

Telecoms regulator to emphasise incentives in 2019 as it prepares for 5G

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THE NATION

THE NATIONAL Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) yesterday outlined its next year's plans, which focus on extending a lifeline to the ailing digital TV licence holders and encouraging telecom operators to bid for new spectra.

The watchdog will kick off the new year by holding an auction of the 700MHz band, totalling 2x45MHz of bandwidth.

Part of the proceeds will be used to continue the NBTC's subsidy of the digital TV broadcasters' cost of transmitting their programmes through satellite networks.

The NBTC wants to extend this subsidiary period to 2022 after the current subsidy period ends next year.

The NBTC will also use its own funds to continue to subsidise half of the broadcasting network rental fees of digital TV licence holders to 2022 from the current 2020 ending.

All these measures will help ease the financial difficulties of broadcasters, said Takorn Tantasith, the NBTC secretary-general. Takorn said this 700MHz band could be divided into three licences of 10MHz, 15MHz and 20MHz.

Currently, the digital TV licence holders use the 700MHz bandwidth to air their programmes. The watchdog will switch them to 470MHz instead. The broadcasters and related parties will be compensated for the impact of the switch.

The watchdog has planned to auction the new spectra on a multiple-band basis. Therefore, it might put the 700MHz to auction alone, or auction

the band together with other bands.

The 700 MHz band could be auctioned along with 26GHz, and the 1800 band with 28GHz, Takorn added.

As for the telecom industry, the NBTC will revise the terms of payment for 1800MHz and 900MHz, which were recently auctioned, to help ease the burden on the operators.

It will also revise the terms and conditions and prices of the spectrum bands for which it plans to call bids next year.

The moves are intended to create inducements for telecom operators to take part in the new auctions. This will help them get the 5G service off the ground in 2020 as targeted by the NBTC, said Takorn.

The NBTC has planned to divide the 5G licences between nationwide licences and special location licences.

The watchdog will this month set up a working panel to reclaim the 2600MHz spectra from Thai state-owned public broadcaster MCOT before the spectrum expiration date. The panel will finish details of the plan within the month before sending it on to MCOT.