

Maker of China's TikTok denies report it is planning HK listing

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TikTok has 500 million users globally and has exploded in popularity over the past two years

Chinese internet start-up ByteDance, whose globally popular app TikTok has raised US security concerns, on Tuesday denied reports that it was considering an initial public offering in Hong Kong in the first quarter of next year.

ByteDance, which is said to be valued at up to \$75 billion, was reported by the Financial Times to be eyeing a listing in the city despite months of violent political protests there.

The report had cited unidentified sources.

"There is absolutely zero truth to the rumors that we plan to list in Hong Kong in Q1," the Beijing-based company said in a statement.

It gave no further details.

With 500 million users worldwide, TikTok has exploded in popularity in the past two years, offering a platform for producing and publishing music-synced videos up to 60 seconds long.

But with China's growing global tech ambitions looming ever larger on Washington's radar, the app's appeal has raised alarm bells in the United States.

Two senior US senators last week called for the government to study national security risks possibly posed by TikTok, saying it could leave American users vulnerable to Beijing's spying.

In a letter to acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican Senator Tom Cotton said ByteDance could be forced to share user information with Chinese intelligence.

It could also conceivably offer Beijing's spies a backdoor into users' smartphones and computers, allegations that are similar to those being levelled against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, the senators said.

They called TikTok "a potential counterintelligence threat we cannot ignore".

Bloomberg News reported late last year that ByteDance, which also operates the popular Chinese news and information platform Jinri Toutiao, had closed a round of funding valuing the company at \$75 billion, making it the world's biggest privately backed startup.

Investors included giants such as SoftBank Group and KKR & Co.

In a response to the senators' letter, TikTok sought to distance itself from China, saying "we are not influenced by any foreign government, including the Chinese government".

The company's data centres are located outside China and "none of our data is subject to Chinese law", it said.

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