

STALLED SLOTS TO HEAD AGENDA

The DES minister plans to hold talks aimed at paving the way for some satellite orbital slots to be allotted to National Telecom. **B4**

Talks aim for solution to stalled orbital slots

Cable clean-up, NT allocation on agenda

KOMSAN TORTERMASANA

Digital Economy and Society (DES) Minister Chaiwut Thanakamansorn plans to hold discussions with the telecom regulator and security agencies to come up with a resolution that paves the way for some satellite orbital slots being allocated to National Telecom (NT) to be used for security purpose and public interest.

The move is seen as another effort to ease concerns about the planned

auction of satellite orbital slots which remain stuck in limbo. The auction was scrapped in August last year after SET-listed Thaicom through its wholly owned firm, TC Space Connect, was the only contestant.

Mr Chaiwut said there are two urgent agenda items that require talks with the new board of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) — the satellite orbital slot allocation for NT and stronger collaboration in putting overhead cables underground.

The new NBTC board is expected to be royally endorsed by this month. Any new development in connection with the satellite orbital slot allocation requires the new board's decision.

"Not only the NBTC board, but all

related security agencies need to be invited for talks," Mr Chaiwut said.

The satellite orbital slots, he said, should not be only put up for auction. Some specific slots should be allocated to be used for national security too.

It is still premature to identify which slots need to be allocated to NT, he noted.

A high-ranking source at the DES Ministry who requested anonymity pointed out that the 78.5° East orbital slot is specifically targeted by the ministry to be allocated to NT. The slot had been used by Thaicom 5 satellite before it was deorbited in February 2020.

NT must prepare its engineers and staff for satellite control and management once it obtains the slot, which is expected to be a tough task ahead, the



Staff walk past satellite dishes at Thaicom's satellite control system centre in Nonthaburi, PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASILL

source added.

The new NBTC board now needs to amend the regulation governing the satellite orbital slot auction, enabling NT to obtain some slots for use for the public's benefit.

According to an NBTC source, some orbital slots subject to the auction are now at risk of being taken back by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) from Thailand which has not yet deployed satellites to use the slots within the ITU's coordination timeframe.

Thaicom's 30-year satellite operating concession expired on Sept 10 last year, leading to the transfer of Thaicom 4 and 6 satellites to the DES Ministry.

CAT Telecom was earlier assigned by the ministry to manage assets linked with the two satellites after the concession ended, so as to ensure the continuity of the service.

CAT last year merged with TOT to become NT, which is now in charge of the two satellites moving forward. Thaicom 4 or iPSTAR is a broadband satellite, while Thaicom 6 is a broadcasting satellite.

Thaicom 4 and Thaicom 6 are operational on the 119.5E and 78.5E orbital slots, respectively.

An industry source pointed out NT staff members were not keen to operate the two satellites further despite staff being sent to attend training courses with Thaicom.

Thaicom's engineers have been recruited by NT to operate the two satellites.