

NBTC stresses deadline for responses to relief measures

SIRIVISH TOOMGUM
THE NATION

THE National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) yesterday urged all telecom operators and digital TV licence holders wishing to take up relief measures to inform the regulator by May 10.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith stressed the deadline yesterday during a meeting with representatives of the three 900MHz telecom operators and the digital TV licence holders at which he explained the assistance measures issued last week by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

The measures were announced in response to a tough business environment for the operators.

Takorn said those operators electing to take up the assistance can change their minds later if they find they are unhappy with the related conditions expected to be announced in late May.

The junta measures offer telecom operators a longer time to pay their 900MHz licence fees, while the digital TV broadcasters will have the option to return their licences to the NBTC. Those wanting to use this right have to inform the NBTC within 30 days.

However, the relief measures include a condition that makes it mandatory for the 900MHz telecom licence holders to take part in the NBTC's planned sale of lots on the 700MHz spectrum, expected in

June. They would lose the extended payment facility if they do not take part in the sale and would have to pay as per the original payment schedule of four instalments.

Takorn said that all the terms and conditions of the 700MHz licence sale are expected to be finished by late May.

Advanced Info Service (AIS) chief corporate officer Weerawat Kiattipongthaworn said that AIS would inform the NBTC of its interest to use the right in the relief measures. Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting with the NBTC yesterday, he said a final decision on whether the company would acquire a licence would be up to the AIS board.

Rajiv Bawa, chief corporate affairs and business development officer of Total Access Communication (DTAC), said in a press statement that DTAC acknowledged the merit of the payment extension offer as it confirmed the exorbitant asking price for spectrum in Thailand.

"We will now dialogue with NBTC to seek more clarity on the order before deciding on next steps," he said.

"As we have previously stated, we urge NBTC to publish a clear spectrum roadmap, including time for allocation and fair valuation of available spectrum, before discussing any further auctions."

Besides the sales of the 700MHz, Takorn said that the NBTC will auction 2.6GHz, 26GHz and 28GHz together on a multiband basis late this year, while it is in talks with the



Takorn elaborates on the relief measures offered to telecoms companies and digital TV operators.

Digital Economy and Society Ministry to reclaim 35GHz from the ministry for auction.

The NBTC will reallocate the 700MHz totalling 45MHz for sale. It is expected to sell three licences, each totalling 15MHz, at between Bt25 billion and Bt27 billion. The telecom operators that grab the licences will start paying for the licence lot next October. The licence term is 15 years.

Takorn said that if no operator decides to acquire the 700MHz, the NBTC will put the licence up for auction.

The NBTC wants to see the telecom operators using the 700MHz to develop a 5G wireless broadband service.

A telecom analyst, who declined to be named, said that the key uncertainty is the price of the 700MHz and the terms of payment. Since the business model of 5G technology remains unclear and 5G potential revenue is still a few years away for Thailand, the analyst believes that acquiring 700MHz too early could reduce or even offset the potential benefit of the 900MHz payment extension.

Under the junta measures, the

NBTC will split the total upfront licence fee for the 900MHz spectrum of the three licence holders into 10 instalments, giving them more time for payments from the current four instalments.

The total licence fee will be divided into 10 equal instalments. The first instalment payment under this measure will be on the day they were awarded the 900MHz licences.

AIS' subsidiary Advanced Wireless Network (AWN) and True's subsidiary TrueMove H Universal Communication (TUC) are originally scheduled to pay hefty final instalments of Bt59.574 billion and Bt60.218 billion, respectively, for their 900MHz licences in 2020.

DTAC will pay its final instalment for the 900MHz of Bt30.024 billion in 2022. TUC and AWN won the 900MHz licences in 2015 and 2016, respectively, and DTAC won the licence last year.

The junta measure also allows digital TV licence holders who want to exit their business to inform the NBTC by May 10 of their intention to return their licences.

The NBTC will also reallocate part of their 700MHz for sale to the 900MHz telecom operators. Then the NBTC will compensate the broadcasters by waiving their remaining upfront payments for the fifth and sixth instalments.

The NBTC will also pay the broadcasting network rental fee for all the digital TV licence holders until the end of their remaining licence term of nine years and six months.