

CONNECTING ALL

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Net Pracha Rat seeks to connect all villages by May

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By next May, villagers nationwide will be able to use free WiFi hotspots after the completion of the second phase of the government's national broadband network for villages.

The project, known as Net Pracha Rat, is an initiative under the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), which yesterday began the process of seeking winners via e-bids for construction contracts budgeted at 19.7 billion baht for the second phase covering 15,723 villages.

An agreement with the winners will be reached in November, with construction scheduled to finish by May 2019.

According to NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith, the second phase of Net Pracha Rat complements the existing Net Pracha Rat project that delivers free WiFi and low-cost broadband infrastructure to more than 40,000 villages that have not been given access to broadband internet.

The first phase of construction, covering 24,700 villages, was completed by TOT at the end of last year.

The government assigned the remaining 15,723 villages under the project to be fulfilled under the Digital Thailand transformation roadmap.

The NBTC yesterday officially started the process to seek bidders to construct the

broadband infrastructure within the commission's 19.7-billion-baht budget.

Of the total 15,723 villages, they are 4,138 in the North, 2,050 in the South, 3,365 in the central and eastern regions, and 6,170 in the Northeast.

The second phase of the project comprises a core five categories: free WiFi for 15,723 hotspots; USO Net (high-speed internet and mobile service for border areas) at 228 schools to equip each with new buildings, computers, last-mile internet access and WiFi; USO Net rooms in 1,623 schools, each to be provided with computers, WiFi and last-mile internet access; free WiFi for 3,170 schools; and free WiFi for 91 districts at hospitals and last-mile internet at each of the hospitals.

During the first five years after deployment, the NBTC will fund routine operations of the infrastructure, including maintenance.

"More than 10 million people in 15,723 villages will benefit from the second phase of Net Pracha Rat," Mr Takorn said.

The NBTC aims to attract bidders for construction and deployment of all five categories of infrastructure through eight contracts that will be offered under the e-bid auction, classified by village zoning.

Mr Takorn said companies interested in the project bids can download applications from the Comptroller-General's Department website in the week ahead.

The NBTC's bidding panel will consider each application during Sept 23-Oct 5 this year. Agreements with the winning bids will be signed by November.

Mr Takorn said free WiFi hotspots for all 15,723 villages will be completed first, by May 2019, followed by all of the remaining categories by August 2019.

The NBTC has opened the floor to more than 60 telecom licensee companies to bid on the project, with an emphasis on telecom licensees of Type 3, meaning operators that have their own nationwide service networks.

The auction is also open to Type 1 licensees, which don't have their own networks and are mostly internet providers.