

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

# MCOT upbeat on 2600MHz

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State-owned broadcaster MCOT Plc, the holder of the 2600-megahertz spectrum, says it's confident that the upcoming 2600MHz auction for 5G use will proceed as planned under a new government, as the auction is governed by the telecom regulator, not elected officials.

Kematat Paladesh, president of MCOT, said the company already received a letter from the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) ordering MCOT to return unused bandwidth on the 2600MHz band to prepare for the auction to build infrastructure for 5G wireless technology.

Mr Kematat said the NBTC board on March 5 required MCOT to return 190MHz of unused bandwidth, including 154MHz now held by MCOT and 12MHz held by the Royal Thai Army. The remaining 24MHz was previously transferred by the Public Relations Department to the NBTC.

Whether MCOT will return all the 154MHz of bandwidth it holds will depend on the compensation rate, Mr Kematat said.

MCOT also has to receive approval for the spectrum return from its board and shareholders, he said.

The NBTC's letter said MCOT and the Royal Thai Army could hold the spectrum bandwidth for 45 days from receipt of the notification. Both agen-

cies have to finish removing all related equipment within 120 days from receiving the letter.

Mr Kematat said MCOT must cautiously consider how much spectrum bandwidth it should return to the NBTC and plan what it should do with the remaining bandwidth if MCOT decides to return just some of the range.

He said the procedure of the 2600MHz recall and planned auction would not be affected under a new government. The procedure is handled by the NBTC office and is a routine part of the regulation of spectrum recall and compensation regime, he said.

The move is in line with Section 27 of the amended NBTC law, stipulating that the regulator must recall spectrum slots held by state agencies that are not efficiently used and reallocate them through auctions.

The NBTC law allows the regulator to recall and pay compensation to spectrum holders to better arrange spectrum for the benefit of the country.

"The procedure of recall and return of the 2600MHz range is an issue between the NBTC and spectrum holders, not politics," Mr Kematat said.

MCOT holds the 2600MHz band under a concession that will end in 2022.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith said the procedure has already begun and there is no reason to stop the planned 2600MHz recall and auction.

The 2600MHz band is considered the proper range internationally for 5G use.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC spent 7.5 million baht to evaluate the 2600MHz range. The valuation will be made Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University and the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI).

The two universities and the TDRI must evaluate reserve prices for the 2600MHz range and compensation rates for agencies that now hold bandwidth.

The NBTC expects the valuation process to end by July and the 2600MHz bid to take place in September.

But Mr Takorn said it's too early to determine the exact timeline of the 2600MHz licence auction procedure because the process may be delayed if MCOT and the army disagree about the amount of unused bandwidth they must return or the compensation rate.