

World Cup TV in limbo as funds short

B600m pledged, but more needed

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The National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) has approved an allocation of just 600 million baht to help finance the purchase of the rights to broadcast live World Cup 2022 matches.

The move has raised concerns over how the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) will be able to find the balance of about 1 billion baht to ensure free viewing for all Thais, especially as the tournament nears.

Trairat Viriyasirikul, acting secretary-general of the NBTC, said yesterday that a majority of NBTC members voted for an allocation of 600 million baht from the NBTC's research and development fund to support the SAT's bid to buy the broadcasting rights.

"The majority of NBTC members approved an allocation of 600 million baht so Thais can watch all 64 live World Cup 2022 matches free of charge," he said.

Mr Trairat said the SAT was negotiating with Fifa, football's international governing body, to reduce the price of the broadcasting rights to about 1.2 billion baht. Fifa has not yet given an answer.



Trairat: Wants Fifa to cut price

So, the NBTC decided to finance half of the negotiated price, or 600 million baht, and the SAT will now have to find ways to seek additional funding, Mr Trairat said. The World Cup football tournament is among seven major sports competitions under the NBTC's so-called "Must Have" rules requiring free broadcasting for viewers in Thailand, he said.

The others are the Southeast Asian Games, Asean Para Games, Asian Games, Asian Para Games, Olympic



**FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar 2022**

Games, Paralympic Games.

However, critics said this rule adversely discourages companies — that normally seek such broadcast rights — from competing for them.

According to media reports, Sarana Boonbalchalayapruck, chairman of the NBTC board, proposed drawing the 1.6 billion baht from the NBTC's research and development fund to buy the broadcasting rights during an NBTC board meeting on Oct 28.

SAT governor Kongsak Yodmanee yesterday admitted he was worried about how to find the rest of the money to fund the rights after the NBTC approved the allocation of only 600 million baht.

He said the SAT will try as hard as it can to find the money as the 2022 World Cup is fast approaching.

"At this stage, I cannot confirm that Thais will be able to watch the World Cup because we have to hold talks with the private sector.

"But that will be difficult as the cost is very high. We will also have to negotiate

with Fifa representatives," he said.

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar will be played from Nov 20-Dec 18, with 32 teams competing in 64 matches for football's most prestigious trophy.

With the tournament less than two weeks away, fans were concerned as no broadcasters in Thailand had shown an interest in securing the rights to air the matches.

Pirongrong Ramasoota, an NBTC commissioner, opposed the move to draw money from the fund to buy broadcasting rights. Writing on Facebook, she said it is not the NBTC's duty to spend money from the fund buying broadcasting rights and any investment in buying the rights should be carried out in line with market mechanisms.

"If 1.6 billion is spent on buying the rights, we will lose an opportunity to promote content that benefits society and needs funding," she wrote, adding the spending would also affect the fund's liquidity.

A source said previously that the NBTC's fund has about 2 billion baht left.

Spending set to rise: Page B1

NTT Group backs Thailand 4.0 initiatives

Company to utilise 5GEC membership

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NTT Group, a global tech and business solutions provider, plans to support Thailand 4.0 initiatives under the umbrella of the 5G Global Enterprise

Solution Consortium (5GEC), a group of leading tech firms that provide one-stop 5G solution services for organisations to pursue their digital and innovation journey.

Private 5G networks allow enterprises to create intelligent and integrated platforms that can provide a foundation for innovation in various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, power plants, logistics, transport and healthcare.

NTT suggested the telecom regulator allocate additional spectrum ranges to be used to boost the country's 4.0 ecosystem.

Private 5G networks offer highly secure communication in a closed environment separate from the internet, which is especially important for smart factories that automate production, said Zaif Siddiqi, director for global business at the business solutions division of NTT Communications Corp.



Mr Nuttapon, left, recently met with Mr Yasuo in Tokyo to discuss ways to further strengthen collaboration to promote digital startups during every stage of growth as well as persuade Japanese investors and startups to participate in Thailand's smart city project in the EEC.



Mr Siddiqi, left, says 5G is a cornerstone of other advanced digital technology such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, extended reality and cloud.

Private 5G is less affected by network failures or congestion when compared with the local telecom operators' service, said Mr Siddiqi. Municipalities and enterprises can build private 5G network to meet the needs of regions or industries.

He said private 5G started in Japan in December 2019 with licences issued to independent entities and communication companies.

