SINGAPORE: You may soon be able to chat and send SMS on your mobile phone as you zoom from one European city to another.

But, if you want to shout "I'm leaving on a jet plane" while flying from Singapore to Europe, or from the Republic to anywhere within Asia, you may have to wait awhile longer.

A check with six international carriers — Air France, British Airways, Lufthansa, KLM Royal Dutch, Qantas and Singapore Airlines (SIA) — flying directly to destinations within Europe from the Republic revealed that they would not be allowing the use of mobile phones on their flights any time soon.

This is despite the European Commission's paving the way on Monday for in-flight use of mobile phones across the continent, when it introduced new rules harmonising the legal and technological conditions regarding their use. The 27 European Union member states have six months to comply with the new rules.

Airlines such as Air France and Qantas, which are rolling out the use of mobile phones on their flights, have limited their use to some flights within Europe and Australia respectively.

While the subject is on the radar screens of airlines and aviation regulators across Asia, they will be watching the rollout in Europe with interest before deciding to introduce the use of such devices, say industry observers.

For example, flag carriers may have to comply not just with their own countries’ regulations, but also of those they would be flying over, noted Assistant Professor Terrence Fan of the Singapore Management University.

Some airlines have been quick to announce plans allowing the use of mobile phones on their flights. European low-cost carrier Ryanair, for example, will fit 20 planes with mobile-phone technology by June, followed by the rest of its fleet, reported The Times.

Last month, Emirates said it would be investing some US$27 million (S$37 million) to equip its fleet with a system allowing mobile phones to be used safely. The service will only be activated when the aircraft is at cruising altitude, and cabin crew will have full control over the system, including the ability to prevent voice calls at certain times, such as during night flights.

For passengers who need to make urgent calls but can't use their mobile phones, the option now is to use a plane's satellite phones. For example, a passenger on SIA will need to pay a minimum of US$5.90 for the initial minute, and US$0.59 for every six-second block thereafter.

While they agree that there is a high demand among passengers to use mobile phones on flights, aviation analysts TODAY spoke to were divided over when they would be rolled out in Asia.

Unlike the EU, there is no single aviation regulatory body on the continent to implement a common framework allowing the use of mobile phones, said Assistant Professor Fan.

"Technically, it can be done. But, I don't know if there is enough political will. It could drag on for some time," he added.

Flight International regional managing editor (Asia) Nicholas Ionides, however, is more optimistic, saying travellers would be using mobile phones on flights here in the "next few years".

"The use of mobile phones in flight is inevitable and will become a fact of life. It's just a matter of time, and getting the regulators on board," he said.

Even if the regulators are agreeable, the final call may still be with the airlines.

"You don't want phones ringing and people talking while you are sleeping on a flight," said aviation consultant Prithpal Singh.

Said an SIA spokesperson: "This is a matter still under study and a decision has yet to be made. We will decide on whether or not to introduce such a service onboard based on the needs and preferences of our customers, as well as the social implications and regulatory requirements." - TODAY/ra