

Google briefly removes India payments app for betting violations ahead of IPL

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Paytm is one of India's biggest digital payment apps

Google Friday removed one of India's biggest digital payment apps for several hours from its online store for breaching gambling rules, a day before the start of the lucrative Indian Premier League cricket tournament.

The IPL, the world's wealthiest national league, has previously been plagued by controversies with corruption and match-fixing cases often taking centre stage.

Betting is illegal in India, but the countdown to the 53-day IPL starting Saturday has seen a profusion of online ads for fantasy sports sites, which are allowed in many parts of the country.

Digital payments platform Paytm had recently launched a fantasy cricket tournament that involved cash bets and violated the Google Play Store's policies, the Indian firm said in a statement.

"Today afternoon, we received communication from Google that they are suspending our app because they believe this to be a violation of their Play Store policies on gambling," the company said.

However the app was back on the platform Friday evening after removing a "cashback" feature on "a recently-launched game on the application," the Press Trust of India reported.

"Update: And we're back!" Paytm tweeted.

Android users who downloaded the app earlier were still able to use it for transactions during that time.

Earlier on Friday, Google in a statement said it would not permit any apps in its store that facilitate sports betting or lead "consumers to external websites that allowed them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money or cash prizes".

The Silicon Valley giant did not mention Paytm in the statement.

Cricket has become a key battleground in the fight against spot-

fixing—illegal bets on a certain part of the action, such as how many runs are scored in an over.

The IPL, which is being held in the United Arab Emirates behind closed doors because of the coronavirus pandemic, was hit by a spot-fixing scandal in 2013 which resulted in two teams being banned for two years.

Digital payments platforms have experienced a surge in demand in India in recent months, with their usage doubling in 2020 from a year earlier due to coronavirus restrictions, according to consultancy firm Local Circles.

India's digital payments market is dominated by Google Pay, followed closely by PhonePe, with Paytm ranking a distant third.

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