

Sports Betting 8 June 2020

ICE Asia panel: Impact of pandemic could boost online gaming in India

By Iqbal Johal



The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a surge of interest in online gaming in India, both from the public and international operators, which could lead to an acceleration in the regulation process, according to an ICE Asia Digital panel.

While skill-based games such as daily fantasy sports are legal in India, sports betting and games of chance are perceived to be illegal, and are unlicensed.

But according to **Ranjana Adhikari, co-head of media entertainment & gaming at Nishith Desai Associates,**

lockdown forcing people to move online has seen business in the Indian gaming industry surge.

Speaking at ICE Asia Digital, she said: "Despite the Indian gaming industry being a very prohibitive regime, there is a very keen interest from international operators offering remote gaming services. I definitely see increasing interest from foreign operators in the market, but the one thing that is a deterrent is stability in policy decisions of India."

"But during COVID, the Indian gaming industry has seen a terrific surge in its business. The online gaming industry is expected to reach revenue of \$2bn by 2022 and despite COVID-19 the mark should still be met."

"We also saw a 24% increase in traffic in online gaming between February and March. Interestingly India is a developing nation, but lockdown has seen an acceleration of people moving to online in general and getting used to it."

While wider regulation might still be a way off, the pandemic might have accelerated the process, according to Adhikari.

She added: "I believe that practically regulation is still some time away because of the time these things take in India, but COVID may have accelerated the interest in regulating this industry."

"Still only after COVID, will we really understand how it will pan out for regulation of sports betting or gambling."