

# 'AIS talks with HBO began before TrueVisions contract ended'

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THE NATION

ADVANCED INFO Service (AIS) has denied the public perception that it has started talks with American premium cable and satellite television network HBO only after HBO and TrueVisions failed to continue their partnership in December.

AIS chief marketing officer Prathana Leelapanang said that the company had been in talks with HBO for a five-year exclusive deal to air HBO programmes on its mobilephone and broadband Internet networks around eight months ago. Both companies announced this successful partnership deal last week.

The HBO deal with AIS covers only the airing of programmes on AIS's mobile phone and broadband Internet networks, while HBO's contract with TrueVisions, which ended in December, covered only the airing of programmes on the pay TV network.

"We had talked with HBO seven months or eight months ago for the deal and not when TrueVisions stopped airing HBO programmes on its pay TV network," Prathana added.

The AIS move to secure the partnership with HBO reflects the intense competition between AIS and the True Corp group to offer appealing content to attract customers.

True chief content and media officer Birathon Kasemsri na Ayudhaya said that

TrueVisions started talking to renew its contract with HBO to air HBO programme on its cable and satellite TV channels since the middle of last year, six months before the contract ended on December 31.

"We always thought that we had been a partner with HBO for more than 20 years and both of us are a key growth drivers for each other. Throughout our negotiations, we never expected that we'd be unable to renew the contract and we never knew that during that time HBO was talking with others too for a possible partnership deal," he added.

In the past, TrueVisions had bought a package of HBO programmes but for the new contract it wanted to buy only one popular programme. This led to their failure to clinch a new deal.

Birathon added that as they could not reach the final agreement, TrueVisions asked HBO to extend the negotiations for the deal renewal until March.

"But on December 24, HBO replied to us that it could not extend the negotiations. That's why we hurried to inform the [National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission] broadcasting committee that we could not continue to air the HBO programmes any more. It is an emergency case. We know that we breached the NBTC regulations that we must inform the customers 30 days in advance of stop airing any programmes," he added. "We never imagined TrueVisions without HBO programmes, as we had been growing together in the pay TV business in Thailand."

Given its breach of NBTC regulations, the watchdog recently called in TrueVisions to propose a remedy plan.

TrueVisions agreed to offer remedial measures but so far the NBTC has yet to approve the company's measures.

Birathon said that after dropping HBO from its channel, 7,400 subscribers had lodged complaints with TrueVisions. So far, only 730 members of gold and platinum packages, under which HBO programmes were available, had terminated the contract. These two packages have a total of about 300,000 subscribers.



**BIRATHON**