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NCC warns of privacy threat planted in Xiaomi phones

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On 6 January 2022, the National Communications Commission (NCC) issued an alert regarding a possible privacy threat planted in the Xiaomi Mi-10T 5G Android phone, which is available on the Taiwan market.

In September 2021, the Lithuanian Defence Department issued a warning that the Xiaomi Mi-10T 5G Android phone was found to have built-in apps that perform censorship on certain banned terms, such as "Free Tibet", "Taiwan Independence" and "Democracy movement". The NCC subsequently released its own findings, based on a regular cybersecurity inspection of popular smart phones available on the domestic market.

The NCC found that the Xiaomi Mi-10T 5G Android phone has seven built-in apps – including a user subjects app, a music app, a package software installation program, a mobile phone housekeeper app, a garbage bin and a download management app. The phone also has a Xiaomi video link to "globalapi.ad.xiaomi.com" for data collection with regard to a list of more than 2,000 keywords generally considered politically sensitive in China, including criticism of the Chinese Communist Party and its leaders, and keywords relating to the Tiananmen protests, the freedom of Tibet, Taiwan independence and the name of the Taiwanese president.

Xiaomi Taiwan responded, in a public release, that the MiAdBlacklistConfig file questioned by the NCC is used to manage paid ads pushed by advertisers in Xiaomi's own app to protect users from illegal content, such as pornography, violence, hate speech and potentially offensive information. Xiaomi Taiwan argued that this is a common practice widely adopted by Facebook and Google.

The NCC says it is pursuing further investigation of the Xiaomi Mi-10T 5G Android phone to ensure it complies with consumer protection and national security laws.

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