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Schools in Chiang Rai to join the WiMax revolution

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SCHOOLS IN Chiang Rai will enjoy free broadband wireless Internet service thanks to the national telecom regulator, TOT and Mae Fah Luang University.

The 21 schools will surf the Web using WiMax-certified equipment - or worldwide interoperability for microwave access. This equipment allows high-speed connections within 30 kilometres of a site, which in this case will be at the university.

It is an alternative to cable or digital subscriber lines. WiMax is delivered via the TOT 2.4 gigahertz spectrum.

National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) secretary-general Suranan Wongvithayakamjorn said on Friday it would sign an agreement for the trial with the university and TOT on February 16. It should start this year.

The "tele-centre for rural education and development" is costing Bt70 million, Bt33 million of which will be contributed by the NTC.

TOT provides equipment and

maintenance equal to Bt37 million while the university contributes technology training and educational materials to the 21 participating junior secondary schools.

The NTC project is part of its public-service obligation policy to provide telecommunication services across the country.

Suranan said it helped the NTC test and learn the technology as part of its formulation of WiMax licensing regulations.

TOT and Shin Satellite have NTC approval to conduct WiMax trials.

Until now TOT has used satellite technology for telephone services in remote areas, but if tests are successful it may switch to cheaper WiMax-certified technology.

University vice president for planning and external relations Associate Professor Nareewan Chintakanond said its information technology students would learn about WiMax along with TOT and the NTC.

In addition to WiMax service each of the participating schools will receive 20 computers.

Internet training will be given to

tambon administrations in the school areas, too.

University information technology dean Dr Thongchai Yooyatevong said the maximum connection speed was two megabits per second.

A teacher at one of the participating schools said students were excited.

Some of the schools do not have computers, and others have old ones. The schools with computers have been using fixed lines to access the Internet. The teacher said students used the Internet to find information for school assignments.