

**TELECOM**

# NBTC gears up auctions for 5G

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The telecom regulator is moving ahead with its plan to auction spectrum on the 26- and 28-gigahertz as well as 2600-megahertz ranges later this year to prepare for 5G wireless broadband adoption.

The action comes after the three major mobile operators recently expressed no interest in participating in the 700MHz spectrum auction scheduled for May.

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) also plans to proceed as planned with the 700MHz auction according to its original timeline.

CAT Telecom plans to participate in the 700MHz auction, saying the company is seeking a foreign partner for the bid to create value in the long term, especially after 2025 when its existing spectrum licences expire.

If the NBTC auctions only the 700MHz range for this year, it may affect the adoption of 5G, said Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the NBTC.

Last week Mr Takorn assigned a working team to draft auction conditions for the 26- and 28GHz and 2600MHz ranges, with a deadline for the initial details by February.

The move aims to create alter-

natives for operators acquiring proper spectrum bandwidth for the 5G technology.

Mr Takorn said it is accepted that the 26GHz, 28GHz and 2600MHz ranges are more popular for 5G than the 700MHz spectrum.

"If the 700MHz auction definitely fails because there are no prospective bidders, other ranges are still on the cards to be auctioned in parallel," he said.

Standard bands for 5G tech development comprise low-, middle- and high-frequency bands. The low band includes 700MHz, the middle band covers 3400-3700MHz and the high band covers 26,000- and 28,000MHz (or 26- and 28GHz).

Vendors and developers are developing 5G tech via those



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standard ranges, with each 5G range developed as a complementary band for the existing spectrum band of 4G called "anchor bands" (28GHz together with the 850MHz range, 3400-3700MHz with the 1800 and 2100MHz ranges and 700MHz together with 2600MHz).

Currently there are no vendors or developers developing 5G network equipment specifically using the 700MHz range for commercial purposes.

In Thailand, the ranges between 3500- and 3800MHz and between 26- and 28GHz are now partly used by satellite business provider Thaicom.

But Mr Takorn said the NBTC can reallocate 4,000MHz of bandwidth or 4GHz on the 26- and 28GHz ranges available for the auction serving 5G.

"The 4GHz of bandwidth is sufficient for operators preparing for 5G," he said.

The 2600MHz range is currently held by state-owned broadcaster MCOT with a total of 180MHz of spectrum bandwidth. MCOT has agreed to return the unused bandwidth of roughly 150MHz to the NBTC in exchange for compensation.

Mr Takorn said the auctions of the 26GHz, 28GHz and 2600MHz ranges should be done in a hybrid format, thus the best proposal for 5G tech development in the future and highest bid price may be factors to decide the winners.