The frequency bands for private 5G have been allocated as dedicated bands for local 5G in Japan, comprising 4.6 to 4.9 gigahertz and 28.2 to 29.1GHz with a total of 1,200 megahertz of bandwidth.

For public 5G in Japan, spectrum

regulations were amended to allow some spectrum ranges adopted for 4G services to also be used in 5G services. They include 700, 800 and 900MHz as well as 1.5, 1.7, 2.1, 2.5, 3.4 and 3.5GHz.

According to Mr Siddiqi, mobile network operators are allowed to support local 5G network deployment and share insights to expand the local 5G market.

"The private 5G market trend in Japan is expected to expand in earnest around 2023 to 2025 and the demand and practical deployment will radically increase along with the price reduction of private 5G equipment," he said.

PRIVATE 5G DRIVER

In February last year, Japan's telecom giant NTT Docomo and leading international firms signed an agreement to establish the 5GEC in Thailand. It also has a plan to expand its network to other countries in Asia-Pacific.

The initial members of the 5GEC are Activio, AGC, Advanced Wireless Network, Exeo Asia, Fujitsu, Loxley Plc, Mobile Innovation, NEC Corporation, NEC Networks & System Integration Corp, NTT Communications, NTT Data Institute of Management Consulting, NTT Docomo and NTT Ltd.

The 5GEC can help deal with business issues including the establishment of secure and hi-speed network, simplifying processes and reducing cost, and deploying optimal and innovation solutions.

By coordinating the use of each member's strengths such as advantages in network technologies or sales and marketing networks, the 5GEC will provide professional consultation regarding 5G solutions, especially flexible and highly secure private 5G networks that function independently of public networks offered by local telecom operators, said Mr Siddiqi.

Through the consortium, the participating members will offer a one-stop delivery of private 5G systems and related managed services, capitalising on the key characteristics of 5G, including enhanced mobile broadband (eMBB), ultra reliable low latency communications (URLLC) and massive machine type communications (mMTC), he noted.

The 5GEC's targets include manufacturing and construction firms in Thailand.

The consortium will draw upon NTT Docomo's leadership in open radio

access network (O-RAN), high expandability and open interfaces to support various mobile frequencies in each country and connect devices provided by various vendors, he said.

"5G is a cornerstone of other advanced digital tech such as artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), extended reality (XR) and cloud, which are an important part of digital transformation," said Mr Siddiqi.

According to him, the 5GEC is ready to bring its strength to support enterprises in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and work with state agencies, such as the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC), to contribute optimal benefits to the country's 4.0 policy.

He said he wants to see the allocation of additional spectrum ranges for usage, particularly among enterprises through licences provided by the NBTC.

The allocation of spectrum ranges should ensure affordability or even come without a licence to promote digital transformation, he said.

Nuttapon Nimmanphatcharin, president and chief executive of the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (Depa), said he is aware that the telecom regulator is looking into the prospect of allocating spectrum bands without licences for enterprises, which could support private 5G network ecosystem.

STRENGTHEN STARTUPS

Mr Nuttapon, along with Depa's executives, recently met Tawara Yasuo, director-general of the Global Strategy Bureau at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan (MIC), to discuss cooperation between the two agencies to promote digital startups in Thailand.

During the trip to Japan, he also persuaded Japanese investors to invest in Thai startups and participate in the country's smart city project in the EEC.

Depa also introduced the Thailand Digital Valley (TDV) project in Chon Buri, which can support tech companies from around the world in designing, developing and testing their technologies and innovations.

TDV is in the third phase of expansion with 40,000 square metres of space for tech testing, development, showcases and R&D.

The third phase will see the development of the Digital Innovation Centre, which will house labs for 5G tech, AI, IoT, virtual and augmented reality and



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ZAIF SIDDIQI

Director for global business at the business solutions division, NTT Communications

cloud as well as a design centre for large tech firms and startups in the region.

The third phase is expected to be completed within two years.

According to Mr Nuttapon, investors in relevant digital industries, such as digital services, smart devices and software, would be eligible for income tax exemption for 13 years, based on conditions stipulated by the Board of Investment.

Mr Yasuo pointed out the MIC and Depa have long engaged in cooperation in various aspects, including organising the "INNOvation" project that allows participants to initiate ideas to address problems of concern. The project has been carried out for a decade.

The project will be adjusted to focus more on innovation development for startups and knowledge exchange.

In August, the MIC and Depa signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in tech and digital innovation development, including knowledge exchange between relevant stakeholders, such as universities, companies and communities.