



Bliss in Beruwala

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Sikkim rakes in moolah by betting



The state has been granted licence to run online games and sports betting centre within its territory.

IN Sikkim's Gangtok you can bet without the fear of getting caught. While walking down one of the country's cleanest MG Road market, a poster of India's first legal betting sports centre caught my attention. Hesitatingly, I took the stairs and found myself caught between big television screens telecasting different live sports. "Welcome to the world of sports betting," said an attendant who asked me to pick up a sport and place my bet with the help of rate charts.

After watching a Bangladesh Premier League match for about 15 minutes I placed ₹500 on how the next player would be dismissed. After playing a couple of shots the batsman mistimed and was dismissed LBW and I made ₹1,500. The payment was made in cash and I got a receipt which carried the stamp of the Sikkim government.

In India, betting is allowed only on horse racing. Sikkim is the only state to extend it to popular sports. Sports betting in Sikkim happen over the internet, cutting off access from the rest of the country. Golden Gaming, the country's first legal online sports betting and gaming centre, became operational in Sikkim this year.

"We have been granted licence to run online games and sports betting

within the state of Sikkim only. So only those who are physically present in Gangtok can engage in sports betting," said Ratul Sethi of Golden Gaming.

While for the rest of India, cricket remains the favourite game for betting, in the Northeast its football. "Ours is a first-of-its kind venture and will generate fiscal revenues for the state, apart from creating jobs for the local youth," said Sethi who hails from Delhi. According to a senior government official, all the financial transaction taking place at the sports betting centre is monitored by the government through mirror servers. This means all the payment made by and to the customer is scanned by the state government.

The financial transaction, taking place at the state's sports betting centre, is monitored by the government through mirror servers

The government has signed a profit-sharing agreement, under which licence-holders would pay 10 per cent of their profits, or ₹5 crore to the government. Winnings would be taxed at 30 per cent as they come under the Income Tax ambit. There is already an uptick in the number of visitors to the state, according to gambling operators who are optimistic that other states will legalise gambling emulating Sikkim.

According to Roland Lander of All India gaming Federation (AIGF), legalisation of betting will help the government earn a revenue of ₹19,000 crore per year.

By Shashank Shekhar