

Panel calls for auction delay

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

A subcommittee of the telecom regulator has proposed moving the 700-megahertz spectrum auction from May to December to allow more time for preparations and give telecom companies a chance to reconsider joining the auction.

Col Natee Sukonrat, chairman of the subcommittee for the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the preparation process for the 700MHz spectrum now being used by digital TV operators needs at least eight months after the draft of the auction comes into effect in April.

Holding the auction too early will benefit no party because there is as yet no new master plan for the spectrum roadmap for TV, spectrum reshuffle details for broadcasting network (MUX) providers in each zone nationwide, and valuation price of the 700MHz.

Col Natee said the process of drawing up a new master plan for the spectrum roadmap for TV businesses and the spectrum reshuffle for MUX can only be done when the draft of the 700MHz auction is published in the *Royal Gazette*.

The NBTC plans to begin the public hearing process for the 700MHz auction draft and remedy measures for digital TV operators in March, with publication in the *Royal Gazette* expected in April.

Col Natee said creating a new master plan takes time because MUX providers use different slots of the 700MHz band depending on zones nationwide and the number of broadcasting stations.

Amendment of the spectrum range from 700MHz to 470-510MHz will affect all related equipment and costs related to the compensation regime of the reshuffle process.

On Tuesday, the NBTC board passed a draft of the planned auction conditions for 700MHz and remedy measures for digital TV operators, divided into seven slots each containing 5MHz of

spectrum bandwidth.

Initially the 700MHz licence will be valid for 20 years, with payment terms upfront divided into 10 years.

Money from the auction will be partly used to subsidise the operating costs of digital TV operators under their long-term survival plan.

Col Natee held a focus group hearing for the planned 700MHz draft with representatives of digital TV operators and MUX providers.

The management of the three major mobile operators on Thursday announced that they would not participate in the planned auction of the 700MHz licences in May, due to existing financial burdens.

Col Natee said representatives of digital TV operators expressed concern over a lack of prospective bidders for the 700MHz auction.

"What happened today may change in the future," he said. "If the auction is held in December, mobile operators may change their minds."