

Teer, Meghalaya's odds-on favourite

Courting fortuneA man books his lucky number at a Teer bookie counter in Shillong. In this only government-approved gambling sport in Meghalaya, archers shoot at a target made of bamboo thatch, and the last two digits of the count of arrows that hit the target make up the day's lucky number.

Meghalaya is home to skilled archers, mainly from the Khasi tribe. And they use the bow and arrow in a gambling game called Teer. The game is part of the State's culture and tradition, and the only wager to get government sanction. The popular pastime takes place not in casinos but on archery grounds.

On all days barring Sunday, 50 archers from far-flung areas assemble around a cylindrical target made of bamboo thatch. For three minutes, each of them shoots 30 arrows at the target. The fusillade is thrilling to watch. The arrows that hit the target are counted, and the last two digits of that total are proclaimed as that day's number.

Meghalaya has over 5,000 Teer bookies, excluding those who operate along the Assam border. Shillong alone has 600 betting counters. Online gambling has a small presence. Seeing the potential for revenue, the State government increased the betting tax from 40% to 50% recently.

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