

NBTC's move for 5G spectrum bids draws mixed views

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ACADEMICS and digital TV operators offered differing views on whether the telecom regulator is being too hasty in calling a bid for the 5G spectrum bands this year.

They expressed their opinions at a seminar held yesterday to discuss the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC)'s current move to migrate digital TV operators to other spectra from the 700MHz and put the 700MHz in auction to provide 5G wireless broadband service.

The NBTC has intended to call bids for 700MHz, 2.6GHz and also 26GHz-28GHz this year. The watchdog has just finished the first draft of the 700MHz bid.

Thailand Development Research Institute president Somkiat Tangkitvanich said in the seminar that he agreed in principle that any spectrum, if not used optimally, should be reallocated for greater use.

However, it is better for the NBTC to clear up all relevant uncertainties first, including those related to regulations while setting up a roadmap for auctioning off all 5G spectrum bands, he said in the seminar co-hosted by the NBTC, the National Press Council of Thailand, and the Foundation for Consumers.

He added that the case for 5G industrial use remains unclear in the global market.

If the uncertainties are not cleared, they would create risks which will affect the bidding process, the NBTC and the bidders themselves.

Somkiat added that the right time to call the bids should be in the next two years.

Mana Trirayapiwat, dean of the School of Communications Arts of the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, said he agreed with Somkiat that the NBTC was too hasty in calling the 5G spectrum bid.

Recently Advanced Info Service chief executive officer Somchai Lertsutiwong said that the right time to launch the commercial 5G service should be in next two or three years.

The NBTC will use the proceeds from the auctions of the 700MHz and also other bands to compensate digital TV broadcasters who would be impacted from the switch from 700MHz.

Somkiat said that the NBTC's auction of the 5G bands and its plan to compensate digital TV operators should not be tied up as they are two separate issues.

Somkiat also proposed that digital TV operators should be legally allowed to exit their business but those who opt to exit must not be compensated by the NBTC for the migration from the 700MHz. Also, they should not face fine for exiting the business.

The NBTC should only compensate those digital TV operators who choose to stay in the business.

When asked if it is too early to auction off the 5G bands, Chatchai Tawantarong, committee member of Digital Television Association of Thailand, said there is no reason for a delay if it can be done soon.

He added that doing nothing could bring damage to the TV industry.