

Telecom Alert | Delivering Clarity

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Telecom Regulator Authority of India (TRAI) has recommended that Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) extend their prepaid offers

Background:

In the event of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown, TRAI has expressed its desire that TSPs extend the validity of their prepaid packs until at least 03 May 2020 (current end date of COVID-19 lockdown). The extension of prepaid services could ensure uninterrupted mobile connectivity during the lockdown period.

Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio, Vodafone-Idea and BSNL had extended the prepaid pack validity for low average revenue per user (ARPU) subscribers and talktime credits earlier. The extension will last up to a week after April 14 (last day of the 21 day lockdown period announced in March). The Government has now announced the lockdown period is extended up to 03 May 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Airtel and Vodafone-Idea had extended the prepaid pack validity and has also given some talktime credits till April 17 for around 180 million users (their combined user base is nearly 600 million users). BSNL had extended the validity of the packs up to April 20. Jio had offered 100 minutes of calls and 100-odd text messages as a complimentary feature for their around 90 million JioPhone users up to April 17.

On April 17, Vodafone Idea announced extension of incoming service for 90 million of its low-income prepaid customer base that are using feature phones. Bharti Airtel is also extending prepaid validity of 30 million low-income customers. Reliance Jio has announced that every Jio user will continue to receive incoming calls. These extensions are in place until May 3 (last day of current lockdown).

Recommendations:

TRAI had sought details of the steps being taken by TSPs to ensure availability of uninterrupted telecom services to customers on a "priority basis". It has expressed desire that all the TSPs should extend the offers to more subscribers but has received a backlash from three private carriers who have asked the government to compensate them from the USO fund for taking these measures.

In identical letters to all five TSPs, TRAI has also sought details of the number of prepaid users who were given a talktime credit of Rs. 10 (or more) to ensure continuous connectivity during the initial lockdown. It had also sought details of

what percentage of the total prepaid user base these customers made up for each TSP on March 24 2020.

No further directives have been issued by TRAI as TSPs have complied with by extending prepaid validity for low-income users until May 3.

Sources:

- <https://telecom.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/lockdown-telcos-should-extend-prepaid-offers-says-traï-official/75140218>
- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-news/trai-to-telcos-extend-prepaid-validity-so-users-get-uninterrupted-services-during-lockdown/articleshow/74885445.cms?from=mdr>
- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/stocks/news/trai-no-fresh-directive-on-prepaid-validity-benefits-as-telcos-have-complied/articleshow/75391425.cms?from=mdr>

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