

## **Abhisit pressing ICT minister to accelerate 3G**

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is pressing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) minister to accelerate the development of third-generation mobile services in Thailand, because of its benefit to the economy.

ICT Minister Ranongrak Suwanchawee said she met with Mr Abhisit last week to discuss 3G progress, including issues concerning funding sources, base stations and the bidding process.

Announcements would be made over the next two weeks to enable the project owner, TOT Plc, to roll out new services by Dec 16 this year, she said.

The 3G projects should be funded by local financial institutions rather than from overseas, as local banks could offer lower interest rates.

Ms Ranongrak plans to consult the Finance Ministry over which financial institutions should provide the estimated 20 billion baht needed to fund the technology's development.

In the first phase, TOT would upgrade its 1900 megahertz (MHz) network's 500 base stations in Bangkok and surrounding provinces to 3G.

TOT would then start introducing new 3G services every three months to achieve its stated target of 4,700 base stations by the end of the next year.

The ICT Ministry has also dropped a proposal from Thaicom Plc, formerly Shin Satellite, to lease a foreign satellite to provide a multipurpose communications service, rather than launching its own Thaicom 6 satellite.

The proposal's legal implications needed to be studied in depth, particularly the issue of whether a leased satellite could be considered a national asset, she said.

The minister also defended the closure of the satellite-based DStation, used by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, allied with fugitive former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. She said the reasons were legal and not political.

She said that DStation had violated its contract with TOT because it did not provide a variety of programmes as per its legal obligations.

However, the industry regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission, has authority to allow DStation to resume broadcasting, she said.