

Digital TV: Japan Sweetens Deal and Brazil Seems Poised to Go Japanese

Contributed by Marcela Rebelo
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The Brazilian Minister of Communications, Hélio Costa, rebuffed criticism that he was "messing up" the selection process of Brazil's digital TV format.

"If you don't have a date for things, they don't happen," he said, explaining the announcement that Brazil would make a final decision this month so that experimental transmissions can occur in June when the World Soccer Cup takes place.

"I think we should begin transmitting immediately. We need at least eight months to get our TV broadcasters to the point where they can handle digital transmissions," said the minister.

Costa explained that other uses of digital transmissions, such as interactivity, would be dealt with later. He emphasized that the Brazilian government was interested in a digital format that was open, available to all, and could be used as a tool for both digital and social integration in areas such as health and education.

Costa also pointed out that it is only now that financial resources for installing the new format are available. His ministry had US\$ 6.32 million (14 million reais) for digital TV during all of the second half of last year, but in January the budget jumped to US\$ 24.37 million (54 million reais).

The government has set up an interministerial work group and given it a 72-hour deadline to analyze the three existing digital TV formats (American, European and Japanese). At the end of the 72 hours they are to recommend one of them to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The work group consists of the ministers of Finance, Antonio Palocci; Development, Luiz Fernando Furlan; Communications, Helio Costa; and the presidential Chief of Staff (Casa Civil), Dilma Rousseff.

Costa declared that the tendency is to use the Japanese format which meets Brazil's four basic requirements on high definition, interactivity, mobility and transport.

The Japanese, according to Costa, will also abdicate their right to royalties and are offering 300 million euros to assist in implanting the system.

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