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MPs ON VICE

Keeping resorts free of predators

HOW the Government plans to keep the new integrated resorts (IRs) here free of such predators as prostitutes and loan sharks was a major concern of at least two MPs yesterday.

Existing laws clamp down hard on these activities in commercial and public spaces, but the MPs wanted the Government to reveal if it had a game plan to prevent these vice vultures from moving near the gambling halls.

Drawing on his experience during a visit to Las Vegas, Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines GRC) recalled his encounters with 'immoral' activities outside the casino there. He asked what the Government will do to prevent similar scenes here.

Likewise, Dr Amy Khor (Hong Kah GRC), relating what she had heard from others, said loan sharks loiter even at children's playgrounds in Malaysia's Genting Highlands.

The two MPs' concerns stood out among the issues raised yesterday, which focused on casino entry charges, bans on problem gamblers and entry restriction on minors.

Their concern is also in marked contrast to those of the man in the street.

Public feedback on the draft Bill last year found that few were worried about the Government's ability to curb crime, or corruption, around the casinos.

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng, disclosing this yesterday, said feedback was mainly on the levy Singaporeans and permanent residents have to pay to enter the casino and exclusion orders that ban problem gamblers.

'This suggests there is public confidence in the Government's ability to manage potential law and order issues associated with casinos,' he said when he sought Parliament's approval of the Casino Control Bill.