

TECHNOLOGY

Digital community projects under review

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The Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry is revising the Net Pracharat project to provide free WiFi for 24,700 villages, as well as the Community Digital Centres project that has developed 2,222 centres nationwide, in a bid to restructure them.

The ministry has tasked two agencies to finish the review within 60 days and submit the result to the ministry for review. The two agencies are the provincial administration of provincial governors and the National Statistical Office.

They will conduct field data collection across all dimensions, such as public usage in the areas, convenience and the management of both projects.

According to Patchara Anantasin, DES permanent secretary, the projects have been operating for a decade and have never been evaluated in terms of efficiency and optimum public benefit.

He said the conclusions must be submitted to the cabinet, with three scenarios likely for the final decision.

One is ceasing some operations in some locations, while another is the government continuing operations

using the budget from the Digital Fund operated by Office of the National Board of Digital Economy and Society, or a fund from the Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission.

The third scenario is the ministry transferring all operations and management to the provincial level, such as the Provincial Administrative Organisation.

"The projects have to be reviewed for their cost-effectiveness, with adjustment possible to ensure efficiency and enhance service to communities," said Mr Patchara.

Previously the board of the National Digital Economy and Society Committee scrapped its plan to establish 1,200 new community digital centres, in addition to the existing 2,222 centres nationwide.

Wetang Phuangsap, secretary-general of the board, said the move is in line with DES Minister Chaichanok Chidchob's policy that the board suspend the expansion plan and closely review the project.

The board established 1,722 community digital centres in 77 prov-

inces nationwide, and has opened an additional 500, bringing the total to 2,222 nationwide.

The project is aimed at driving the grassroots economy forward and reducing digital inequality through the sustainable community digital centre ecosystem development under the fifth strategic action plan of the Universal Basic Telecommunications and Social Services Plan phase two between 2017 and 2021, and to serve as learning centres for the digital future.

The centres provide computer equipment and public internet access, as well as a network that continuously and efficiently connects and provides high-speed internet.

The establishment of community digital centres costs roughly 400,000 baht per year per centre.

The target groups include low-income earners, people with disabilities, children, the elderly and the underprivileged in various parts of the country.



The Community Digital Centres project has developed 2,222 centres nationwide.