

## **Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia agree on cheap roaming charges**

By USANEE MONGKOLPORN  
THE NATION  
Chiang Rai  
Published on August 3, 2009

**The national telecom regulators of Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia will jointly seek ways to lower the roaming tariffs paid by their nationals when calling home from any of the other two countries.**

Sudharma Yoonaidharma of Thailand's National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), said the three countries had reached a preliminary agreement at the 15th Asean Telecommunications Regulators' Council (ATRC) meeting hosted by the NTC from July 27-29 in Thailand.

The agreement will see the three countries' watchdogs jointly pilot the study on the possibility of regulating and standardising the international roaming (IR) tariffs.

The move is aimed to create fair IR tariffs and will benefit Asean free trade, he added.

Sudharma cited the disparity in the Asean roaming tariffs studied by the international research house Synovate on the international roaming voice market in Asean presented to the ATRC meeting by Singapore's national regulatory body.

According to the study, most retail roaming charges in Asean are significantly higher than local substitutes for calling home such as local mobile international calls in roaming destinations, which it attributed to high inter-operator tariffs - wholesale prices charged by host operators to home-country operators - and also high roaming retail price margins, suggesting there was room for price reduction.

Increasing travel within Asean has pushed up roaming usage and is one driver for the possible standardisation of Asean roaming tariffs.

Many mobile-phone users may hesitate to use the IR service due to the difference between IR charges and cheaper domestic call rates. The promotion of reasonable IR charges would encourage the travellers to use more IR service, it said.

It said government intervention in the form of regulations or incentives would be needed in reducing roaming prices, though a ceiling roaming price might hurt the profits of telecom operators and drive them to find ways to recoup them.

The paper also referred to the Eurotariff cap, which was introduced on June 30, 2007 by the European Commission in all 27 member states, to set a ceiling on charges to mobile-phone users for making or receiving calls while travelling in another EU countries.

The EU roaming regulation is applicable for three years, during which time the tariff will drop step by step and the EU Commission and national telecom regulators will monitor implementation.

In the first year the Eurotariff was €0.49 per minute for calls made outside home countries and €0.24 per minute for calls received. The rates dropped to the present €0.43 and €0.019 respectively.

Before the roaming legislation, the average retail charge for roaming calls was €1.15, according to the Synovate study. After the Eurotariff implementation, consumers were able to save up to 60 per cent on roaming charges.

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/search/read.php?newsid=30108911&keyword=atrc>