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## Pakistan Struggles to Contain Surge in Illegal Betting Apps

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Betting remains banned in Pakistan under the Prevention of Gambling Act of 1977, yet illegal online platforms continue to penetrate the country through smartphones and social media. Apps such as Binomo, 1xBet, Bet365, and others have reached millions of users, despite operating outside the law.

The issue intensified in 2024 and 2025 with high-profile figures implicated. YouTube star Saad ur Rehman, widely known as *Ducky Bhai*, was arrested in August 2025 at Lahore airport for allegedly promoting foreign gambling apps. Prosecutors accused him of advertising platforms like Binomo and 1xBet to his nine million YouTube subscribers, and investigators believe he even acted as an unlicensed representative for one app. Similarly, cricket legend Wasim Akram drew criticism for appearing in an advertisement for a betting platform in 2024, sparking debate about celebrities endorsing illegal gambling.

Cricket has been at the center of the controversy. The Pakistan Super League (PSL) became a target for betting-linked sponsorships. Karachi Kings struck a deal with “1XBAT,” later revealed to be a surrogate name for 1xBet. Lahore Qalandars signed with “Melbet,” closely resembling another gambling site. Other teams made similar arrangements with firms connected to Wolf777Casino and comparable platforms.

These partnerships drew backlash from fans and former players. Rashid Latif, a former national captain, publicly condemned the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for allowing surrogate sponsorships while simultaneously penalizing players for corruption. During a PSL

match, star batsman Mohammad Rizwan even covered a betting company's name on his shirt to avoid promoting the brand.

The Peshawar High Court weighed in on the matter in 2024, ruling that betting firms could not sponsor PSL teams or display their logos. Following the decision, the PCB assured courts that future tournaments would prohibit such partnerships.

Foreign betting platforms have relied heavily on Pakistani influencers to expand their reach. Apps disguised as “trading” or “crypto” platforms were marketed aggressively on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Influencers often embedded promotions within entertainment videos, luring young audiences with promises of quick profits.

The arrest of Ducky Bhai signaled a turning point. Authorities allege he worked with multiple betting companies and received payments to advertise their apps. His case has become a landmark in Pakistan's ongoing crackdown, with officials warning that more influencers may soon face investigation.

Other celebrities have also been tied to the controversy. Wasim Akram's appearance in a betting app campaign led to public criticism, although no formal charges were filed against him. Fans and commentators, however, raised concerns that cricket icons were normalizing gambling culture in a country where it is strictly prohibited.

Despite bans and court rulings, the apps continue to operate from offshore jurisdictions, making enforcement difficult. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has blocked hundreds of gambling websites and apps, while the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has begun targeting promoters under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016.

In addition, the State Bank of Pakistan has been urged to tighten financial oversight, as many users make deposits through unofficial channels. Critics argue that without stricter monitoring, offshore betting platforms will continue to evade detection.

The rise of betting apps has triggered intense public debate. Analysts like Dr. Nauman Niaz and Rashid Latif warn that cricket's deep connection to gambling risks undermining the integrity of Pakistan's most popular sport. Social media users have also voiced frustration that celebrities who profit from illegal endorsements often face lighter scrutiny than the companies running the operations.

By August 2025, the PTA confirmed it had blocked more than 180 illegal betting apps in a single month. Still, questions remain over whether outright prohibition is effective. Some experts argue that regulation, rather than a blanket ban, could offer more protection for consumers. The government, however, has shown no sign of considering legalization, instead vowing stricter enforcement.

For now, Pakistan faces the challenge of cutting off access to these platforms while holding influencers and organizations accountable. The continued spread of illegal betting apps demonstrates the need for stronger coordination among regulators, courts, and law enforcement agencies.