

MCOT awaits say on 2.6 GHZ

BROADCASTER WANTS TO USE PART OF SPECTRUM FOR NEW SERVICE AFTER EXPIRY OF RIGHTS

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MCOT will have to hand its 2.6GHz spectrum bandwidth back to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), according to the NBTC's spectrum subcommittee, which found that MCOT's rights over the bandwidth had already expired.

The state-owned broadcaster, which is a listed company, is however currently awaiting a decision from the regulator's broadcasting committee on whether it can use part of the spectrum for a new service offering.

MCOT earlier claimed it had the right to retain all 144MHz of its 2.6GHz bandwidth, and said it planned to use part of it to offer a 4G pay-TV service, returning the remainder to the regulator for auction.

However, at its meeting on December 15, the spectrum subcommittee found that rights to all four parts of the bandwidth held by MCOT had already expired.

It said the rights to the first and second parts, for which MCOT had awarded a concession contract to TrueVisions for providing pay-TV service with a multichannel multi-point distribution system (MMDS), had ended on September 30 last year.

The rights to the third part, for which MCOT had awarded a contract to Siam Broadcasting and Communication for offering pay-TV service, had expired as far back as 1998, in the panel's view.

The subcommittee's opinion is that the right to operate all three parts of the spectrum that involved concession contracts ended at the same time as the expiry dates of those contracts.

The role of the panel is to examine when all the spectra used under state concessions expire.

Moreover, the rights to the last

part of the spectrum, which MCOT had used to operate MMDS service in the provinces, also ended some time ago - in 1999.

Last year, the NBTC broadcasting committee rejected MCOT's plan to operate its entire 2.6GHz bandwidth by joining with partner Playwork Co to offer pay-TV service.

The committee indicated that MCOT had no right to operate the service, and said that it had to return the spectrum to the NBTC.

However, MCOT later appealed the decision to the NBTC board, which concluded that the contract between MCOT and Playwork was still valid and said MCOT should reapply to the regulator for permission to launch the service.

The NBTC also forwarded the matter of MCOT's request to launch the pay-TV service with Playwork to its spectrum subcommittee, which in December found that MCOT's rights over the spectrum had already expired.

The panel then submitted its findings to the regulator's broadcasting committee for a decision to be made on whether to allow MCOT to launch such a service.

However, the broadcasting committee failed to reach a final decision on the matter at its meeting on Monday this week.

Two broadcasting commissioners at the meeting were reportedly of the opinion that MCOT had no right to operate any of its 2.6GHz spectrum bandwidth, while the other three asked for more information so that the matter could be reconsidered.

The committee is expected to reconsider the issue next Monday.

MCOT's plan is to use part of the spectrum to offer pay-TV service, using 4G, and to return the remaining bandwidth to the NBTC for auction on condition that MCOT gets compensation for letting go of this part of the spectrum.