

# NBTC board set to hold hearing in June

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**T**he new board of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has set an initial timeline to hold a hearing for the draft of the country's first auction of satellite orbital slot rights in June.

Bidding was scrapped last year and remains stuck in limbo. On Aug 18 last year, the regulator decided to cancel an auction scheduled for Aug 28 as SET-listed Thaicom, through its wholly owned company TC Space Connect, was the only bidder.

The NBTC then amended a condition of the auction, with the draft scheduled to be put up for a hearing next month, said a source close to the NBTC who requested anonymity.

The hearing is slated to last for 30 days to gather the opinions of stakeholders, both offline and online.

The source said a proposal that some specific satellite orbital slots would have to be allocated for National Telecom (NT) to use for security purposes is one of the topics up for discussion at the hearing.

The source said the NBTC board on May 5 assigned its management to prepare an official amended auction draft to be submitted to the board for consideration on May 11, before being put up for the hearing.

The new NBTC board, which came into office last month, has yet to determine whether it will hold the auction for only one slot — the previous target of Thaicom — or offer various packages as per the earlier auction plan.

NBTC management previously suggested the auction should only be for the 119.5 East slot, which was targeted by Thaicom, but Air Marshal Thanapanat Raicharoen, one of the five sitting commissioners, disagreed, saying the bidding should include all four packages as previously planned.

AM Thanapanat is the only commissioner perceived to have a strong command of the satellite field as he is a former deputy secretary-general of



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the NBTC and the former head of the planned auction of the satellite orbital slots.

Digital Economy and Society (DES) Minister Chaiwut Thanakamansorn earlier suggested some specific slots be allocated to NT, which could use them for security purposes.

The source said the DES minister's proposal sounds reasonable if NT commits to using the slots merely for security purposes and not for business.

"If NT decides to do business through the network capacity of the allocated slots, enabling private operators to rent them for business means such as ground services under satellite landing rights licence regimes, this would create a detrimental effect on the auction in the long run," the source said.

Thaicom has applied for satellite landing rights licences for foreign satellites from the NBTC office.

Under an NBTC rule, landing rights licences for foreign satellites involves a fee of 7% of total revenue, compared with landing rights licences for Thai satellites, which have a fee of just 4%.