

THIRD TELCO PLAYER STILL OPEN TO OTHER INVESTORS, SAYS PALACE

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The country's telecom industry remains open to other foreign investors, although President Duterte has said he wants to give the third slot to China, Malacañang said on Sunday.

"The third player who is expected to enter the Philippines is not limited to China. This is open to all telcos or investor from around the world," Communications Secretary Martin Andanar said in a radio interview.

"Whoever can give the best, the most viable offer, or the juiciest offer to us, that will be the third player in the telecommunications industry in the Philippines," he added.

"The President said that he wants it as soon as possible, first or second quarter of 2018, because our internet is so slow. No. 2, there are so many issues about dropped calls," Andanar said.

"This is not funny because it is impeding our economy. If you want many investors, your telecommunications should be excellent," he said.

Andanar said China endorsed the China Telecoms group after Mr. Duterte offered a slot in the telecom industry to China during the visit of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.

But, officials have clarified, the offer has to abide by the country's laws on foreign ownership of strategic industries.

"They should form a consortium because a foreign company cannot control more than 40 percent of public utilities like telcos. So they need to find a partner," he said.

Earlier, Philippine Telegraph and Telephone Corp. (PT&T) announced it was pursuing talks with the China Telecoms group over a possible partnership.

Last week, PT&T also announced it signed a memorandum of agreement with Chengdu Zhongxing Tiantong Technology Corp. on possibly providing free wireless broadband services in public areas around the country.

"The agreement is to explore the feasibility of engaging in a project that will provide free wireless broadband services in designated public areas," PT&T Chief Information Officer Arturo T. Falco said in a disclosure to the stock exchange.

At the same time, Andanar downplayed concerns about national security threats and said "at the end of the day, what is important to us is that we'll get quality service."

He noted that Chinese firms had already been allowed to invest in the country's national power grid system and cellular phone market.

"What is important really is that we have a very good telecom industry, a very competitive industry that will give quality service to our countrymen," he said. INQ

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