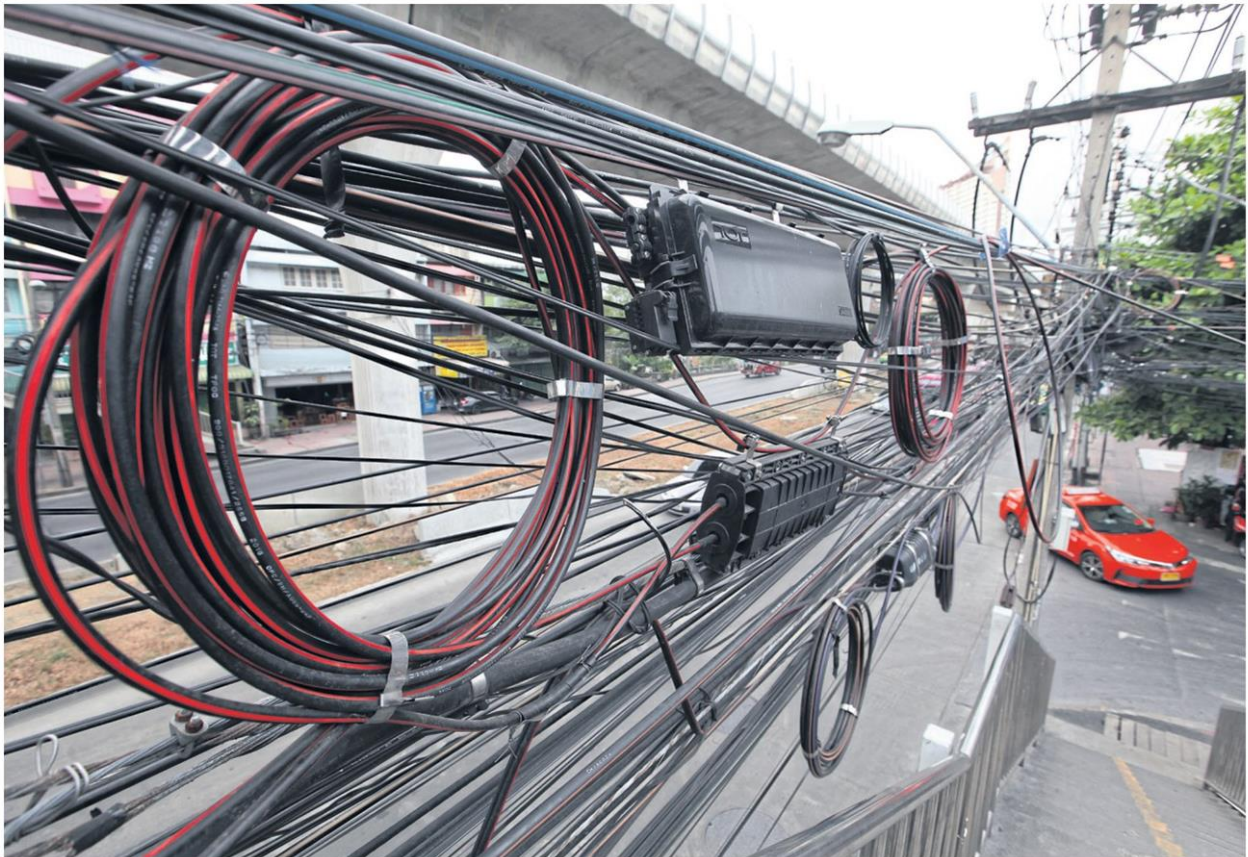


DIGABLE PLANET

An investment arm of the World Bank mulls offering long-term loans for Bangkok's underground cable project. **B3**

IFC may fund underground cables



Communication lines and cables from electric poles at Phetkasem 48 in Bangkok. PAWAT LAUPAISARNTAKSIN

World Bank also keen on broadband

KOMSAN TORTERMOVASANA

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector investment arm of the World Bank, is considering offering long-term loans for the underground cable conduit project in Bangkok, expected to cost 20 billion baht, says the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

The scheme is being handled by Krungthep Thanakom (KT), the business arm of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the NBTC, said IFC representatives met NBTC management on Feb 5, mostly to discuss the conduit project. The IFC was updated about the scheme at the time.

The representatives of the IFC include Helen Han, a senior investment officer, and Tugay Yilmaz, an officer for infrastructure and natural resources.

Apart from the conduit project, the IFC asked about 5G spectrum alloca-

tion in the Feb 16 auction and what the regulator can expect from the 5G auction and roll-out.

The IFC was also interested in the country's broadband network expansion and fibre technology plans.

"If KT started constructing the conduit project now, it would be completed in the next two years as targeted," Mr Takorn said.

The conduit project was initiated by the government to put overhead cables in Bangkok and adjacent cities underground in a bid to beautify the capital's landscape and improve safety.

The National Digital Economy

and Society Committee approved KT moving ahead with the project.

KT is obligated to operate the project on its own, based on Section 35 of the Telecom Business Act, which governs practice, investment, telecom infrastructure and conduit construction.

State telecom enterprise TOT has underground cable conduits stretching more than 200 kilometres in the capital. KT's project would have to extend from TOT's conduit lines.

The NBTC has urged TOT to clarify the locations where its existing conduits lie.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC and the BMA held a meeting about the construction plan late last year and they expect the project to cost 20 billion baht, based on KT's study.

Both agreed to partially subsidise the rental fees for telecom operators to encourage use of the conduits.

The NBTC will forward the proposal to the National Digital Economy and Society Committee for approval.

TOT set the rental fee at 9,000 baht per kilometre per month for the underground conduits.

According to Mr Takorn, the NBTC, the BMA and the Metropolitan Electricity Authority plan for the underground cables to span 150km, of which 27km was completed in 2019.

In 2020, cable conduits spanning 52km are to be put underground.