



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Dr Sarana expected to be named new chairman of NBTC

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

Dr Sarana Boonbaichaiyapruk, a medical specialist and former member of the defunct National Legislative Assembly (NLA), is expected to be chosen as chairman of the new National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) board.

He is among five candidates approved as NBTC board members by Senate voting on Monday. The five obtained at least 124 votes, half of the total votes in the Upper House. Another two candidates failed to get enough votes.

Of the five, three have been working closely with the NBTC and another two have close ties to the government.

A source at the existing NBTC board who requested anonymity said Dr Sarana is most likely to be voted

by the five to become the board chairman.

Dr Sarana is a medical doctor who has close ties to Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon as he takes care of Gen Prawit's health and cardiac system. He is also a former member of the defunct military-installed National Legislative Assembly (NLA).

The vote for the chairman is expected to be held during the first meeting of the new NBTC board, which will happen after the new commissioners receive royal endorsement.

Apart from Dr Sarana, who represents the consumer protection field, the other new board members are: Air Marshal Thanapant Raicharoen, deputy secretary-general of the NBTC,



Dr Sarana: Tipped for prized post

in the broadcasting field; Pirongrong Ramasoota, lecturer at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Communication Arts, in the TV field; Torpong Selanon, president of the Thailand Association of the Blind, in the field of people's liberty and rights promotion; and Suphat Suphachalasai, director of Thammasat University's Institute of Area Studies, in the economic field.

With five people approved, the new board can start operating in line with the amended NBTC Act, ending months of a decision-making vacuum at the regulator.

The five chosen board members have 15 days to step down from their existing positions, the source said. The six existing board members are not expected to make any policy decisions during this period, stepping down as soon as the new members have been royally endorsed.

Pisut Ngamvijitvong, senior equity research analyst at Kasikorn Securities, said the new commissioners may create some regulatory noise that might adversely affect telecom share prices.

The top regulatory issues the new commissioners are likely to take up comprise four items. First is a decision on the proposed merger of Total Access Communication Plc and True Corporation.

Other issues include an auction of satellite orbital slot licences, licensing regulations for low-earth orbit satellites, and an auction of 3.5-gigahertz spectrum licences, which is the most popular global range for 5G adoption.



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