

Media Coverage

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Outlook India	30 June 2020	Online	https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/tiktok-goes-offline-removed-from-google-play-store-apple-app-store/1882136	TikTok Goes Offline; Removed From Google Play Store, Apple App Store

Outlook
THE NEWS SCROLL

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TikTok goes offline; removed from Google Play Store, Apple App Store

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(Eds: Updates with expert comments)

New Delhi, Jun 30 (PTI) Short video sharing app TikTok went offline in the country on Tuesday following the government order banning it and 58 other apps citing threat to India's sovereignty and security.

The app was also removed from Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

The status of other banned apps could not be immediately ascertained.

According to some users, they were able to use the app for a brief period on Tuesday. It had 200 million users in India.

"Dear users, we are in the process of complying with the Government of India's directive to block 59 apps. Ensuring the privacy and security of all our users in India remains our utmost priority," as per a message displayed by the app.

The India website of TikTok, which employs about 2,000 people in the country, has also been pulled down.

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Besides ByteDance's TikTok, other banned apps include e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's UC Browser, Tencent Holdings Ltd's social media platform WeChat, and Baidu Inc's map and translation platforms.

The ban in India would hit Chinese internet companies that were making headway in the world's fastest-growing mobile market.

Blaise Fernandes, Director at policy think tank Gateway House, said there are essentially four types of Chinese apps functioning in India – economic activity apps, service-oriented apps, vanity apps, and strategic apps.

"The Digital India story is globally tracked. Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent are part of the digital "Silk Route" of China. The ban of the 59 Chinese Apps in India, will negatively impact the valuations of these apps and their respective promoters," he said.

Fernandes also noted that a case in point is the upcoming IPO of TikTok, whose 30 per cent user base comes from India. This will impact the TikTok valuations negatively, he added.

In a statement, TikTok India Head Nikhil Gandhi said the company has not shared any information of its users in India with any foreign government, including the Chinese Government, and that it places the highest importance on user privacy and integrity.

Helo - another group company of ByteDance - said it was working with key stakeholders for an opportunity to respond and submit clarifications. It also said that it strictly follows all rules and regulations of the region.

Meanwhile, Roposo, which describes itself as a "Made in India" short video app with over 65 million downloads, said many TikTok users, including influencers have moved to its platform following the ban.

"Influencers who have switched to Roposo include Prem Vats and Noor Afshan who had fan followings of 9.5 million and 9 million, respectively on TikTok," InMobi Group-led Roposo said.

On Tuesday, traders' body CAIT called for an investigation into investments made by Chinese firms in various Indian startups to ensure that data accrued by these startups is not being transferred to Chinese investors and there is no threat to the country's security.

The CAIT has written to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal seeking a probe to ascertain that no "foul play" was taking place under the garb of investment.

"We wish to state that Chinese companies have major investments in many startups in India and the few majors are Flipkart, Paytm Mall, Paytm.com, Swiggy, Ola, OYO, Zomato, Policybazaar, BigBasket, Delhivery, MakeMyTrip, Dream 11, Hike, Snapdeal, Udaan, Lenskart.com, Byjus....," CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said in the letter to Sitharaman.

Chinese companies like Alibaba, Tencent and others are lead investors in many of these startups and it should be ensured that no foul play is taking place under the garb of investment, he added.

Industry executives believe that the government's move to ban these Chinese apps presents an opportunity for homegrown companies to woo millions of young users and brands onto their platforms.

Regional language social media platform ShareChat said MyGov India joined its platform, giving the citizen engagement platform the opportunity to connect and engage with over 60 million active users in 15 Indian languages.

Chingari, an Indian app touted as TikTok rival, has seen manifold growth in usage in the past few weeks. It has crossed more than 2.5 million downloads from 550,000 downloads in about 10 days.

Sumit Ghosh, Co-Founder and Chief Product Officer of Chinagri app said the step taken by the government was good and welcomed TikTok users to try the app.

Naveen Mishra, senior research director at Gartner, said with the ban of TikTok, 200 million Indian consumers are evaluating alternatives.

"This ban creates immediate opportunities for Indian developers to create a similar robust platform. There are bunch of early stage similar Indian products, which will be aggressively tested by Indian consumers now."

Genius Consultants Ltd CMD RP Yadav said this will open up great opportunities for the IT MSME sector. "They can work on developing application software that is similar or better."

Sunil Nair, the India CEO of Silicon Valley-based Firework, said for any platform that wants to enter India and operate, it is important for it to understand the sensitivities towards the country's culture and the importance of taking responsibilities for the actions of its users. Firework is a short video network and caters to an audience across nine countries. PTI SR MBI ANZ RAM MR MR