

# China may legalise gambling on horses

China may legalise gambling on horse races for the first time since the Communist Party took power in 1949, the official Xinhua news agency said.

The government in Beijing has approved the start of regular horse racing in the central city of Wuhan, and is considering the introduction of betting on those races on a trial basis next year, Xinhua reported.

The experiment is seen as heralding the return of nationwide betting on horses in China, Xinhua said.

„The proposal for betting on horse racing is being reviewed and discussed, but there is no concrete information on when or whether it will begin,“ Xinhua quoted a spokeswoman for the China Sports Lottery Administration Centre as saying.

Wuhan was a centre for horse racing in the early 1900s, but the sport and gambling in general were among a string of vices banned when the Communists won the Chinese civil war.

Horse racing reappeared in the early 1990s as jockey clubs were set up but gambling remains illegal, except for state lotteries.

Chinese scholars have calculated the government loses billions of dollars of potential revenue each year to illegal gambling schemes such as internet betting, underground casinos and private lotteries.

A survey by the Hubei Academy of Social Sciences showed 83 per cent of Wuhan residents thought the introduction of betting would have a positive social impact, and 51 per cent said they were interested in gambling on the races, Xinhua reported.

Qin Zunwen, a researcher who studied betting on horse races, was quoted as saying that once fully operational nationwide, the business could create three million jobs a year in China, yielding 40 billion yuan (AUD 6.24 billion) of tax revenues.

„Initially about 250 horses from different jockey clubs around the country will participate in the races,“ Xinhua quoted a manager at Orient Lucky Horse Group, which will help run the races, as saying. „But betting can only be officially launched when the races draw at least 2,000 horses.“