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Thailand studying Japan's satellite model

FOREIGN INVESTMENT ALLOWED AFTER END OF THAICOM CONCESSION

Thaicom 8 in orbit

THAICOM PLC

THE NATION

THE MINISTRY of Digital Economy and Society has teamed up with the Thai Chamber of Commerce to study Japan's satellite model to seek supervisory direction for the satellite industry, in which foreign investments will be allowed after Thaicom Plc's 20-year satellite concession ends in 2021.

Vunnaporn Devahastin, the deputy permanent secretary of the ministry, said the country must be well prepared as the new bill on the organisation to assign radio frequency and to regulate broadcasting and telecommunication services awaits a Royal Decree.

Supervising, thus, needs a study of overseas information, while discussions with Japan's Office of National Space Policy allowed Thailand to see the process, she said.

Japan liberally permits enterprises from other countries such as Vietnam, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to operate satellites with clearly separate operations.

Japan's ministry for information, communications and technology normally joins the prime minister's office to set plans which will, then, become the policy for related ministries to follow the strategic plans.

"In Thailand, after the new bill comes into force, it will be necessary to clearly separate the authority of the ministry and the NBTC [National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission]. Based on the new bill, a request for operating licences will go to the NBTC, while the ministry will set the policy to cope with the planned liberalisation of the satellite industry in Thailand," Vunnaporn said.

In the overall satellite industry of the future, there will likely be more internet satellites amid a global move into investments in services from non-geostationary satellite orbit, such as low earth orbit and medium earth orbit, thousands of which can be sent to the sky each time due to their small sizes. These satellites serve several services – from high-speed internet 5G, internet of things, high-speed data transmission, survey, navigation to high-resolution photography.

The satellite industry is expected to see high competition with more operators, while several industries may have to rely more on satellites.

In Japan, most satellites are the low earth orbit type and thousands of them can be sent into the sky each time.

Presently, there are about 1,000 satellites in the sky, compared to the past five years' 200 satellites.

In 2021, the number of low earth orbit satellites are expected to see a big jump as seen from the licences for 10,000 satellites given to Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX)'s founder Elon Musk, who also leads Tesla, which makes electric cars, giant batteries and solar products.

His move is expected to create demand for satellites in the industry. In Thailand, Thaicom's satellites – Thaicom 4 (Ipstar), Thaicom 5 and Thaicom 6 – will end their concessions and still see high demand for their services to cope with the demands of 5G, IoT and artificial intelligence.