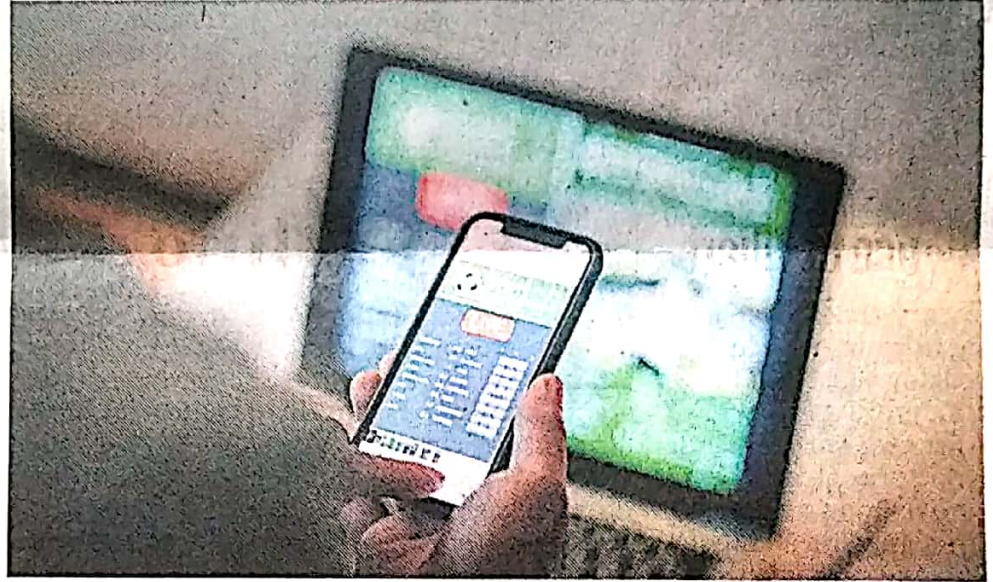


Online betting thriving as legality remains grey

Lawyers see a surge in betting-related cases during IPL and election seasons

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PIC FOR REPRESENTATION

In the wake of a recent suicide caused by unpaid online betting debts (see box), the unregulated gambling industry is back in the spotlight. According to reports, the online betting industry in India is worth an estimated Rs 8,20,000 crore.

With no definitive law governing online betting, it's largely a grey area legally speaking, lawyers say. "Online betting is currently operational in India. But one cannot give a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer when it comes to the question of its legality," says advocate Ankit A Mishra.

"Multiple laws come into place such as the Consumer Protection Act and IT Act. One of the primary acts dealing with this is the Public Gaming Act, 1867. While this is not up to date on the topic of online betting, the law is subject to regulation by each state," he explains.

In Karnataka, offline betting is illegal under The Karnataka Police Act, says advocate Indra Dhanush. "But when it comes to online betting, there is no proper law in place prohibiting it. Online betting is done openly," he explains. He sees a surge in betting-related cases during the IPL, football and election seasons.

In early February, the Karnataka government announced it would formulate a new law to check cricket betting and online gaming. This came after concerns were raised about the impact of betting on the state's youth, in the Assembly.

In December 2023, the central government banned 174 betting and

gaming apps. Some of the apps on the banned list were Mahadev, Parimatch, Fairplay, 1XBET, Lotus365, Dafabet and Betwaysatta.

"In India, betting is seen as either a game of skill or game of chance. When it's the latter it is illegal, but when it involves skill it is permissible," says Ashita Bhagwan, a lawyer.

Mishra explains, "Sports betting and game-fixing is not allowed, however, the new-age fantasy gaming apps allow users to play against other participants, make one's own team and place bets (for a lack of a better/enacted term). These are taken to be under the 'game of skill' category and therefore, they are allowed to operate currently."

Psychological angle

Kala Balasubramanian, a psychotherapist, has been dealing with a few cases of gambling addiction. She says, "When the player wins money, the brain generates dopamine. But when the person starts seeking the dopamine high, the impact of the small wins reduces, so they are forced to bet more and larger amounts of money to achieve the same high." This leads to problem behaviour, which she defines as behaviour that disrupts the person's relationships, fi-

nances and daily life. She highlights the fact that it is not unusual for gambling addiction to lead to other issues such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and even suicide.

Kala shares that people dealing with addiction are in dire need of family support. "The family gives up on them because of the nature of the problem. So we first advise the family to support them," she tells *Metrolife*. They also recommend healthy ways through which the patient can get a dopamine hit, such as exercise, apart from joining support groups.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Earlier this week, Darshan Babu's 23-year-old wife Ranjitha was found dead at her home in Chitradurga. She allegedly killed herself as she was unable to face the pressure from money lenders whom her husband had borrowed from to pay online betting debts. Darshan, an engineer, had borrowed about Rs 1.5 crore to place bets on the IPL matches.