

NBTC gears up for 5G auction

Bidders warned that offers must be viable

POST REPORTERS

Thailand is set to hold its 5G auction tomorrow with the telecom regulator warning bidders to be realistic with their offers as the government can no longer intervene to help should their business models not prove viable.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the NBTC is fully prepared for the electronic auction, which will start at 9.30am and is expected to finish by 9pm on Sunday.

The agency has organised six rooms for the five qualified bidders. The extra one is in case of an unexpected hiccup with one of the other five. The secretary-general led the press to visit the venue to be used for the historic auction at NBTC headquarters yesterday.

The bidders are Advanced Info Service (AIS), True Move H Universal Communication (TUC), Total Access Communication (DTAC), TOT Plc and CAT Telecom Plc.

The 700MHz and 2600MHz frequency ranges will be contested by AIS, TUC and CAT.

All but CAT will vie for the 26-gigahertz range. No company has registered to bid for the 1800MHz range.

"I want to reiterate to the bidders that they should be prudent in submitting bidding prices. Unlike in the past, they will not have Section 44 to help anymore," said Mr Takorn.

The secretary-general said the telecom bidders should learn from the auctions of digital TV licences in 2013 and 4G licences from 2015 onwards when the reference price for digital TV and the 900MHz spectrums were set at 10 billion baht for each licence but bids exceeded 50 billion baht for digital TV and 70 billion baht for the 4G spectrum.

In April last year, the now-defunct National Council for Peace and Order, used its special powers under the interim charter's Section 44 to bail out digital TV operators and delay payments for three 4G licence operators for another five years.

On the bidding day, Mr Takorn said bidders will draw for auction rooms at 8.15am and the first auction will start with the 700MHz spectrum at 9.30am.

He said the "clock auction" system will be used for the 5G auction for the first time in the country.

The auction will proceed on a round-by-round basis, where products are split into smaller sets and they can open auctions at the same time.

Mr Takorn earlier estimated the combined winning prices in the auction could surpass 70 billion baht while overall 5G network investment could reach 130 billion baht this year and 200 billion in 2021.



Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, third from left, briefs journalists on the 5G spectrum licence auction taking place tomorrow. NATIONAL BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATION COMMISSION