

LET'S TALK

Three US congressmen meet NBTC executives to seek ways to strengthen US business in Thailand. **B3**

US lawmakers visit NBTC

Concerns raised over sluggish investment

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Three US congressmen held talks yesterday with executives of the telecom regulator to seek ways to strengthen US business in Thailand. They also received an update on the country's move to 5G.

The congressmen were Seth Moulton, a Democrat from Massachusetts; Ron Estes, a Republican from Kansas; and Jim Banks, a Republican from Indiana.

Mr Moulton last April announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, but he withdrew from the race in August.

The trio were accompanied by economic counsellors from the US Embassy during a visit to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

During the talks, the NBTC suggested hosting executives of US over-the-top (OTT) platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Netflix and Google, at the 2020 Asean Telecommunication Regulators' Council (ATRC) meeting on May 26 and 27 in Bangkok.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the NBTC, said the three congressmen lunched with NBTC commissioners and management under coordination by the Foreign Ministry.

During the discussion, the congressmen and counsellors voiced concern about sluggish investment by US firms in Thailand, Mr Takorn said.

They asked the regulator whether

US firms had recently contacted the Thai government about plans for investment, he said.

The NBTC responded that it only governs telecom and broadcasting business through related regulations, Mr Takorn said.

NBTC management also told the congressmen that the commission has a neutral policy with regard to the country's 5G development.

The congressmen received updated information about the NBTC's 5G spectrum auction, currently scheduled for Feb 16.

"The NBTC urged cooperation from the US congressmen to attract executives of big US OTT firms to join the ATRC meeting in Thailand in May," Mr Takorn said.

Some representatives of US OTT platforms took part in past meetings, but they were not at the decision-making level.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak is scheduled to hold a meeting with the NBTC and chief executives of mobile operators next Monday to discuss the country's 5G drive for the benefit of the overall economic ecosystem.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC will use the opportunity to ask the government to accelerate the establishment of the national 5G committee.

The panel, chaired by the prime minister, would be a key mechanism fostering collaboration between related government agencies to press ahead with 5G development.

The NBTC office would serve as the secretariat of the committee.

"It is a good signal that the meeting on Monday will help accelerate collaboration from all related parties," Mr Takorn said.