

TELECOM

Bid afoot to extend nation's right to use 50.5° East slot

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

The Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) is preparing official documents to request the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) grant a one-year extension for Thailand's right to use the 50.5° East orbital slot once it expires on Nov 27, 2024.

The NBTC said it is in the process of awarding the rights to use two unsold packages of orbital slots — the 142°E slot, and a package including the 50.5°E and 51°E slots.

The regulator wants to award these rights before the end of the year.

NBTC acting secretary-general Trairat Viriyasirikul said the regulator has been coordinating with ITU officials for months regarding this matter.

The ITU has permitted the NBTC to submit its proposal on Oct 21. The ITU's radio regulation panel plans to consider the proposal in November.

The NBTC has amended significant details concerning the awarding conditions, aiming to attract potential bidders.

A new round to award the rights is expected to be held in October.

"Even if the planned awarding of rights occurs according to the timeline, it will take time for the winning bidder to procure a satellite and launch it to the 50.5°E orbital slot," said Mr Trairat.

"That's why the NBTC is asking the ITU for the one-year extension for the slot's expiry date."

In January 2023, NBTC held the country's first auction of the rights to use the satellite orbital slots, offering five packages. The package containing the 50.5°E and 51°E orbital slots, and another comprising the 142°E slot, remain unsold.

The NBTC then planned to award the rights to use the unsold packages on Aug 24 this year using the auction method.

Only two companies picked up bid envelopes, but they both failed to submit them by the July 23 submission deadline.



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TRAI RAT VIRIYASIRIKUL
Acting secretary-general, NBTC

This prompted the NBTC to draft a new plan to award the rights via a combination of the open direct award and beauty contest methods.

BOOST FOR POTENTIAL BIDDERS

The NBTC board recently approved a proposal to scrap a condition that requires the winning bidders to launch a satellite into orbit within a period of three years.

NBTC commissioner AM Thanapant Raicharoen said the board unanimously passed the resolution to ease the burden for prospective bidders.

However, winning bidders are required to maintain the country's right to use such orbital slots via several alternatives.

SET-listed satellite operator Thaicom recently urged the NBTC to give greater weight to bidders' business experience in the criteria for awarding the unsold rights to use the orbital slots.

More experienced companies are more likely to successfully launch a satellite into orbit, according to Thaicom.

Thaicom chief executive Patompob Suwansiri said the beauty contest scheme gives 40% weight to the potential success of a project proposal when making an assessment, while only 25% is given to the bidder's experience.

The remainder comprises matters related to the bidder's financial information and the benefits that would be returned to the state, said Mr Patompob.