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DICT allays fears of security threat from Chinese telco

By BEN ROSARIO

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) yesterday allayed fears of security threat from the Duterte administration's decision allowing one of three leading Chinese firms to compete with the existing telecommunications duopoly in the Philippines.

However, Undersecretary Eliseo Rio, officer-in-charge of DICT, admitted in a congressional hearing that the department has yet to adopt a criteria that will form the basis for the award of the telecommunications frequency to a Filipino consortium that will partner with the China firm.

Appearing at a legislative hearing called by the House Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Rio said he will meet with at least 30 local telecom-

munications holders today to discuss the criteria for the award of the frequency.

Despite the absence of the criteria, the DICT executive assured lawmakers that they will be able to choose the best franchise holders that will receive the frequencies to enable a third player to compete in the country's telecommunications industry.

During the hearing, Minority Leader and Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez warned that allowing the entry of a Chinese government-owned communications firm access to the country's telecommunications structure can be a "serious threat to national security."

"This is a decision that the administration should not rush. We must be vigilant about its national security implications," said Suarez.

He stressed that the ongoing territorial dispute between China and the Philippines can place the country in a vulnerable situation if the Chinese are allowed to partially handle telecommunications industry.

"As there are other players from countries where we have no diplomatic incidents, they should be given a fair chance

to forward their offer," said Suarez.

Asked by Suarez if the Chinese telecoms player can threaten national security and its future competitors, Globe and Smart, Rio said such a scenario may be doubtful.

Globe and Smart have their own cyber security wall that nothing can go in and out of their system that they cannot monitor, Rio explained.

He also pointed out that the two local telecommunications giants are currently using technology supplied by Huawei and ZTE, which are among the two leading Chinese firms.

Globe representatives confirmed that the company is using Chinese telecommunications technology in view of their reduced cost compared to US and European products.

"Chinese products are the most viable options considering they can do the same job at much lower price," said Globe's Sherwin de Joya.

Nevertheless, De Joya stressed that the telco's security protocols are very tight to block any unauthorized access to their system.

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