

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

# Speculation mounts over future role of AIS chief executive

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Somchai Lertsutiwong, chief executive of leading mobile operator Advanced Info Service (AIS), is tipped to be requested to continue in his current role for another one or two years or become an adviser to the new leadership after his retirement at the end of this year, according to industry sources.

The move is expected to facilitate the smooth transition of AIS in the face of several key developments of the firm, including its transformation into a cognitive telco by 2024 and its planned acquisition of fixed broadband provider Triple T Broadband (TTTBB).

Its key rivals — True Corporation and Total Access Communication (DTAC) — are also on the path towards a merger with the newly merged firm expected to be more competitive against AIS.

The AIS board has yet to start the recruitment of the new chief executive despite four months remaining before Mr Somchai retires.

An executive source at InTouch Holdings, the parent firm of AIS, said Mr Somchai has been offered two choices — chief executive or the adviser to the new chief executive — after his resignation.

He has yet to give his decision, said the source who requested anonymity.

The country's biggest mobile operator is now steering towards a cognitive telco by 2024, or a smart telecom organisation. AIS's board approved the plan late last year.

"2022 is only the first phase of the transformation," the source said.

A telecom industry veteran said a significant adjustment has been made to AIS's organisational structure and management, especially after Gulf Energy Development, Thailand's biggest private power producer by market

value, became the largest shareholder of InTouch last year, replacing Singapore's Singtel.

Gulf, led by energy tycoon Sarath Ratanavadi, has a total 46.05% stake in InTouch, followed by Singapore's Singtel with a 24.9% stake.

Gulf indirectly owns 18.6% in AIS through InTouch while Singtel directly owns 23.3% in AIS.

"A local capitalist now has an influence on AIS's organisational direction much more than the past," the veteran said.

However, it sounds reasonable for Mr Somchai to continue to helm AIS, especially during a period when the company is surrounded by various pressing issues.

When asked about the offering of the positions after his retirement, Mr Somchai declined to comment.

Mr Somchai, a homegrown executive at AIS, was made chief executive of the company in 2010 and has since driven efforts to turn AIS into a digital service provider.

AIS is now facing two critical developments in the telecom industry.

The first involves the planned merger of True and DTAC.

The planned merger is now being scrutinised by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission.

Mr Somchai has said the merger would bring a change to the telecom market landscape and AIS needs to drive its cognitive telco roadmap faster than the original plan to make sure AIS is one step ahead of its rivals.

AIS is also in the process of acquiring TTTBB and investing in Jasmine Broadband Internet Infrastructure Fund for a combined 32.4 billion baht.

Once the deal is completed, AIS is expected to be the second biggest player in the fixed broadband market with 34% market share, trailing only True with a 39% market share.



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**ANONYMOUS SOURCE, INTOUCH HOLDINGS**

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

# True, DTAC set date for 1st joint shareholders meeting

True Corporation and Total Access Communication (DTAC) will hold their first joint shareholders meeting on Oct 3 to consider extending the period for consideration of issues in connection with their planned merger, due to the telecom regulator's delayed review of the deal.

The two telecom firms informed the Stock Exchange of Thailand about their scheduled meeting on Friday.

On April 4, True and DTAC shareholder meetings approved the amalgamation of the two companies.

Section 148 of the Public Limited Companies Act obliges both firms to hold their joint shareholders meeting to discuss issues in connection with their merger within six months from the date on which the firms resolved to pursue the amalgamation, unless they jointly agree to extend the timeline, although this must not be by more than a year.

Yupa Leewongcharoen, True's chief financial officer, said the extension of the timeline for their joint shareholders meeting is meant to provide more time to cover the period when the new board of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) scrutinises the deal.

She said the company hopes that the NBTC's deliberations soon come up with a clear outcome for the sake of optimum merger benefits for members

of the public and users.

True expects the entire merger process to be completed in line with its plans this year, Ms Yupa said.

The amalgamation would ensure better competition in Thailand's telecoms industry, she added.

True and DTAC submitted their merger report to the NBTC on Jan 25.

According to DTAC, based on relevant NBTC notifications and its past practice considering merger transactions, the telecom regulator is expected to issue its final report on the proposed amalgamation within 90 days from the date of the merger report's submission.

However, as the NBTC is still considering the deal, True and DTAC may not be able to hold their joint shareholders meeting within six months from the date on which they approved the merger plan, DTAC's statement said.

"The prolonged process affects the progress to create a new technology-telecom champion, and the delay has a negative impact for consumers and for Thailand's pathway towards building a leading regional digital economy," said Sharad Mehrotra, chief executive of DTAC.

"DTAC and True still aim to finish the amalgamation as soon as possible for sustainable benefits and value creation for Thai consumers, businesses and the nation."