



AIS chief technology officer Kriengsak Wanichnatee (second left) and Mantosh Malhotra (centre), head of Southeast Asia and the Pacific at Qualcomm, celebrate an agreement on wireless broadband.

AIS unveils new 4.5G network

SUCHIT LEESA-NGUANSUK

Mobile leader Advanced Info Service (AIS) has developed its wireless broadband network to support the parade of upcoming 4.5G smartphones in Thailand as the company seeks to serve the proliferation of data.

In collaboration with chipset maker Qualcomm, the country's largest mobile operator yesterday rolled out its commercial LTE Advanced service, or 4.5G network.

"We expect at least 30% of the 15-18 million new smartphone shipments to Thailand this year to be LTE-Advanced or 4.5G-enabled handsets," said Wasit Wattanasap, vice-president for radio planning and operations at AIS.

LTE Advanced offers ultra-fast network speeds of 150-300Mbps, which is 130% faster than LTE 4G in terms of upload speeds and 150% faster for download speeds.

"Our 4.5G network can offer speeds of up to 400Mbps, while the network capacity can scale up to gigabit-per-second," Mr Wasit said.

As of December 2016, AIS had 14 million 4G subscribers out of its total of 41 million subscribers.

Suwit Pruckwattananon, country manager for Thailand and Myanmar of Qualcomm, said it is possible to see 4.5G

smartphones with mid-range prices starting from 7,000 baht this year, instead of only being available in the high-end smartphone segment.

Qualcomm plans to unveil its new chipset on smartphones to support high-speed mobile services like video streaming for virtual reality through peer-to-peer connectivity, high-definition music and movies, and the massive amount of data generated from Internet of Things and cloud computing services.

Kriengsak Wanichnatee, chief technology officer of AIS, said the company will invest 45 billion baht to expand its mobile network coverage and increase capacity to accommodate exploding mobile data.

"The average annual mobile data usage of AIS customers in 2017 is expected to double from last year, driven mainly by our new exclusive video programming such as HBO and Netflix," he said.

Mantosh Malhotra, the head of Southeast Asia and the Pacific for Qualcomm, said Singapore and Thailand are on the forefront of LTE Advanced technology in Southeast Asia.

"I believe the adoption of LTE Advanced or 4.5G-enabled smartphones will be faster than the pace of 4G technology, as 4.5G phone prices are expected to be more affordable," Mr Malhotra said.