

NBTC board has work cut out

Three critical issues await approval, writes Komsan Tortermvasana



The new NBTC board needs to decide on a framework for the auction of the rights to use satellite orbital slots, as well as consider principles to govern the OTT business.

TAWATCHAI
 KEMGUMNERD

Hopes are high the new board members of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) will be endorsed by the first quarter next year, allowing the country to take advantage of a myriad of opportunities and ensuring sufficient regulations for industries.

Several critical issues are awaiting the new board's approval, including the framework of the auction for the rights to use satellite orbital slots, with satellite service provider Thaicom's concession due to expire in September next year.

The board is also to consider the principles to govern over-the-top (OTT) business.

Suebsak Suebpakdee, executive director of the Telecommunications Association of Thailand, said as Thailand has become a first mover on 5G infrastructure in Asean, it should make the most of it.

"It is essential to look at how we can gain benefits from further steps after this," said Mr Suebsak.

The NBTC is the regulator for telecom and broadcasting businesses.

It is in charge of digital resource allocation, especially spectrum bands, which serve as the digital backbone for the internet economy.

The body also plays an immense role in ushering in regulations and measures in relation to the telecom and broadcasting industries.

SELECTION PROCESS

The recruitment of new NBTC board members will be done under the existing NBTC Act, which came into effect in 2017.

Based on the legislation, the seven seats on the NBTC board must come from seven different fields: telecom, broadcasting, TV business, law, engineering, economics and consumer protection.

Applicants must be aged 40-70 and they must select a field. They need to have qualifications and experience in line with their chosen field.

Initially 14 shortlisted names from the seven fields of expertise are determined, two from each field.

They need to have their qualifications vetted.

The Senate will then vote to select seven of them — one from each field.

A total of 80 people submitted applications for the job from Oct 14-28, including former NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith.

Mr Suebsak said he is aware the Senate secretariat is in the process of verifying the applicants' qualifications and could pass the list of qualified candidates to the Senate early next year.

"If the recruitment is completed and the new NBTC board members are announced by the first quarter, this would be an acceptable time frame as several key agenda items await them,"

he said.

Uncontrollable factors delaying the recruitment process could harm the industry, said Mr Suebsak.

"The new NBTC board does not have much time to prepare as several critical issues require a decision," he said.

CRITICAL ISSUES

A source at the NBTC who requested anonymity said at least three crucial issues await a board decision. First, the board needs to decide on the recall of the 3500-megahertz spectrum range from Thaicom for telecom use because the band is the most popular range for 5G adoption.

Second, the agency has to complete the draft for the auction of satellite orbital slots, said the source.

Finally, the NBTC has to set out proper regulations to govern OTT platforms. Mr Suebsak said the OTT platforms should be registered with clear regulatory framework by the state.