

E-gaming industry wants to be part of TN panel on online rummy

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E-Gaming Federation, the organisation representing the skill-based gaming industry, welcomed the Tamil Nadu government's initiative to set up a committee to examine the adverse effects of online rummy, but sought industry representation on the panel.

"The committee has multiple stakeholders but industry is not included. We are perhaps one of the key stakeholders," said the federation CEO Sameer Barde.

An industry representative can familiarise the committee on the ground realities such as how the industry operates, the safety measures available, and how it can be enhanced, he said.

"If you are planning to protect the interests of the players, there are many ways it can be done. Banning is one of the least effective ways of addressing that concern. We can look at global best practices... see that those can be brought in," he told *BusinessLine*.

Given the complexity of the issues involved, the committee might need more time to examine the matter thoroughly, he added. "The goal of the committee should be to explore the possibility of establishing a framework to regulate the gaming sector as a whole and the skill



E-Gaming Federation's CEO Sameer Barde, addressing the press in Chennai **BIJOY GHOSH**

gaming sector, in particular," Barde said.

Legal precedents

He pointed out that over the last seven decades, High Court and Supreme Court judgements have ruled in favour of the industry when looking into the legality of specific skill-based games. The judgements fundamentally depended on a single unified test—whether the game is predominantly skill-based or not. The Supreme Court's verdict in totality states that all games where there is a preponderance of skill over chance are protected under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution of India.

In August 2021, the Madras High Court held that wherever the better skilled would prevail more than not, is a game of skill,

reinforcing that both rummy and poker are games of skill, said Barde. There can be no enforcement if the industry is not regulated. Anecdotal evidence, based on media reports, is not sufficient for this sort of punitive action, he said.

"If you are trying to save the players, a ban on e-gaming will see legitimate operators leaving. We saw this in Telengana in 2020 where a Chinese company set up an app and the whole scam is around ₹1,200 crore," he alleged. "When the entire industry was banned, the industry was not worth that much," he said.

The Indian gaming market is projected to grow from \$2.2 billion currently to \$7 billion by 2026. With three gaming unicorns, 400-plus gaming companies, 15,000-plus gaming developers, and around 420 million gamers in the fray, the industry holds huge potential. The advent of 5G, metaverse and other new-age technologies will offer a fertile ground for the industry's exponential growth. Any hurried adverse policy at this juncture will prematurely impede the prospects of this budding ecosystem, he said.