

**BROADCASTING**

# Probe into MCOT president ordered

**MONGKOL BANGPRAPA**

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has ordered a probe into the MCOT president's bid to give half the 3.25-billion-baht compensation awarded for the recall of the 2600 MHz range to the broadcaster's contractor.

The compensation controversy puts state-owned public broadcaster MCOT in the spotlight after the MCOT workers' union submitted a petition on June 1 to the prime minister, asking him to look into the details behind the 3.25-billion-baht in compensation for the recall of the spectrum range by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). The 2600 MHz band has been recalled for the development of the 5G service.

The NBTC has to pay the broadcaster 3.25 billion baht, half of which will go to Playwork, MCOT's contractor in its paid-TV project as requested by MCOT president Kematat Paladesh.

The MCOT workers' union said several board members and the union itself opposed the idea to give half the compensation to the firm. They voiced their objections many times to the MCOT president, but to no avail.

Three of the board members — Piset Chiyasak, Parichart Sthapitanonda and Montri Sanghirun — later resigned on June 12.

The MCOT president did not have the authority to ask the NBTC to give half the compensation to Playwork. He did not protect the interests of the broadcaster and the nation, the union said.

Meanwhile, Mr Kematat confirmed the board had given him the authority to negotiate compensation for the spectrum range recall. He said he had also negotiated with Playwork for a larger cut for the broadcaster.

The NBTC has claimed it has the power to pay MCOT half the compensation and the other half to its contractor.

Prime Minister's Office Minister Tewan Liptapallop, who oversees

MCOT, said Gen Prayut has stressed that protection of national interests must be a priority.

It is still too early to conclude whether there are irregularities in the MCOT president's compensation request, judging from the information and complaints that he now has.

A panel has been set up to investigate. It is obligated to send its findings to the government within 15 days.

A letter has been sent to the MCOT board president requesting his comments on the compensation controversy.

When asked whether Mr Kematat would have to step down during the investigation, the minister said he is checking to see if the law allows the PM's Office to order him to do so.

The minister said the probe would continue even if the MCOT board and Mr Kematat ceased working in the organisation.

When asked if the PM's Office needs to run a background check on Playwork, Mr Tewan said he was unsure whether the office has power to do so since the company signed contracts with MCOT.

A source said Playwork partnered with MCOT in 2010 to operate pay-TV and develop media applications with the use of the 2600 MHz band. The deal has not borne fruit since the power to manage frequencies was transferred to the NBTC in 2011.

According to the Department of Business Development, Playwork was registered on March 10, 2005 with registered capital of 50,000,000 baht to provide telecommunications and news services, and develop applications.

The NBTC was set up in 2009 to oversee the allocation of frequency spectrums.

The minister added that he has not talked to the MCOT president directly about the compensation, saying he had written to Mr Kematat to ask about disputed transfers within the organisation, but had received no replies.