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EDUCATION

NTC, university join hands for long-distance learning

Move aimed at helping rural communities in Chiang Rai province

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THE NATIONAL Telecommunications Commission (NTC) is joining Mae Fah Luang University to develop a long-distance learning and rural-development project in Chiang Rai province.

Deputy secretary-general Nisakorn Tadtiamrom yesterday said the NTC would provide Bt70 million in financial support over three years, so that the university could create the project, involving the supply of personal computers and Internet connections to 21 secondary schools throughout the province.

The university will develop educational media and related content for the schools and the communities surrounding them, said Thongchai

Yooyativong, dean of the university's School of Information Technology. A financial-support agreement between the NTC and the university was signed yesterday.

Mae Fah Luang University, which is named after HRH the Princess Sri Nagarindra the Princess Mother, was founded in 1998. An autonomous public university, its programmes include English, business Chinese, agro-industry, Thai traditional medicine and information technology.

Nisakorn said under the agreement signed yesterday, each of the 21 schools

would receive 20 personal computers and a printer.

The NTC will grant Bt28 million to the programme this year, another Bt29 million next year and the rest in 2009. The university will launch a bidding process to procure Internet-connection equipment next January, and the project is expected to be completely developed within a few months after that.

Funding for the Chiang Rai project will come from the NTC's Universal Service Obligation (USO) Fund, which is made up of obligatory contributions from the commission's

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licensees that have declined to invest in telecom projects in remote areas. The NTC also uses the money to hire other companies to develop remote telecom projects.

However, until the NTC creates its proposed USO Institute, funding for the Chiang Rai project will come from the commission's licensing revenue. The NTC is expected to receive USO revenue of Bt180 million this year.

TOT had earlier promised to develop the Chiang Rai project, but the NTC decided to take it over after it pulled out. TOT is an NTC licensee.

In its original plans, TOT was going to deploy Wi-Max broadband wireless technology, in order to provide Internet access to the schools in the project.