



## Cuba

# Cuba is launching full internet access on mobile phones

**CUBANS WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS THE internet on their mobile phones beginning this week, state-run telecoms monopoly Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba SA (ETECSA) has announced, marking a milestone for what has long been one of the Western Hemisphere's least-connected countries.**

Nearly half of the Communist-run country's 11.2 million residents have mobile phones, although not all will be able to afford mobile internet.

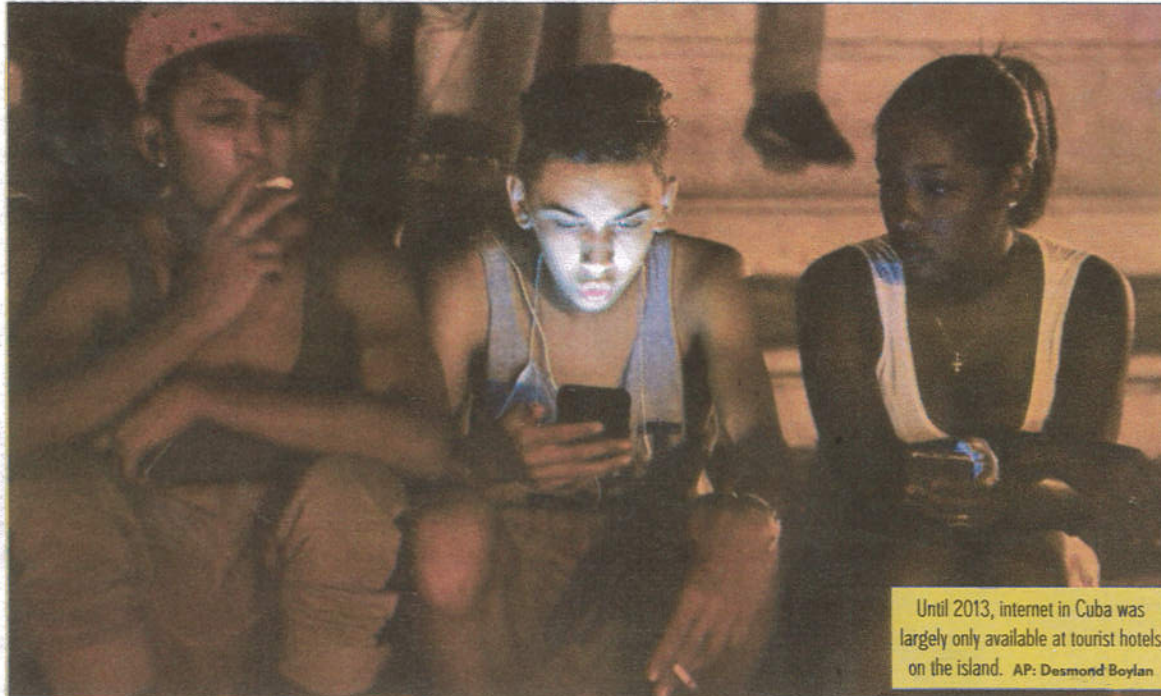
In a news show broadcast late on Tuesday, ETECSA executives announced a range of packages valid for 30 days from 600 MB for the equivalent of \$AUD9.60 to 4 GB for \$41.16. Without a package, 100 MB will cost users \$13.72.

The cost will be out of reach for many Cubans as the average state wage is around \$41.16 per month, and many people rely on remittances from relatives abroad or side gigs to get by.

"It was about time this became a possibility for Cubans too," said Havana resident Joaquin Montiel, 58.

"But for some, like me, it's still a remote one."

Mr Montiel said he would not be able to afford a mobile phone with 3G



Until 2013, internet in Cuba was largely only available at tourist hotels on the island. AP: Desmond Boylan

technology on his wage of less than \$27.44 per month as a salesman in a state company.

A long time coming for Cubans Cuba has lagged far behind most countries in internet access, whether because of a lack of cash, a long-running US trade embargo or concerns about the flow of information.

Until 2013, internet was largely

only available to the public at tourist hotels on the island.

But the Government has since made boosting connectivity a priority, introducing cybercafes and outdoor Wi-Fi hotspots and slowly starting to hook up homes to the web.

"It will be good to be able to connect to the web with greater comfort," said Guillermo Diaz, 38, who frequently

heads to his a Wi-Fi hotspot in a park near his home in order to video-chat with family who emigrated to the United States.

Many Cubans complain about having to brave insects and the elements at the hotspots, which also lack privacy.

ETECSA vice president Tania Velazquez said the company would

be rolling out the service over several days in order to avoid the network congestion that occurred during mobile internet testing earlier this year.

Many Cubans also complained they could not use their mobile phones for making calls or sending text messages during the tests.

"The quality of service will be a key factor during the rollout of mobile internet," said Norges Rodriguez, one of the editors of YucaByte, a Cuban media outlet on telecoms and their impact on society.

Ms Velazquez announced that access to state-run applications and websites like EcuRed, a Cuban Wikipedia, would be significantly cheaper than access to the World Wide Web.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who succeeded Raul Castro in April, has championed greater connectivity, underscoring the potential for internet to boost the economy and enable Cuba to better defend its revolution online.

He opened a Twitter-account in October to much fanfare, and many government officials have followed his lead.

Reuters