

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

MCOT's extra spectrum to be reallocated

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The government insists it will reallocate the unused 2600-megahertz broadcasting frequency of MCOT Plc for broadband internet service by next year.

The spectrum will be allocated through auctions by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) by mid-2017, said Deputy Prime Minister Prajin Juntong.

The state-run broadcaster will receive financial compensation from the state in exchange for returning the 60MHz of bandwidth.

MCOT holds 144MHz of bandwidth on the 2600MHz spectrum to provide pay-TV services.

The reallocation is to comply with new digital economy-related laws, including the NBTC law, governing greater flexibility in the management of spectrum resources.

MCOT signed a contract in 2010 with Playwork, an IT solutions provider, to have the latter operate the planned pay-TV service for 15 years on a revenue-sharing basis. However, Playwork never launched the service because of problems related to importing high-tech equipment.

MCOT was delighted to return the bandwidth to follow the government's digital economy policy to serve the country's interests.

"We [the state] expect the auction of the 60MHz band on the 2600MHz spectrum to take place by mid-2017," said ACM Prajin.

He said the new NBTC law was expected to promote efficient use of frequencies and help the telecom regulator manage the reallocation of other spectrum ranges that are now being used by many state enterprises.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith said the regulator initially planned to reallocate four additional spectrum bands by 2020 for the development of fifth-generation (5G) wireless broadband services and to serve growing demand for mobile data communication.

The 700, 850, 1500 and part of the 1800MHz spectra (now operated by Total Access Communication Plc under a 2G concession that will expire in 2018) will be allocated through auctions by 2020.

Even though mobile operators provide mobile services via a combined 250MHz of bandwidth on spectrum bands ranging from the 850, 900, 1800 and 2100MHz frequencies, Mr Takorn said operators would need more and bandwidth in both low and high spectrum bands for their long-term frequency management and to meet customer demand.

"At least a combined 690MHz of bandwidth is needed for greater efficiency in providing 4G and 5G services over the next four years," Mr Takorn said.

The GSM Association recently urged the government to outline a clear roadmap for the reallocation of the 700, 850, 1800, 2300 and 2600MHz bands to promote affordable fixed and mobile broadband internet access. The association said allocating more spectrum is crucial to developing the country's digital infrastructure, accelerating the government's efforts to achieve nationwide digitalisation by 2020.

A digital economy can improve GDP growth, broad-based socioeconomic prosperity, labour productivity and enhance competitiveness.