

**TECHNOLOGY**

# 5G promoted as lifeline



Dr Chalermpon Chairat, chief of the emergency unit of Nopparat Rajathanee Hospital, with the smart ambulance equipped with 5G, the first such model in Thailand.

## Networks tapped for economic recovery

### KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

Amid the carnage caused by the pandemic, 5G networks are expected to serve as critical infrastructure to speed up the country's economic recovery and promote health technology, say industry pundits.

5G-related issues are expected to be deliberated in the first meeting of the national 5G committee, chaired by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha. The 26-member committee was formed in May this year.

The issues include the smart hospital scheme, over-the-top (OTT) platform development, Thailand as a global work-from-home hub and 5G adoption promotion.

These agenda items were raised by Takorn Tantasith, then secretary-

general of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), before he left the post at the end of last month.

During the crisis, 5G tech has been deployed by major operators to help the healthcare sector deal with coronavirus patients, including customised robots and a series of solutions.

Trairat Viriyasirikul, acting secretary-general of the NBTC, said Thailand is perceived to have handled the outbreak well because of its outstanding public healthcare sector, partly thanks to 5G network infrastructure installation, which took place a few months after the 5G spectrum licence auction was held in February.

"When the outbreak came, 5G network capability and related solutions proved they could help medical teams deal with the patients in more convenient, quicker and safer fashions with lower budgets," said Mr Trairat.

### ECONOMIC BOOST

Referring to the 5G-related issues to

be considered by the committee, he said these agenda items are expected to help drive the overall economy via 5G tech in the wake of the pandemic.

The agenda could facilitate 5G adoption by vertical industries, smart hospital developments as well as work-from-home hub initiatives.

The committee should also promote local OTT platforms, embedded with 5G tech, for everyday use, said Mr Trairat.

Work-from-home measures have been gathering steam for some time during the crisis, driven by innovative platforms.

Thailand has the potential to serve as a work-from-home hub because it was the first mover for 5G adoption in Asean, he said.

### OPERATOR INVOLVEMENT

Somchai Lertsutiwong, chief executive of Advanced Info Service (AIS), the country's largest mobile operator by subscribers, indicated the company



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**SOMCHAI LERTSUTIWONG**

Chief executive, AIS

will invest 35-40 billion baht to expand digital network infrastructure this year.

"AIS is committed to creating a 5G tech network as the new infrastructure of the country through the Eastern Economic Corridor [EEC] project and core sectors," said Mr Somchai.

All ground, air and marine sectors in the EEC need to be supported with 5G tech to allow for a boost in operations, he said.

AIS has developed medical robots through its 5G test bed under the approval of the telecom regulator since late 2018, known as tele-operation drilling robots that help doctors with surgery, said Mr Somchai.

During the pandemic, AIS announced a "combat mission" against the pandemic, using 5G-enabled robots that help medical personnel deal with patients to ward off the risk of infection. AIS has provided the robots, related devices and platforms to seven hospitals under this mission.

Piroon Paireepairit, head of the 5G working group of True Corporation, said the company has a vision to use 5G tech to accommodate all people, particularly in the public health sector.

True is working with Nopparat Rajathanee Hospital in Bangkok's Kan-nayao district to support 5G tech for various tasks, including 5G-equipped ambulances, which would enhance telecommunication between paramedics and physicians for better preparation as patients are taken to the hospital.

True also developed the Vhealth app, which helps hospitals' medical personnel give medical advice and screen patients who need to receive treatment at the hospital.

The company provides 5G signal coverage at hospitals to facilitate these tasks.