

Regulator set to rule on telecom merger today

NBTC under pressure from True and DTAC

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

True Corporation and Total Access Communication (DTAC) have asked the telecom regulator to make a clear resolution regarding their planned merger at the agency's board meeting today, saying a delay will affect consumers.

A source at the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) who requested anonymity said a resolution is highly likely following signals given by the government.

The source said the resolution is likely to conclude that the NBTC has no authority to consider approving or rejecting the deal, although remedy measures will be issued to govern the deal.

The petition was submitted to the NBTC yesterday, led by Chakkrit Urairat, chief regulatory officer at True, and Lertratana Ratananukul, head of DTAC's government relations division.

Mr Chakkrit said the two companies jointly submitted an amalgamation report to the NBTC on Jan 25, in compliance with the rule that parties wishing to merge must report to the regulator 90 days before they can execute a merger.

"This is almost nine months since we submitted the amalgamation report. We are concerned that a delay in the issuance of a resolution is creating a bad impact on optimum benefits for consumers," he said.

The merger could foster synergy between the two telecom firms with the integration of their assets, ranging from cellular towers to frequency bands, said Mr Chakkrit.

"This is not meant to pressure the NBTC board, but we expect it to use its power in line with a regulation involv-

ing mergers enacted in 2018, and issue remedy measures to govern the merger," he said.

Referring to concerns about the prospect of a hike in service fees following the merger, Mr Chakkrit said the NBTC has the authority to govern prices.

RESOLUTION EXPECTED

According to the NBTC source, a resolution to govern the deal is expected from the board meeting today.

The board members are likely to vote 3-2 that they do not have the authority to consider approving or rejecting the deal in line with the 2018 regulation, but can impose specific measures to prevent the licensees from creating a monopoly or restricting competition in telecom services, the source said.

According to the source, two board members — Dr Sarana Boonbaichalyapruk and Torpong Selanon — believe the board has no such power to rule on the deal.

Board members Pirongrong



A group of people gathered at the NBTC headquarters yesterday to express their support for the merger.

Ramasoota and Suphat Suphachalasai disagree with the merger and believe the board has the authority to approve or reject it. Another board member, Air Marshal Thanapant Raicharoen, could be an unknown variable as he is concerned about a legal backlash from whatever decision is made, the source said. Yesterday evening some commissioners were invited to a meeting to discuss details of today's agenda, said the source.