

**TECHNOLOGY**

# NBTC begins relaxing auction payment process

## Various rules mullied to draw operators to 5G

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The telecom regulator plans to extend the payment period for the 900- and 1800-megahertz licences, and redesign the auction conditions and spectrum evaluation to ease the financial burdens of mobile operators, all in an effort to draw 5G investment.

The move includes an early auction for 45MHz of bandwidth on the 700MHz spectrum range in February 2019, with the winner being granted part of the 35MHz bandwidth on the 1800MHz range that remains from the previous auction.

The auction is expected to generate some 50 billion baht for the state, with some funds being used to subsidise the operations cost of digital TV operators

under the regulator's long-term survival plan, said Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

Mr Takorn said yesterday the NBTC will focus on two critical categories — a strategic move to 5G and a long-term survival plan for digital TV operators.

“The plan to push 5G adoption and the long-term survival plan for digital TV will complement each other,” he said. “Adoption of 5G needs direct investment from telecom operators to install all related infrastructure, devices and system development as well as proper spectrum ranges for providing services to market.”

The NBTC has started to revise the existing payment terms of 900- and 1800MHz licences, especially the 900MHz licences, said Mr Takorn.

The NBTC auctioned two licences on the 900MHz band at a combined price of 151 billion baht. Advanced Info Service (AIS) won one licence for 75.65 billion

baht, while True Move won the other for 76.3 billion.

All three operators have already paid the NBTC for 3G licences.

AIS and True Move have to pay for the remaining two terms of the 900MHz licence in 2019 and 2020, respectively, with each paying 60 billion baht for the last term in 2020.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC plans to extend payment until the year the licences expire, but it may have to ask the government to approve the plan.

The NBTC has started evaluating the spectrum ranges that will be auctioned in 2019, including 470MHz, 700MHz, 2600MHz, 1500MHz, 3400-3800MHz and 26-28GHz.

He said the 700MHz range is the first priority for the February 2019 auction under the 5G strategic move. The NBTC is trying to rearrange the 700MHz band (where digital and analogue TV channels operate) by transferring them to the 470-510MHz range instead. Analogue TV channels will be switched off in 2020.

TV channels will be moved to other ranges because the 700MHz range must be used for wireless broadband to comply with global standards.

The next auction serving 5G adoption will be designed under the multi-band concept, where the winner of the one spectrum auction will be given another range to avoid too costly a licence.

Mr Takorn said the 50 billion baht the state expects to collect from the February auction includes 14 billion for the 10MHz of bandwidth on the 700MHz.

“The NBTC has to carry out early auctions for the 700MHz range to accommodate the financial burden of digital TVs at the proper time,” he said.

The government has invoked Section 44 twice to ease the financial burden of digital TV operators, including subsidising costs for the broadcasting network rental fee and the must-carry rule for broadcasting services.

The must-carry rule states that locally licensed TV stations must be carried on a cable provider's system.



The NBTC called an auction for the 1800MHz spectrum in June this year. SOMCHAI POOMLARD