

5G FAIR PLAY

The telecom regulator vows to remain neutral concerning bids from telecom vendors involved in the nation's 5G roll-out. **B3**

TECHNOLOGY

NBTC declares neutrality in 5G gear



The 5G spectrum licence auction is scheduled for Feb 16.

Head of regulator meets US vendors

KOMSAN TORTERMOVASANA

The telecom regulator has vowed to remain neutral concerning bids from telecom vendors involved in the nation's 5G roll-out in light of ongoing trade tensions between the US and China.

The 5G spectrum licence auction is scheduled for Feb 16 and the network roll-out could commence in May, according to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

The door is open for telecom operators to choose technologies from various vendors for their networks, which could create better balance and security management, said NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith.

"We will ask prospective bidders for cooperation regarding this," Mr Takorn said.

Previously, the regulator attracted both Chinese tech giant Huawei and some US-based vendors to help

develop telecom infrastructure and 5G testbed centres in collaboration with major mobile operators.

The NBTC maintained its neutrality after the first 5G test centre was established in Bangkok last year.

The regulator sought cooperation from Huawei and various US tech firms, including Intel, Cisco, Qualcomm and IBM, to run the 5G tests in Thailand.

Huawei has agreed to work with the NBTC and Chulalongkorn University on a test site.

Mr Takorn said representatives of US vendors have met him for talks about the cooperation.

"I clearly expressed our neutral policy to them," he said.

These vendors helped provide information and took part in events aimed at educating and promoting innovation development in the country, Mr Takorn said.

The NBTC will auction off four spectrum ranges on Feb 16, consisting of 700MHz, 1800MHz, 2600MHz and 26GHz.

The regulator expects about 54 billion baht to be generated from the auction.

5G adoption this year could contribute 177 billion baht to the economy,

or 1.02% of GDP, the NBTC said. The intake could rise to 332 billion baht in 2021 and 476 billion baht in 2022.

The 2600MHz range is coveted in the auction because it is being used for commercial 5G service in China, which is the world's biggest market for mobile subscriptions, Mr Takorn said.

He said the NBTC will urge the auction's bidders to consider the 5G roll-out at Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports as the first priority.

The NBTC plans to sign a pact with Airports of Thailand Plc on Jan 22 for the cooperation.

"The two international airports will serve as a flagship and national gateway for 5G tech adoption in Thailand, where visitors will get a hands-on experience of ultra-fast wireless broadband service once they arrive," Mr Takorn said.

Several 5G use cases are expected at the two airports' operations, including facial recognition, smart security, smart logistics, smart hospitals and smart transport, he said.