Written by **Angeline Tan** on December 14, 2022

Taiwan Considers Banning TikTok, Citing Security Concerns

SINGAPORE — Taiwan's Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA) will organize inter-ministerial discussions in December to ascertain whether a nationwide ban should be enforced on TikTok.

This comes after the MODA banned TikTok from public-sector devices such as tablets, computers, and smartphones on December 5. The next day, New Taipei City announced it would work with the central government to impose the ban on public-sector devices.

Based on reports from Mirror Media, Taiwan's Minister of Digital Affairs Audrey Tang said December 9 that the ministry is mulling over whether to extend the ban to the general public and that a report will be filed at the information security meeting at the end of this month. Tang said an inter-ministerial committee meeting would be conducted to ascertain the best path with regard to national security.

Last week, a MODA official was quoted as saying that Douyin, TikTok (international version), and Xiaohongshu have been regarded as "harmful products against national information security." The ban on the installation of TikTok and its Chinese version, Douyin, is applicable to the Chinese social-media platform Xiaohongshu, also known as Little Red Book. An official from the Digital Affairs Ministry who declined to be named said the impacted devices include mobile phones, tablets, and desktops.

The announcement of the public-sector device ban has fueled debate over whether TikTok should be banned for individual consumers. During an event at the Songshan Cultural and Creative Park on Friday, Tang was questioned by the media whether the ban would apply to private usage of TikTok.

Tang highlighted that Taiwan's principles on "Limiting Harmful Products Against National Information Security Used by Government Agencies" do not apply in private and personal situations. Nonetheless, Tang remarked that people from all backgrounds in Taiwan have begun to voice their worries about TikTok's impact on national security.

On December 12, Taiwan's Cabinet banned TikTok in its buildings and is collaborating with Taiwan's other top governing bodies to enforce a ban on the controversial Chinese-owned social-media app. Li Meng-yen, secretary-general of Taiwan's Cabinet, said that Chinese audio-visual platforms have unleashed many attacks, propaganda campaigns, and misinformation in Taiwan. Besides urging public departments of ministries and Cabinet commissions to forbid this platform, the Cabinet has invited other governing bodies and commissions to plan countermeasures to be taken against TikTok.

Cabinet spokesman Lo Ping-cheng said that the scope of the ban includes mobile phones used for official business by civil servants. He said that phones are presently checked individually for the banned app.

Lo mentioned that if there is a more efficient way to block TikTok, using a technical process to block the app within the scope of a local area network, the task force will explore ways to enforce it.

National Science and Technology Council Minister Wu Tsung-tsong also confirmed that a report on the matter will be unveiled at an inter-ministerial national security meeting slated for this month.

Mark Ho, a lawmaker from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, commented at a legislative meeting on December 6 that the video app owned by ByteDance could be utilized to spread "united front disinformation."

Based on Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, Beijing-based firm ByteDance does not have a branch in Taiwan, and Chinese-funded companies are banned from operating online platforms in island nation.

However, various fake accounts on the Douyin app impersonating Premier Su Tseng-chang and Taiwanese government agencies heightened security concerns, Ho said.

A TikTok spokesperson informed *The Epoch Times* by email that the company is "happy to continue with constructive meetings with state policymakers" to talk about the privacy and security practices of the app.

"We believe the concerns driving these decisions are largely fueled by misinformation about our company," the spokesperson said. "We are disappointed that many state agencies, offices, and universities will no longer be able to use TikTok to build communities and connect with constituents."

Taiwan is not the only one concerned about TikTok's potential threat to national security. Brendan Carr, one of five commissioners on the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, posted on Twitter praising Taiwan's "smart" and "strong leadership" in banning TikTok from public-sector devices.

He had previously called for a ban on TikTok in the United States, as he asserted that it would be impossible for American officials to evaluate if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had access to TikTok users' data.

FBI Director Christopher Wray recently commented that the CCP is using TikTok to harness data on individuals around the world. What the regime will use the data for remains unclear, according to officials.

"We do have national security concerns, obviously from the FBI's end, about TikTok," Wray told Congress during testimony in November.

"They include the possibility that the [CCP] could use it to control data collection on millions of users, or control the recommendation algorithm which could be used for influence operations if they so choose, or to control software on millions of devices."

TikTok issued a statement on November 2 indicating that its "privacy policy" is "based on a demonstrated need to do their job," which applies to "the European economic area, United Kingdom, and Switzerland."

Elaine Fox, TikTok's head of privacy for Europe, remarked that although the social-media app presently stores European user data in the United States and Singapore, it permits "certain employees within our corporate group" to have remote access to TikTok European user data.

Fox said employee access was "subject to a series of robust security controls and approval protocols, and by way of methods that are recognized under the General Data Protection Regulation."

TikTok's threat to national and individual security was further echoed by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. In an interview with CBS, Yellen admitted that there is a genuine national-security issue with TikTok, and "there are a number of ways" that "that concern, if it's found to be significant, could be addressed."

Host Norah O'Donnell asked, "For parents of teenagers that spend a lot of time on TikTok, what are those legitimate national security concerns?"

Yellen responded, "Well, it's that private information could potentially end up in Chinese hands and used in ways that would negatively impact Americans. And there are a number of ways in which that could be — that concern, if it's found to be significant, could be addressed."

O'Donnell then probed further, "I feel like we're dancing around the issue with TikTok. I mean, what is it about — that China could do with my teenager and the type of videos that they're looking at if they're looking at silly pet videos, why does — why is that a national security concern?"

Yellen replied, "Well, they have access to a lot of data on your teenager from the information that they collect while your teenager is online."

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