

# Sands stops publicising lucky punters

Webpages taken down after Govt promises action following MP's query

BY NG KAI LING

MARINA Bay Sands has taken down two webpages announcing winners of cars and cash in its casino, after the Government last week said it was moving to stop such publicity.

The integrated resort took down the two webpages on Wednesday.

Asked why, after earlier saying it had operated within the law, MBS said yesterday: "MBS is fully aligned with all regulations including the advertising regulations as outlined by the Casino Regulatory Authority.

"We work closely with the Singapore Government to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework at all times."

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, which said last week it was looking into the matter, would yesterday say only that it has noted that MBS has removed the relevant pages.

In Parliament last Tuesday, Mr Seah Kian Peng, an MP for Marine Parade GRC, asked if it was legal for casinos to publicise punters' winnings on their websites.

Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan, had said: "They will want to publicise the wins; you will find they never publicise the losses and the consequences of those losses on the gamblers and their families."

He added that his ministry was taking steps to stop such publicity.

The two pages that were on MBS' website were titled Celebrate With The Winners and Mystery Car Jackpot. They listed the names of jackpot winners, the machines they played on, and how much they won. The list chronicled those who have won since last August.

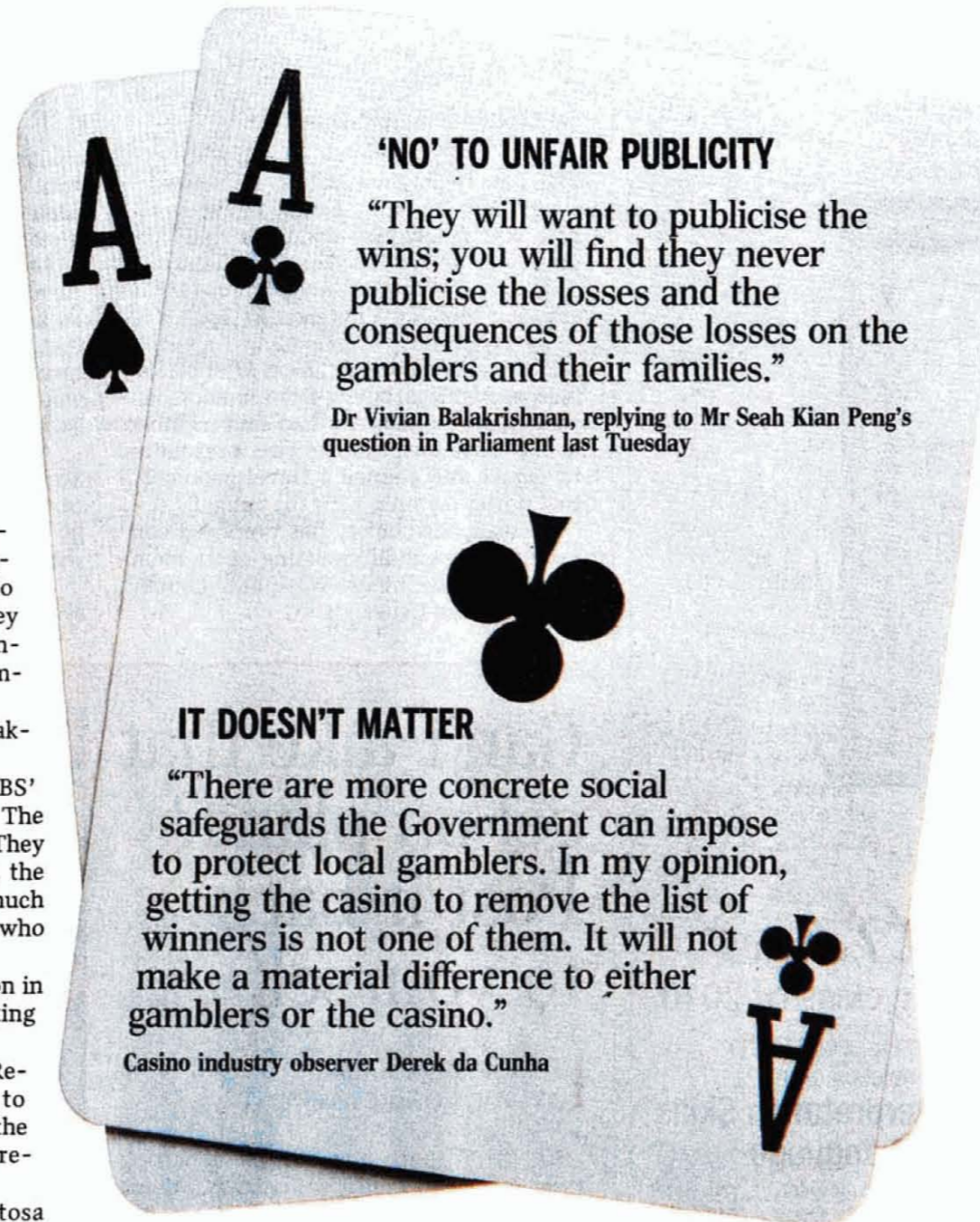
This is not the first time a question in Parliament has led to the IRs backing down on decisions.

In September last year, MBS and Resorts World Sentosa were ordered to stop their shuttle bus services from the city area and the heartland to the resorts.

At the time, Resorts World Sentosa was also rapped for promoting a rewards scheme for which points could be earned at the casinos, and for releasing to the media stories about punters' big wins.

These two instances and the bus shuttles were all judged by the Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) to have contravened the advertising regulations under the Casino Control Act.

Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan said that it was



evident from these cases that the IRs were trying to push the envelope and test the boundaries of the law.

"They try to do some things and if the Government has no objections, then it may be deemed permissible," he said.

"If there are objections then they will back down."

He added: "Now that MBS has taken down the pages, CRA need not express an opinion on whether it is permitted... One can say that this form of publicity may be discouraged even as the Government has not expressed a definitive view."

But to Mr Tony Compton, a lecturer on casino management at the Boston Business School, a private school here, it is clear that MBS broke the law.

"The law basically says there should be no advertisement or promotion of the casinos.

"The webpages are promotions. They say, 'Look at all these people who have won'. It is enticing people to try their luck."

Under the Casino Control Act, the IRs are not allowed to advertise or promote their casinos. If found guilty, the operators can be fined up to \$100,000.

Mr Seah Seng Choon, executive director of the Consumers Association of Singapore, said the lists do not present a full picture of what actually happens at the casinos.

"The fact that they only publish the winners and not the losers may give consumers the false impression that winning is easy."

But Dr Derek da Cunha, author of Singapore Places Its Bets, a book about the two IRs and their economic and social impact, said that having the lists of winners on the MBS website does not entice gamblers to go to the casinos as they are already doing so.

"There are more concrete social safeguards the Government can impose to protect local gamblers," he said.

"In my opinion, getting the casino to remove the list of winners is not one of them. It will not make a material difference to either gamblers or the casino."

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The online announcement of winners could have given the false impression that winning is easy. PHOTO: WWW.MARINABAY-SANDS.COM