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Users to get 100-minute call perk

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The telecom regulator, in collaboration with five mobile operators, is offering 100 minutes of voice calls for 45 days as part of public assistance during the coronavirus outbreak.

Mobile users can apply for the scheme from May 1-15. They can press *170* followed by their 13-digit ID number, then press # before dialing. Some 50 million subscribers are expected to benefit from the scheme.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the assistance applies to all mobile networks.

Users with three mobile numbers from different operators can use combined assistance of 300 minutes via their three numbers.

It applies to both postpaid and prepaid users. However subscriptions by foreigners or corporate names are not eligible for the scheme.

"Today there are 130 million subscriptions of mobile service in the country, more than 90% of which are in the prepaid system," said Mr Takorn. According to the NBTC, 70% of the prepaid system customers are crucially using voice call service.

Voice call still serves as a major communication way, particularly for mobile users in provinces, he said.

On April 10, the NBTC kicked off a campaign to allow mobile users to apply for 10 gigabyte of free data usage for a month.

Some 13 million subscribers have applied for the 10GB assistance. Those with unlimited data plans or a long-term prepaid plans are not eligible for the scheme and each subscriber has the right to apply only

once, regardless of how many phone numbers they have.

The 100-minute free call assistance came after the NBTC held talks with five mobile operators three times, he said.

Previously, the NBTC pressured the operators into cutting service fees by 10-30% to ease public hardship during the difficult time and allowing all postpaid users to delay phone bill payment to three months without having service cut.

However, the call was spurned by the operators, which insisted they have provided special packages with low fees for a month to help ease public hardship.

The operators also indicated that users with good payment records can usually extend the deadline of their payment from two to three months without having their service cut.