

TELECOMMUNICATIONS**NBTC awards first batch of licences for LEO satellite slots****KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA**

The telecom regulator awarded the first batch of licences yesterday for the right to use low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite slots to four organisations and one school in compliance with regulations that will become active in February 2021.

The regulation paves the way to bring the satellite business out of the concessions model and into a real licensing regime.

The licences have a 15-year term, and the five licencees initially expect to use satellites for geographical surveys and research for national security purposes — not for commercial operations any time soon, because of low market demand.

The five licensees are the Royal Thai Air Force through the Air Force Electronic Communications Department, the Amateur Radio Association of Thailand under the Royal Patronage, the Navaminda Kasatriyadhiraj Royal Thai Air Force Academy, the Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency, and Bangkok Christian College.

Gen Sukit Khamasundara, chairman of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the licences are for non-stationary orbit satellites such as LEO and medium Earth orbit satellites that are small and can be sent up into the sky by the thousands.

LEO satellites operate at between 500km and 2,000km above Earth's surface, compared with a 36,000km height



Interested companies that want to operate businesses related to LEO slots can apply at the NBTC office.

AIR MARSHAL THANAPANT RAICHAREON

Deputy secretary-general, NBTC

for geostationary satellites, the traditional type of communication satellite.

The advantage of the lower orbit is lower latency. It will also benefit everyone with access to high-speed internet services via 5G technology, Internet of Things devices, machine-to-machine technology, and drone technology and applications in areas that require high levels of accuracy, such as remote surgery.

Additionally, the satellites will help transmission of TV signals, including for exploration, navigation and photography, with a very high level of clarity.

Air Marshal Thanapant Raichareon, the NBTC deputy secretary-general, said interested companies that want to operate businesses related to LEO slots can apply for the right to the slots at the NBTC office for commercial or non-commercial purposes.

AM Thanapant said the NBTC office has outlined a timeline for granting licences for the right to use geostationary satellite orbital slots for early 2021.

The draft of methods for granting

licences is set to receive a public hearing in November.

The move is in line with NBTC law and the government's plan to transition the satellite business from concessions to real licensing. The shift coincides with the expiration of Thaicom's concession in 2021.

AM Thanapant said there are seven orbital slots set to be granted, comprising 50.5E, 51 E, 78.5E, 119.5 E, 120E, 126 E and 142 E.

The seven slots are divided into four packages or categories: the first package includes 50.5E and 51E, the second includes 78.5E, the third includes 119.5E and 120E, and the fourth includes 126E and 142E.

When the reallocation of those orbital slots takes place, interested bidders must propose which package of orbital slots they wish to use.

The NBTC has yet to decide the method for granting licences, be it an auction, a beauty contest or a hybrid method.