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MITV-LAUNCH

MITV, M'SIA'S SECOND PAY TV, TO BEGIN SERVICES BY END-DECEMBER

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- MiTV, Malaysia's second pay-TV operator, run by a group of enterprising Bumiputera individuals, is expected to launch its services by end-December this year offering some 50 television channels.

Its founder and deputy chairman, Datuk Rosman Ridzuan, said that while the service would initially cover the Klang Valley, it would go nationwide within 18 months after the commercial launch.

Rosman, who is also MiTV's Chief Executive Officer, has also promised subscribers that "the majority of the 50 plus channels will be new and as yet unseen in Malaysia."

"Obviously, there would be some duplication of channels such as sports and news, where only a handful of brands (with content relevant to Malaysia) dominate," he told a press conference here today.

MiTV is 40 percent owned by Rosman, 44 percent by Tan Sri Vincent Tan's family-owned company and the rest by other Bumiputera individuals.

Elaborating, Rosman said that Tan was a "white knight" who agreed to invest in his personal capacity in MiTV due to its limited financial capabilities in commercialising its service.

He said that he and other Bumiputera individuals managed to convince Tan to participate in what the latter saw was a viable project since they initially found it difficult to obtain financing from banks.

Although Tan has a sizeable stake, he is understood to have given

Rosman and the other shareholders a free hand to run the company.

Tan is the chairman of MiTV.

Sources close to the deal said that it was former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had asked a group of corporate leaders to look into investing into the project.

However, it was Tan who finally took up the offer, convinced of its earnings potential coupled with the fact that it would be good for the consumers as it would provide an alternative to the services provided by

Astro.

MiTV is expected to create healthy competition and pricing as well as enhance the quality of services and programming by pay-TV operators.

Rosman said that MiTV only needs 180,000 subscribers to reach operational break even in view of its cost-effective homegrown technology.

The variety of new and exciting channels from MiTV coupled with the existing channels from Astro would bring unparalleled choice to those consumers with enough disposable incomes to subscribe to both Astro and MiTV.

"If say, 13 percent of Astro's existing subscriber base of 1.4 million subscribe to MiTV, we would have achieved our targeted break even point," he said.

Rosman also said that "it is our intention to list MiTV on Mesdaq as soon as it is practical in order for the Malaysian public to participate in our future success."

He said that MiTV's technology platform is not Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting (DTTB) and neither does it use satellites.

It entails a homegrown Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) technology platform over last mile Ultra High Frequency (UHF) distribution.

"We hope to make Malaysia a showcase for our homegrown technology, which we believe adds credibility to the government's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiatives."

In the process, it would provide cheap and fast Information Technology (IT) deployment for the country," he said.

"We need 18 to 20 transmission towers in Peninsular Malaysia and we are still undertaking site surveys for Sabah and Sarawak," Rosman said.

The cost of each transmission tower would be cheaper than launching satellites.

Analysts said the move to have two pay-TVs would overcome the monopoly held by Astro and in the process further enhance the liberalisation of the media industry in line with the government's stated policy.

Also, there were too many complaints over Astro imposing additional fees, its interruption of services when it rains and quality content

stemming from its constant reruns.

Rosman said: "MiTV's intention is to provide a very broad spectrum of international channels and comprehensive vernacular packages that will address the tastes of all Malaysians for entertainment, education, news and current affairs." -- BERNAMA

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