

# Spectrum deal still OK: NBTC

## State still stands to gain after S44 help

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Despite criticism of the regime's invocation of Section 44 to ease the financial burden of telecom and digital TV operators, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) says the planned allocation of 700-megahertz spectrum licences for the major three mobile operators in June would generate at least 75 billion baht for the state.

Critics say helping the digital TV operators will cost the state 32 billion baht in money which could otherwise have stayed in state coffers, while the package of measures unveiled under a Section 44 order to help the three mobile phone operators will cost another 24 billion baht. Together that's a total bill to the state of 56 billion baht, which is still less than the proceeds from the new auction to be held in June.

Under recent moves to help the phone companies and digital TV operators, the government will waive the remaining two terms of digital TV licence payments at 13.6 billion baht as well as subsidise their rental fees for broadcasting networks (MUX) worth 18.7 billion for the remaining nine years of the digital TV licences.

The NBTC also said it would give operators longer to pay for 900-megahertz (MHz) licences if they take part in an upcoming auction for 700-MHz licences, which will be used for 5G technology.

The NBTC will allocate 45 MHz of bandwidth on the 700-MHz range dividing into three licences. Each contains 15-MHz of bandwidth at 25 billion baht, NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tanta-sith said. The 700-MHz licence will be valid for 15 years, he said.

Earlier, experts have slammed the regime's move to invoke Section 44 to extend the payments for the 900-megahertz spectrum licences awarded to telecom operators, saying it is currying favour with the private firms at the public's expense.

Among the critics, president of the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) Somkiat Tangkitvanich said the extension of the payment terms for the operators would mean 24 billion baht supposed to benefit the public would be in the hands of telecom operators while Thailand is still not ready for a 5G spectrum auction this year.

Mr Takorn said, as a result of invoking Section 44, the major three telecom operators — Advanced Info Service (AIS), True Move and Total Access Communication (DTAC) — will be allowed to extend their 900-MHz licence payment terms only if they accept to buy the 700-MHz licences.

Money from the planned 700-MHz licences allocation will be partly used

for assistance to all digital TV operators, he said.

The government allows all existing digital TV operators to exit the segment without having to pay the remaining licence payments or face any additional financial penalties. Mr Takorn said digital TV operators which need to exit the segment will have to submit their proposal to the NBTC by May 10.

Similarly, mobile operators which need to get an extension of their 900-MHz licences payment terms must submit proposals to the NBTC by May 10 too. "This 700-MHz licences allocation is not a normal auction, because Section 44 allows only the major operators which need to get licences in exchange for assistance of their existing 900-MHz licence payment," he said.

Yesterday, the NBTC held a special meeting with digital TV operators and the major three operators about the Section 44 move.

Several participants were concerned the submission date of May 10 may be too short to make a decision because mobile operators have to discuss the matter with their boards.

However, Mr Takorn urged the mobile operators to aim for May 10 anyway because they could still withdraw their proposal to buy the 700-MHz licences later.