

**TELECOMS**

# State weighs impact of 5G bid delay

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The government says it needs time to consider whether delaying bidding on the 5G spectrum auction will negatively affect the country's development before deciding on using Section 44 to help mobile operators.

Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam said the government will consider a proposal by the top three mobile operators, who say a delay in bidding on the 5G spectrum will impede the roadmap for developing the infrastructure.

"The government wants to develop 5G, but both the government and the private sector need to develop the infrastructure through a budget," Mr Wissanu said.

He said the government needs to consider claims by mobile operators that they will not have the capital to invest in 5G infrastructure, and requests to delay the last payment of bid fees for the 900-megahertz spectrum auction.

The government has yet to decide on whether to invoke Section 44,

enabling the government to delay payments, as a result of legal questions such as whether the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has the authority to take such action.

Laws may have to be amended for the NBTC to delay payments, Mr Wissanu said.

"The government needs to consider amending the law, either by normal means or other methods," he said. "Another consideration is whether it should be implemented by this government or the next."

The regulator insists that extension of the last payment term for the 900MHz licences by invoking Section 44 is the only practical way to drive 5G infrastructure investment and ease the existing financial burden of digital TV operators.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith said the regulator does not see any other option to the situation other than invoking Section 44.

Mr Takorn spoke yesterday after Tuesday's meeting between the government and all related parties to seek a solution to a petition by the three mobile operators asking for a

delay on the payment term of the 900MHz licences.

However, he said the NBTC will design the planned spectrum auctions with the most attractive conditions.

On Tuesday, Mr Wissanu said the government is considering a solution to help mobile operators between a measure to invoke Section 44 or use of other measures.

Participants of Tuesday's meeting, including the NBTC and representatives from the Digital Economy and Society Ministry, expressed support for the petition proposed by the three major operators.

"The NBTC does not act or support the petition on behalf of the private companies, but we are working based on the optimum benefits," Mr Takorn said.

He noted that Advanced Info Service (AIS) and True Move H Universal Communication (TUC) jointly asked the government in late 2017 to invoke Section 44 in order to extend the terms of their licence payments to 2020.

Each company has to pay 60 billion baht to state.