

South Korea approves sale of Apple's iPhone

(AP) -- South Korea's telecommunications regulator said Wednesday that Apple Inc. can sell its hit iPhone in the country - potentially shaking up a cell phone market controlled by domestic manufacturers.

The development comes a month after Apple cleared the way to enter China's massive cell phone market as well. As part of its deal with wireless carrier China Unicom Ltd., Apple is expected to begin selling the phone in China in the fourth quarter.

The Korea Communications Commission approved the sale of the device at a meeting attended by its five commissioners, said spokesman Lee Sang-hun.

The introduction of the iPhone has been keenly awaited in South Korea, where the handset market is dominated by Samsung Electronics Co., LG Electronics Inc. and other domestic manufacturers.

Apple spokesman Steve Park said the company had no comment on the commission's decision and added that nothing was decided or planned on the iPhone's release in South Korea.

Local service providers, however, said they are in talks with Cupertino, Calif.-based Apple regarding the iPhone.

"We will try to release the iPhone as soon as possible," said Yeom Woo-jong, a spokesman for KT Corp.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing

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KT officials it did not identify, said the company plans to start selling iPhones in South Korea next month.

Lauren Kim, a spokeswoman for SK Telecom Co., also said her company was in discussions with Apple.

According to Apple's iPhone Web site, the device is available in nearly 90 countries or territories.

South Korean law requires companies that provide so-called location-based services - such as the maps and directions on the iPhone - to obtain government permission, said Oh Sang-jin, director of the Korea Communications Commission's privacy protection and ethics division.

The commission decided that to facilitate the iPhone's entry to South Korea, local telecommunication service providers can obtain permission on Apple's behalf. The commission sought a "flexible way to apply Korean law to Apple's case," Oh said.

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