

Casino operators woo wary Japanese public after bribery scandal

Written by Administrator

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YOKOHAMA, Japan, Jan 29 (Reuters) - Global casino operators sought to win over a wary Japanese public at an exhibition on Wednesday in the city of Yokohama, after the arrest of a ruling party lawmaker on suspicion of taking bribes has stirred up opposition to the industry.

Anti-gambling protesters gathered outside the exhibition in the port city, which is among the Japanese cities expected to bid for government licences to open “integrated resorts,” or Las Vegas-style complexes that include casinos, shopping arcades and conference centres.

Japanese prosecutors last month arrested Tsukasa Akimoto, previously a senior vice minister overseeing casino policy, on suspicion of taking bribes. Akimoto has denied the allegations.

U.S. casino operator Wynn Resorts Development President Chris Gordon said Yokohama was “an excellent place for an integrated resort” and he was not worried about a possible slow down in the licensing process in the interests of good practice.

“We want to compete in a market where it’s really well-regulated,” he said.

George Tanasijevich, president of Marina Bay Sands, a resort in Singapore operated by Las Vegas Sands Corp, told reporters the government must educate the public “to make sure that we reduce misconceptions about our industry and its impact on the market”.

A Japanese government source said earlier this month on condition of anonymity that the government was considering delaying the process for selecting casino host cities following Akimoto’s arrest.

The government has authorised licences for three integrated resorts and has been expected to receive bids officially from interested localities in 2021. Potential bidders include Yokohama, Tokyo, Osaka - Japan’s three largest cities - and smaller cities including Nagasaki and Wakayama.

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Critics say casinos are likely to increase gambling addiction and could lead to organised crime.

Protesters outside the exhibition waved banners saying Japan does not need casinos.

“Casinos will totally or fully destroy the life of the citizen,” protestor Nobutaka Kishi, a 72-year-old retired man, said. (Reporting by Akiko Okamoto, Chris Gallagher and Ami Miyazaki; Writing by Linda Sieg; Editing by Barbara Lewis)

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