

**AVIATION**

# NokScoot set to go after shareholder greenlight

**BOONSONG KOSITCHOTETHANA**

The plan to set up NokScoot as a discount carrier to provide medium and long-haul services out of Thailand is gaining momentum with the blessing from SET-listed Nok Air's shareholders.

The shareholders last week endorsed the business plan and mechanisms required to get the new airline — a joint venture between Thai budget carrier Nok Air and Scoot, Singapore Airlines' budget long-haul carrier — off the ground.

According to Nok Air executives, NokScoot will now proceed with the application for an air operator's certificate (AOC), the licence to use aircraft for commercial purposes, from the Civil Aviation Department.

NokScoot's exact launch date appears indefinite because of the country's uncertain political and economic outlook, though Nok Air management told shareholders that it still aims to begin commercial flights by the end of this year.

The airline will kick off with one Boeing

777-200 wide-body aircraft with a second aeroplane of similar type expected in the second quarter of next year.

NokScoot plans to add two B777-200 jets annually to its fleet and all the aircraft will be leased from Singapore Airlines.

NokScoot's launch is mostly likely to fall behind Thai AirAsia X which is expected to announce next Tuesday the specific time-frame for its commercial start-up as the first Thailand-based long-haul low-fare airline.

Technically speaking, Thai AirAsia X, part of Malaysia's AirAsia X, is ready to start commercial flights with an AOC from the Civil Aviation Department already secured and one Airbus 330-300 wide-body jet ready to fly since January. The airline started its charter flights on April 1 from Bangkok to Norita.

Both NokScoot and Thai AirAsia X are looking at the same market — traffic between Thailand and East Asia which includes Japan, South Korea and China beyond 3.5-hour flying radius from Bangkok.