

HOLDING ITS GROUND

The DES Ministry is demanding satellite capacity be allocated for state use at the upcoming orbital slot auction this year. **B3**

DES asks for capacity from satellite auction

Provision said to be for the public interest

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The Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry is demanding satellite capacity be allocated for state use from the winning bidders of an upcoming satellite orbital slot auction.

The move is in line with resolutions reached by the National Space Policy Commission and National Digital Economy and Society Committee (NDESC), which want to see a certain satellite capacity provided to serve the public interest.

Such a request will be sent to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), which is working on conditions for the satellite orbital slot auction.

Ajarin Pattanapanchal, DES

permanent secretary, said a combined demand from state agencies for satellite capacity involves 7.5 satellite transponders from broadcasting satellites and 2 gigabytes of capacity from broadband satellites, based on a study by the NDESC.

"The NBTC office understands our needs. However, this is up to consideration by its committee responsible for working on the conditions of the auction," she said.

For the allocated satellite capacity, state enterprise National Telecom (NT) may have to make use of it for the public interest, she said. NT may seek a partnership deal with a winning bidder to pursue the task.

"Reserving some satellite capacity is the most practical choice," Ms Ajarin said.

State agencies are not keen on taking up a lot of satellite network filings for their own operation, said Ms Ajarin.

DES Minister Chaiwut Thanakamansorn has said that NT has been

assigned to participate in the December auction.

If NT fails to grab targeted satellite orbital slots, it may have to talk with the winning bidder for possible joint investments, he said.

Based on a draft condition of the auction presented at a public hearing last month, the licensee is obliged to set aside 1% of its high-throughput communication (broadband) satellite capacity for state use and public services from each satellite network filing it won, or one transponder in the case of a conventional (broadcast) satellite, without charge.

The issue has drawn opposition from the hearing's participants, who said the winners should provide consent for that requirement.

Ms Ajarin is due to retire at the end of this month.

The new permanent secretary will have to deal with two major disputes which are currently in the arbitration process.

One concerns a dispute between the



Satellite dishes at Thaicom's headquarters in Nonthaburi. PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASIL

DES Ministry and SET-listed satellite service provider Thaicom over Thaicom 7 and 8 satellites.

The ministry considers Thaicom 7 and 8 to be part of Thaicom's concession, demanding the company provide revenue sharing, but the firm insists the two satellites are operated under a single licence from the NBTC, for which

it has to make a licence fee payment to the regulator.

Another dispute concerns Thaicom's deorbiting of the Thaicom 5 satellite in February 2020 before the concession expired.

The ministry demanded Thaicom build and deliver a replacement satellite for Thaicom 5, or pay compensation of

around 7 billion baht if it cannot do so.

Thaicom argues the ministry was informed in advance about the satellite's lifespan, which was due to end in 2018, before it was approved for launch.

The company also indicated it had consulted with the DES Ministry and NBTC and sought approval before deorbiting the satellite.