

Is TS game for 'Sikkim model' gaming industry?

AIGF meets KTR to introduce gaming in Hyderabad

Last month members of the All India Gaming Federation met K T Rama Rao, Minister for Industries, IIT and Municipal Administration, exploring the possibilities of introducing online as well as off-line gaming in Telangana. According to sources, the government will take its own time to take a decision due to the sudden turn of events, including demonetisation of Rs 100 and Rs 1000 notes.

T P VENU

Hyderabad/Gangtok: Believe it or not, there are close to 250 gaming outlets and two casinos spread across the mountainous state of Sikkim and every day people spend close to Rs 40-45 lakh on online gaming and betting. With an undulating terrain ill-suited for agriculture and manufacturing activities, Sikkim, by tweaking its Gaming Act and opening its doors, is betting big on the gaming industry.

The only State in the country apart from Goa to have casinos, the gaming industry (includes online gaming & betting, lotteries and casinos) in Sikkim, according to estimates, is worth Rs 100 crore per annum. The liberal

policies of the government allow even real sport betting in Sikkim.

Rajpal Singh, who heads Skill Development, Sports, Youth Affairs division of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) says, "If betting is made legal with a regulatory body, the government would get revenue. In any case, illegal betting is happening and in 2015 it was estimated at Rs 10 lakh crore."

The 'Sikkim model', as it is being branded, is now postulated as a viable alternative for States to make additional revenue. Queried on the potential of gambling and betting to ruin lives of families, Roland Landers, CEO, All India Gaming Federation (AIGF), said, "A good regulatory

body that stipulates responsible betting is the need of the hour. Revenues from gaming industry can be used as a corpus to train future Olympians. The London Olympics was fully funded from the revenues from sports lottery corpus."

Votaries of the gaming industry are pinning their hopes on the 'Sikkim model' and have been in talks with several State governments, including Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, to legalise betting and open their doors to casinos. Roland says, "According to a 2010 report by KPMG, the estimated betting market in India was worth US\$60 billion. This included the unregulated and illegal betting and gambling in the country."

Indian gaming industry

- Total revenue from the activity is pegged to be in excess of rupees three lakh crore (US\$60 billion).
- According to the International Centre for Sports Security (ICSS), the illegal gross betting and gambling market in India is estimated to be \$150 billion
- Gambling, betting and regulation of other sports fall in the State list as per the Constitution. Hence, Sikkim and Goa tweaked their Gaming Act to allow betting.

Former CBI director Ranjit Sinha said that there was a stigma attached to gambling and betting. Besides, legal issues had made it difficult for the gaming industry to make inroads into other states of the country."