

Right balance for casinos

The job of keeping watch over Singapore's two casinos will require a delicate balancing act.

On the one hand, there is a need to ensure the gaming tables at Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World at Sentosa, set to open at the end of the year and early 2010 respectively, draw the crowds, so business booms and Singapore benefits from a steady stream of tax income.

Doing this will mean keeping out crime syndicates, including prostitution and money-laundering rings.

On the other, there is the task of protecting the gambler and society from the social impact of allowing large-scale gambling here.

Giving its first glimpse of how this will be done yesterday, the Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) revealed that it will follow a hybrid approach: The statutory board will have two arms – one dedicated mainly to the task of keeping bad hats out, the other to prevent Singaporeans from gambling beyond their means.

It came up with this model after studying how countries like Australia and the United States manage their casinos.

Elaborating on the task before CRA at its first Workplan Seminar yesterday, Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng said in his speech: ,While we seek to reap the job and tourism benefits of the integrated resorts, we must guard against any fallout in crime and social problems.

,The challenge before us is to balance the competing imperatives.'

Mr Wong added that the challenge is made tougher by the fact that Singapore's relative inexperience in operating casinos

means it could prove a tempting target for criminals.

The experience of other cities with casinos reflects the difficulty of the task at hand.