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**B3****Common tower policy  
for telcos soon in effect**By **LOUELLA DESIDERIO**

The government is set to implement a common tower policy wherein telcos would no longer be allowed to build cell sites but instead lease space from a private tower company, a move expected to benefit existing carriers, new players, as well as improve and make cost of services lower for customers.

With the implementation of the policy, the third telco player should at least invest \$3 to \$4 billion in the next five years.

Presidential Adviser on Economic Affairs and Information Technology Communications Ramon Jacinto told reporters yesterday the Cabinet has decided to implement a common tower policy as a solution to the lack of cell towers to provide adequate service in the country.

"There's a Cabinet decision to implement a common tower policy, meaning to say, operators will co-locate in a common tower," he said.

Under the policy, private firms or tower companies would be building cell sites to be leased to telcos.

Jacinto said each cell site would be able to accommodate three to four telco players.

Telcos which have existing cell sites would also have the option to cell their towers to the tower companies.

The location of the towers would be decided based on consultations with the telco industry.

A common tower policy is expected to offer a solution to the lack of cell sites in the country as this would allow for quicker deployment, remove redundancy in the location of towers, as well as do away with the problem faced by telcos when it comes to obtaining permits for building cell sites.

It would likewise allow telcos to free up capex spent in constructing cell sites and level the playing field by enabling both big and small operators to utilize the towers.

Jacinto said the policy would also provide benefits to consumers in terms of better services and lower costs.

At present, the country has 16,000 cell towers which are not enough to cater to the demand of customers.

Jacinto said the country, which has a population of over 100 million, requires 50,000 towers with each tower having an average cost of \$100,000 or total investment of \$5 billion.

He said American Tower, which is engaged in the operation and development of wireless communication infrastructure, has expressed interest in building cell towers in the country, along with two other firms.

"Next month, we will roll out the guidelines for the common tower policy," he said.

Actual implementation, meanwhile, could take place in the first quarter of next year.

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