

Political Opposition Rises Against Himachal Pradesh Lottery Restart



The recent decision by the Himachal Pradesh state government to reintroduce lotteries has drawn sharp criticism from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with State President Rajeev Bindal labeling the move as "harmful." The decision, approved by the Cabinet, seeks to restart state-run lotteries after a 26-year ban, aiming to generate an estimated ₹50-100 crore in annual non-tax revenue for the state. Bindal's comments highlight a political divide on the issue, with the opposition party arguing that the lottery will exploit citizens and promote gambling.

The move to restart the lottery system comes as the state faces significant financial challenges, with its debt burden exceeding ₹1 lakh crore. The government, seeking alternative revenue streams, has cited successful lottery operations in other Indian states, such as Kerala and Punjab, as a model. However, Bindal and other BJP leaders are raising concerns about the potential social impact. They argue that the lottery system, which was previously banned by the BJP-led government in 1999, had a devastating effect on families, leading to financial ruin and even suicides.

In a press conference, Bindal accused the government of promoting "gambling and false hope" instead of focusing on job creation for the state's youth. He contrasted the government's action with its pre-election promise of one lakh permanent government jobs, claiming that the lottery is an attempt to exploit the unemployed. "The government, which had promised to change the

system, has legalized the lottery," Bindal stated, adding that this policy "is not in the interest of the state." He further warned that if the BJP returns to power, it will reverse the decision.

The reintroduction of the lottery is not a new issue in the state's political history. After the 1999 ban, the system was briefly restarted by a Congress government in 2004 but was banned again in 2007 by then-Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh. The BJP's strong condemnation and promise to hold a protest rally in Mandi on August 6 underscore the intensity of the opposition. The party's stance is that a state's prosperity should not be built on the savings and desperation of its citizens. The debate over this policy is likely to continue as the government moves to introduce legislation on the matter during the upcoming monsoon session of the assembly.