

WORLD CUP

SAT nod for broadcasting fund request

WASSANA NANUAM**FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar 2022**

The Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) board — chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon — yesterday approved a request by the SAT to borrow 1.4 billion baht from the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) to fund the national broadcasting rights of the World Cup, a

source has said.

SAT has reached a deal with Fifa to pay US\$33 million (about 1.2 billion baht) for the broadcasting rights fee, said SAT governor Kongsak Yodmanee on Thursday.

The amount approved by the SAT board also includes covering 15% tax and possible differences in currency exchange rates, said the source after the board meeting yesterday.

Gen Prawit has extended his thanks to SAT, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) and International

**Prawit: Got private sector help**

Olympic Committee (IOC) member Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul for their roles in helping secure the Fifa World Cup broadcast rights, said his deputy spokesman Lt Gen Patchasak Patirupanont.

**Patama: Liaised with Fifa**

The source from SAT said Gen Prawit and Khunying Patama, who is also president of the Badminton Association of Thailand, have played vital roles in the deal in which Fifa and SAT reached an agreement on the price tag of US\$33 million for the broadcast rights in Thailand.

Gen Prawit has coordinated with the private sector in helping fund the broadcast rights, while Khunying Patama coordinated with Fifa president Gianni Infantino, who is also an IOC member, during negotiations.

A number of private companies have expressed their interest in jointly sponsoring the government's purchase of the broadcasting rights. SAT has yet to formally reveal what sponsorships these companies have offered to contribute to the purchase of the broadcasting rights, said the source.

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World Cup overreach

Millions of local football fans are sighing with relief as it appears that the private sector will chip in 800 million baht to co-finance the broadcasting of the Fifa World Cup 2022.

The broadcast fee has been agreed at 1.4 billion baht plus tax and related expenses, 200 million baht lower than the earlier reported sum.

The first 600 million baht will be footed by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), while the remaining 800 million baht will be covered by private firms.

However, the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) needs to advance 800 million baht to be paid this week. Interestingly, it has not been reported which companies will remit the 800 million baht to cover the fee.

Initially, this 800 million baht will be paid in the form of a loan from the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF), which has been reserved to cover sport development activities — not broadcast sports events.

Therefore, this coalition government — especially Gen Prawit Wongsuwan — needs to ensure the money from the NSDF must be returned as soon as possible.

The Thai government has played an unusual role in broadcasting popular World Cup football matches.

That is because the NBTC prescribed the so-called "Must Have, Must Carry" rule that obliges seven types

of sports events, such as the Asean Games, Olympics, Paralympics, and World Cup to be broadcast free on TV and other media platforms.

Despite its good intentions, such a rule destroys market mechanisms. The policy kills incentives for companies to purchase a broadcast.

So for this World Cup, sports-crazed deputy PM Gen Prawit has had to resort to publicly pledging that Thai people would see all of the World Cup for free, and he pushed the SAT to secure the deal.

No matter how joyful the experience of watching the World Cup is and how massive the benefit of the event can be in stimulating spending, the government needs to reduce its role in financing such expensive broadcasts.

The NBTC paid 400 million baht for the Fifa World Cup Broadcast in 2014, along with the 600 million baht this year.

The NBTC must revise its "Must Have, Must Carry" rule and let the market operate while ensuring that consumers are not exploited.

But the government must also help people have access to watch other top sporting events, be it volleyball, basketball, swimming, badminton, rugby, and games that the SAT is trying to groom talent in.

Broadcasting such events is affordable.

Government bodies such as the NBTC or even the SAT must craft strategies and income sources so more sports events can be broadcast for free, especially for children to watch.

Indeed, the problems of state-broadcast sports programmes are larger than the NBTC and its "Must Have, Must Carry" rule.

Government-sponsored broadcasts such as the Olympics only focus on games that Thai athletes compete in and omit highlights or even finals if Thai athletes do not compete.

To promote sports among Thai youth, the government must help find and support sports programmes for our youth on a consistent basis. But it must not tamper with the market and take away the private sector's role by splurging hundreds of millions of baht to fund the once-in-every-four-year beautiful game.