminal Law that took effect in November, those who publish false, alarmist claims about natural disasters or police actions or those who deliberately spread rumors on the Internet about such matters can be held in prison for up to three years if the false information disrupts social order. Those whose rumor mongering causes serious consequences can be put behind bars for three to seven years.

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The deadly flood that swept through Xingtai was the worst in two decades, affecting 9 million people and causing heavy economic losses, and 100 people are still missing, local authorities said Sunday.

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The local government affirmed Sunday that the disaster was caused by heavy rainfall and not by an intentional discharge of water from a reservoir as previously reported.

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Rumors of intentional reservoir discharge and fatal delays in flood warnings prevailed on social media in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, angering villagers and Net users.

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According to the Xinhua News Agency, five government officials have been suspended for dereliction of duty over the response to the deadly floods.

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Xingtai Mayor Dong Xiaoyu apologized for the inadequate response to the disaster at a press conference on Saturday night, Xinhua reported.

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