

Pay more as unlimited free calls across networks end

Mobile Tariffs Increase 10-45% For Prepaid Customers

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New Delhi:

The days of unlimited free voice calls across networks are over for Indian telecom customers — at least for prepaid users — with Airtel and Vodafone Idea joining Reliance Jio in raising tariffs by up to 45%.

The price hikes come after a period of nearly three years, or since September 2016 when Reliance Jio had entered the market with highly-aggressive tariff plans, which included unlimited free voice and dirtcheap data tariffs. Last month, loss-making Airtel and Vodafone Idea had announced that they would be raising tariffs and Reliance Jio, which has been reporting profits, joined them but had refrained from disclosing the details.

On Sunday, Airtel and Vodafone Idea increased tariffs from December 3, the hike ranging between 10% and 45%, while also making the minimum monthly entry plan expensive, hiking it from Rs 35 to Rs 49. Reliance Jio said that it will be increasing the tariffs on its 'all-in-one' plans by 40% from December 6.

Airtel and Vodafone Idea have kept their post-paid customers out of the tariff hikes, considering they are already high-paying users and on an average pay around Rs 499 per month.


Earlier, Reliance Jio had decided to pass on a 6 paise interconnect charge burden to its subscribers, and its rivals Bharti and Vodafone Idea followed suit on Sunday.

The tariff hikes impact voice calling in a big way, with customers getting limited minutes (under fair usage policy, or FUP) when calling to customers of other networks. For example, on Vodafone Idea, a Rs 299 charge for 28 days will give 1,000 minutes free calls to other networks, beyond which 6 paise per minute will be charged. Airtel also said that FUP will apply to all its 'unlimited calling' plans.

Voice calls will, however, continue to be completely free when customers call someone on the same network.

Analysts welcomed the hikes, saying it is "a must" to keep the Indian telecom businesses viable, and added that there is space for even more tariff revisions. "We are still amongst the cheapest tariff markets in the world," Sanjay Kapoor, former CEO of Airtel India, who analyses the sector closely, told **TOI**.

HIKE AFTER THREE YEARS



- Tariff increase comes after a period of three years
- Calls outside home network to be charged at 6 paise per minute (Trai's interconnect rate) after end of free-calling minutes
- Minimum monthly entry plan at ₹49 now against ₹35 previously
- India still remains the cheapest telecom tariffs market in the world
- Airtel and Vodafone Idea hikes are effective from Dec 3, Jio from Dec 6