

Taiwan's Executive Yuan Dumps Casino Bill

Taipei (Asia Pulse) – The Executive Yuan approved Wednesday a raft of amendments to the Outlying Islands Development Act during its weekly meeting, but a measure permitting the opening of casinos was not included in the package.

Executive Yuan spokesman Shieh Jhy-wei said the government has no plans at present to legalize the gambling industry, due to a lack of social consensus on the issue.

According to Shieh, the issue is by no means a simple economic affair, rather it also involves legal and moral fronts.

The Executive Yuan is not in a hurry to legalize the disputed gambling industry before a national consensus has been forged, he explained.

Shieh also dismissed as sheer speculation that the Executive Yuan's exclusion of the casino provision had something to do with the coming legislative and presidential elections.

The amendment package approved by the Executive Yuan gives the green light to the opening of duty-free shops on Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu islands.

According a United Evening News report, Penghu County Magistrate Wang Chien-fa was extremely dissatisfied with the outcome and aggressively criticized the central government for turning a blind eye to the need for economic development on remote islands.

Citing estimates by Penghu authorities, the report said that if casinos were opened on the offshore county, it would generate NTD 26 billion in tax revenue per year for the county government, and more than NTD 40 billion (USD 1.24 billion)

worth of foreign and local investment would likely to pour into the county, it added.

Legislator Lin Ping-kun from the Penghu constituency was quoted in the report as voicing a strong suspicion that the Executive Yuan dumped the casino bill to slam the door on outlying islands so as to make an opening possible on Taiwan proper in an effort to lure votes prior to the legislative and presidential polls early next year.

Fielding questions during a question-and-answer session in October at the Legislative Yuan, Council for Economic Planning and Development Chairwoman Ho Mei-yueh said that the government will temporarily hold back from its plan to promote the gambling industry before relevant regulations and laws have been put in place.

Despite the Executive Yuan's failure to pass the full bill, Lin, a lawmaker of the Non-Partisan Solidarity Union (NPSU), said that he is set to call a vote on a similar NPSU-proposed bill before the Legislative Yuan adjourns its current session in late December, according to the report.

The NPSU-initiated bill to allow casinos on outlying islands has been included on the legislative agenda, and the United Evening News report said that the opposition „pan-blue alliance“ of the Kuomintang and the People First Party is willing to back the measure.