

YET ANOTHER SETBACK

The DES Ministry's demand for satellite capacity for winning bidders of orbital slots threatens to derail the auction. **B3**

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

DES Ministry demand disrupts satellite orbital slot auction

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

The second attempt by the telecom regulator to hold a satellite orbital slot auction looks set to face a major hurdle as the Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry demands reservation of some satellite capacity from the winning bidders for state use without charges.

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) plans to meet with the DES Ministry's representatives to explore practical details about the demand, including flexible conditions, compensation and support.

The demand could discourage some interested parties from joining the bidding, said a ministry source who requested anonymity.

Earlier this month, DES permanent secretary Ajarin Pattanapanchai said the combined demand from state agencies for satellite capacity involves 7.5 satellite transponders from broadcasting satellites and 2 gigabytes of capacity from broadband satellites.

Such a demand had been forwarded to the NBTC, she said.

The move is in line with resolutions from the National Space Policy Commission and the National Digital Economy and Society Committee, which want to see a certain satellite capacity provided to serve the public interest under the concept of the national satellite service, she said.

The most practical approach is to request the NBTC reserve some capacity of the satellites in orbital slots for state usage by National Telecom (NT), Ms Ajarin said.

An NBTC source who requested anonymity said the DES Ministry's demand could create problems for the planned

auction.

The regulator has to come up with a proper solution to address the demand, the source said.

"Nobody can guarantee whether the auction will proceed in December as planned," the source said.

Based on a draft condition of the auction presented at a public hearing last month, the winning bidder in each orbital slot is obligated to reserve 1% of its broadband satellite capacity for state use or only one transponder in the case of a broadcasting satellite.

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

The source said the NBTC and the DES Ministry must jointly discuss the ministry's demand.

There are some factors that could disrupt the auction's timeline, the source said.

First, Ms Ajarin is due to retire today, while the reshuffle could affect the negotiations of the two parties. Her successor, Wisit Wisitsora-At, is scheduled to take office next week.

Secondly, this high demand may dissatisfy the NBTC as it would discourage prospective bidders from participating in the auction.

Last year's auction, scheduled for Aug 28, was scrapped as SET-listed Thaicom's wholly owned company TC Space Connect was the sole bidder.

"We are still not sure whether any other bidders would join the auction," said the source.

The auction scheduled for December offers five slot packages instead of four placed last year. They consist of 50.5°E and 51°E; 78.5°E; 119.5°E and 120°E; 126°E; and 142°E.