

**COMPETITION**

# Thai lawyer urges Oslo to block DTAC merger

**KOMSAN TORTERMMVASANA**

A lawyer has petitioned the Norwegian government to pressure Norway's Telenor, the parent of Total Access Communication (DTAC), to abort the planned merger with True Corporation, saying it violates Thai laws and Thailand's constitution.

The petition was lodged by Somboon Boonyapirom via the Norwegian embassy in Bangkok yesterday.

He also called on the Norwegian government to deliberate whether the merger was in line with the UN's guiding principles concerning business and human rights (UNGPs).

"A deliberation would be a confirmation of Norway's dignity as a country near the top of the global rankings for good corporate governance," said Mr Somboon.

He said the proposed merger is in violation of the Telecommunications Business Act's Section 21 that prevents acts that can cause monopoly or competition restrictions, with the regulator required to usher in measures to counter such acts.

Second, the deal will leave only two major players in the market, which is likely to take a toll on consumers in terms of service quality and pricing, as well as hindering the country's digital economy development, said Mr Somboon.

He said True and DTAC have respective market shares of 34% with 32.2 million subscribers and 20% with 19.6 million subscribers, while their key rival Advanced Info Service (AIS) has a market share of 46% with 44.1 million subscribers.

The merger would result in two large carriers that could dictate market prices and service quality, said Mr Somboon.

The remedy measures hastily drawn up by the Office of the



**The Norwegian embassy should communicate with Telenor to investigate whether its subsidiary is violating business ethics in Thailand.**

**SOMBOON BOONYAPIROM**

Lawyer

National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) have flaws in governing the deal, he said.

Several subcommittees of the NBTC tasked with scrutinising the planned merger have suggested the NBTC should not approve the deal.

Mr Somboon said another concern is freedom of communication for the public, which must not be interfered with by private firms or the state.

Fewer telecom operators increases the chance of interference or limits on information access, he said.

Private companies have a responsibility to protect human rights, in line with UNGPs, said Mr Somboon.

He said with the NBTC scheduled to hold a meeting to deliberate the planned merger on Oct 12, the Norwegian embassy should communicate with Telenor to investigate whether its subsidiary is violating business ethics in Thailand.

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## Killing spree a red flag

**T**he whole nation was shocked and saddened by the heinous shooting spree at a nursery in Nong Bua Lam Phu province yesterday. The nature of the crime inflicted on pre-school children and strangers seems inexplicable and especially callous.

Our deepest condolences go out to the bereaved families of the 38 victims. We also send our prayers and wishes to the 10 injured people who are now in intensive care units. We hope they all make speedy recoveries.

The carnage meted out yesterday is more than just a despicable crime, however. It is another red flag that the risk of mass shooting sprees — once believed limited to other countries and foreign news reports — is closer to home than we would like to believe.

The mass shooting in northeastern Thailand brings back memories of the carnage that took place in Nakhon Ratchasima two years ago. Indeed, the two mass murders share some similarities. Apart from both being shockingly cold-blooded in nature, the perpetrators were low-ranking state security personnel who were familiar with using firearms.

Both men also had serious psychological and emotional problems. The first was a rank-and-file soldier who was in financial dire straits and had just quarrelled with one of his superiors. The former policeman

responsible for yesterday's shooting had also held a low rank and had just been fired from the Royal Thai Police (RTP) for using illegal drugs. He was about to face a narcotics charge.

Both cases beg questions about the recruitment process employed by the army and the Royal Thai Police (RTP).

It will take days for police investigators to wrap up the latest case to find out the man's real motivation. At this stage, police have concluded drug abuse and mental stress were likely the main factors that drove Pol Capt Panya Khamlarb to kill scores of pre-school kids and strangers — seemingly at random — before turning the gun on his wife, their young son and finally himself.

The RTP will also, of course, need to check his drug abuse record. The public will demand to know why he chose a nursery centre, of all places. Above all, people will want to know how the RTP hired this man, who reportedly admitted to his superior that he had been taking narcotics since he was a teenager. Moreover, he had been punished for bad behaviour on several occasions.

Society needs to know how the police deal with the mental health issues their staff face. The suicide rate among police is high, with 443 taking their own lives from 2008-2021.

It will take months or even years for the survivors and bereaved families to cope with the pain and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by yesterday's shooting. At this point, psychologists from the Ministry of Public Health must be quick to provide them and other community residents with counselling and long-term monitoring.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society and the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) must also strictly prevent the media from showing graphic images of the crime scene.

Above all, the government and society must accept the harsh reality that we could see copycats and other similar incidents. The government needs to find measures to monitor potential risks such as improving its gun control policy and arming staff and security personnel with the kind of safety information and protection they need. We can only pray it won't be needed.