

Japanese ruling party eyes bill to legalize casinos in the country

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party plans to propose legislation to legalize casinos in Japan under strict supervision, Jiji Press learned this week. Under the lawmaker-initiated bill, an LDP panel on casinos plans to call for the establishment of an independent watchdog with strong investigative authority in order to prevent crimes. Inspectors of the envisioned organization would be empowered to screen casino business license applications from the private sector, conduct on-site inspections of casino operators, etc.

Inspectors of the envisioned organization would be empowered to screen casino business license applications from the private sector, conduct on-site inspections of casino operators, check and monitor people who work at casinos and certify casino equipment, according to the sources.

The oversight body's operation would be funded by revenues of casino operators, instead of tax revenues. The LDP panel is also considering penalties for casino operators that allow minors to enter their facilities, as well as a ban on the installation of automated teller machines near casinos.

The LDP panel aims to submit the bill at an early date after working out further details, such as specific regulations. To ensure the enactment of the bill, it hopes to gain support from New Komeito, the coalition partner of the LDP, and the top opposition Democratic Party of Japan, the sources said.

In June 2006, the LDP panel drew up the basic policy of launching two or three casinos in Japan in the foreseeable future in a bid to attract foreign visitors to Japan and revitalize regional economies. Under the policy, the casinos

would set up by municipalities and run by private firms.

Casinos are prohibited under Japan's Penal Code, but several municipal governments, including Tokyo, have shown interest in setting up casinos. Around the world, casinos are operated in some 120 countries.