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CHINA'S NEW ANTI-MONOPOLY RULES TARGET TECH GIANTS

The State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) has released new guidelines aimed at "stopping monopolistic behaviors and protecting fair competition in the market" among the country's tech giants, including e-commerce sites like Alibaba's Taobao and JD.com, and payment services such as Ant's Alipay and Tencent's WeChat Pay. The new rules, which formalize an earlier anti-monopoly draft law released in November, will stop companies from price fixing, restricting technologies and using data and algorithms to manipulate the market. SAMR said online monopolistic behavior is increasing and it is facing challenges regulating the industry due to its opacity. "The behavior is more concealed, the use of data, algorithms, platform rules and so on make it more difficult to discover and determine what are monopoly agreements," it said. (Reuters, February 7, 2021)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: In December, regulators suspended Ant Group's \$37 billion IPO and launched an antitrust investigation. Regulators criticized the firm's practices, including forcing merchants to sign exclusive cooperation pacts at the expense of other internet platforms.]

NEW PENTAGON TASK FORCE TO REVIEW CHINA POLICY

The Pentagon will conduct a review of U.S. military posture toward China. "It will require a whole-of-government effort, bipartisan cooperation in Congress, and strong alliances and partners. That is how we will meet the China challenge and ensure the American people win the competition of the future," President Biden announced. Biden, who made the remarks during his first visit to the Department of Defense since taking office, said the review will help "chart a strong path forward on China-related matters." Led by Ely Ratner, the department's special assistant on China, the group will include about 15 civilian and uniformed officials. They will assess U.S. strategy, operational concepts, technology, intelligence, alliances, military relations with China, and force structure, posture and management and in four months deliver a report to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. (Defense News, February 10, 2021)

NEW RULES FOR ARTISTS

The China Association of Performing Arts (CAPA) under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has released new policies targeting artists from various fields, including music, theater, dance, and opera. Scheduled to take effect on March 1st, the new policies, titled "the Management Method of Professional Self-disciplining for Performers in the Entertainment Industry," lay out moral guidelines covering artists' lives, both on and off stage. The notice stipulates Chinese entertainers can be punished for "ethics violations" including "harming national interests," "disrupting China's ethnic unity," promoting religious groups deemed illegal by the government, endangering social morality, criticizing revolutionary heroes and martyrs, using physical defects to attract attention, endorsing products in advertisements that contain misleading information, or deceiving audiences in lip-synching performances. Offstage offenses include taking drugs, driving drunk, or illegal activities involving violence or obscenity.

Punishments for rule-breakers include halting their eligibility for awards and subjecting them to "joint industry boycotts," which, depending on the severity and degrees of "negative social impacts," could either be temporary or permanent. After a temporary ban, a celeb must apply to CAPA's ethics construction commission to obtain permission to make a comeback. "When public figures lose their moral compass and neglect rules, they need to be called out and held accountable," the official People's Daily posted on Weibo. (SupChina, February 7, 2021)

UK BLOCKS CGTN, CHINA BLOCKS BBC

Last week, UK regulator Ofcom revoked CGTN's broadcasting license because the latter omitted "crucial information" from its the application that would have shown it is controlled by the Communist Party of China. This week, China's National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) determined that the BBC has violated regulations that news bulletins should be "truthful and fair," and has refused to accept its renewal application. UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab called the decision an "unacceptable curtailing of media freedom." (Bloomberg, February 11, 2021)

'DEEP CONCERNS' ABOUT WHO CHINA PROBE – NSA SULLIVAN

The Biden administration has expressed "deep concerns" about the World Health Organization's (WHO) probe into China's handling of the coronavirus. "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government," said National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan. At an exit briefing in China, WHO scientists said it is "most likely" that the coronavirus was initially transmitted via a jump from an animal to human. But the team also said they did not see the raw data and relied on analysis provided by Beijing. "To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak. Going forward, all countries, including China, should participate in a transparent and robust process for preventing and responding to health emergencies -- so that the world learns as much as possible as soon as possible," Sullivan said. (Fox News, February 13, 2021)