

5G SIGNALSCAT Telecom's latest moves suggest telecom operators are serious about the 5G bid. **B3**

The sign in front of CAT Tower, CAT Telecom's headquarters. PANUMAS SANGUANWONG

Telecom experts keeping an eye on CAT's alliance moves

KOMSAN TORTERMSASANA

CAT Telecom's move to clinch a partnership deal with Malaysian telecom infrastructure firm Edotco Group Sdn Bhd and SET-listed ALT Telecom to jointly develop 5G infrastructure suggests telecom operators will get serious about the 5G licence auction scheduled for Feb 16, according to industry experts.

CAT is expected to bid for the 700MHz and 2600MHz ranges. The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) will officially announce the qualified bid-

ders and their spectrum bids on Feb 12.

"CAT is being watched by telecom experts as to whether it will be a spoiler or a real treat for the auction's competition," said an industry veteran who requested anonymity.

The source said Edotco is a leading telecom infrastructure service provider in the region, while ALT is a top telecom equipment installation provider.

The NBTC plans to auction off four spectrum ranges: 700MHz, 1800MHz, 2600MHz and 26GHz.

The *Bangkok Post* has learned that the 700MHz and 2600MHz ranges will be contested by Advanced Info Service

(AIS), True Move H Universal Communication (TUC) and CAT.

Pisut Ngamvijitvong, senior analyst at Kasikorn Securities, said CAT's partnership with Edotco implies it will be a serious bidder for the 2600MHz range, which could spark intense competition. The range is known to be the most coveted spectrum for 5G adoption.

Reports recently emerged that Total Access Communication (DTAC) parent Telenor had resumed talks for business integration with Edotco's parent Axiata. This could help explain why DTAC reportedly opted out of the 2600MHz licence auction, as the country's third-

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largest mobile operator may seek a roaming agreement on the range with CAT in the future, Mr Pisut said.

He said an alliance between CAT, Edotco and ALT implies that CAT may want to become a 5G infrastructure provider, rather than a service provider.

If CAT participates in the 2600MHz range auction, the final bid price for all 19 licences on the 2600MHz range could reach 58 billion baht, he said.

CAT has 60 billion baht for investment, while operating mobile service requires funds for spectrum acquisition, network roll-out, marketing and services.

Mr Pisut said AIS, which holds a slot of 700MHz range, could be willing to contest for licences on the 700MHz range in the auction because its existing slot is adjacent to those available for bid.