

# Quek bags 25 casino licences

London: Hong Leong group's Tan Sri Quek Leng Chan has grabbed 25 of the 89 casino licences awarded in Britain in the past two years, according to The Business.

Quoting figures from Britain's Gambling Commission sources, the London weekly magazine said the swoop was a major coup for the Malaysian billionaire, who also controls the Thistle Hotel chain as well as Mayfair's upmarket Claremont casino.

The report said Quek, arguably one of the world's biggest high-rollers, now accounted for a remarkable 28% of permissions granted, easily crushing his rivals.

Quek's plan to introduce gambling to Thistle was known but the scale of his ambitions, which could see a casino opened in more than half of his hotels, came as a shock, the magazine added.

The move will cement Quek's status as a top player in British gaming following his acquisition of the Claremont Club last August for GBP 31mil.

The club is reportedly an iconic gambling establishment famous for its high-stakes bridge games between British billionaire James Goldsmith and Lord Lucan.

The raft of Thistle casino approvals, along with the 64 for other companies, has been granted under Britain's 1968 gambling legislation, which did not specifically limit the number of establishments built in Britain.

The magazine noted that other operators granted approval included Stanley Leisure, owned by Malaysian gambling firm Genting and which had been given permission for 16 sites.

The news comes in the wake of last week's announcement of 17 casinos, including the building of Britain's first Las Vegas-

style super casino in Manchester under the 2005 Gambling Act.

The surprise decision where Manchester defeated the two favourites – Blackpool and the Millennium Dome in Greenwich – shocked everyone, including bookies who were reportedly offering 16-1 odds against the city winning the licence.

According to the Financial Times, the decision will spark a bidding scramble by international gaming companies to win the operating licences that Manchester will be able to award.

The independent Casino Advisory Panel, which made the announcement, said the city's size made it the right place to test the social impact of a Last Vegas-style super casino.

Manchester had a catchment area for a casino second only to London and it was an area in need of regeneration at least as much as any of the others we observed, the panel said.

The super casino, on a 5,000-sq-m site with up to 1,250 unlimited slot machines, is to be built in Beswick, a poor area of east Manchester.

It will be based at Sportcity, close to the city of Manchester stadium – built for the Commonwealth Games and now used by Manchester City FC.

The site will also contain an entertainment complex with facilities such as a multi-purpose arena, a swimming pool, an urban sports venue, restaurants, bars, a nightclub and a hotel.

Of the remaining 16, eight large licences were granted to Great Yar-mouth, Kingston-upon-Hull, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, New-ham, Solihull and Southampton. The rest of the eight smaller ones were approved for Bath and North East Somerset, Dumfries and Galloway, East Lindsey, Luton, Scarborough, Swansea, Torbay and Wolverhampton.