Handphones will have to stay switched off

No plans to allow its use on flights out of Singapore

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Last month, Emirates said it would be investing some US$27 million ($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.”