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The outcome of Japan's snap election for the lower house of the Diet saw the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) and prime minister Shinzo Abe come out on top following a risky political gambit, in spite of his flagging personal approval ratings.

The leaders of the pro-casino bloc within the Diet, Hiroyuki Hosoda and Takeshi Iwaya, were returned to office. However, Sakihito Ozawa, an opposition lawmaker who has been outspoken in support of IRs lost his seat.

The LDP in partnership with Komeito, now have a two-thirds super majority which will allow for the continued progress of legislation which would allow for the introduction of integrated resorts.

There are two key pieces of legislation that are expected to occur before a tender process could begin, the first of which is the Responsible Gaming Bill, which will then be followed by the IR Implementation Bill.

The LDP and Komeito agreed at a meeting on 21 November to try and submit the Responsible Gaming Bill to the country's parliament before the end of the current legislative session, which is due to end on 9 December.

However, this process may be held up due to a busy schedule and amid the ongoing political tensions with North Korea and it is possible that the bill will pass over to the regular ordinary session in spring 2018.



Yatta! Japan's casino legislation on the move again after a win for Abe

"Abe's win has placed him in a very strong position now as he has further cemented his power base," explained Eric Coskun, senior associate at IGamiX Management and Consulting. "That being said, as we have seen in the past, Abe is quite happy to push the IR plan onto the backburner should any political or economic crisis emerge."

It is predicted that once this legislation is passed,

the debate on the IR Implementation Bill will commence around late spring and into summer.

"We anticipate real movement on this no earlier than mid next year," stated Coskun.

"Abe is clearly pro-gaming yet the assembled 'Expert Committee for IR development' does not have a single member that has even a single day's experience in planning, building

or operating an IR.

"The Japanese have a bad habit of getting caught up in the minutiae and a process that may take 12 months in another country may take up to three or four years in Japan."

Meanwhile potential candidates to host an IR are setting out their stalls, but while over 20 prefectures and cities have displayed an interest, only a small number of these will be

chosen for the first phase of development.

It has been widely suggested that there will be two to three licenses in the first round, distributed between urban centres such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Yokohama and the regional destinations, including Sasebo in Nagasaki prefecture and Tomakomai in Hokkaido prefecture.

"It seems that the Japanese Ministry of Finance, to whom the gaming industry would be reporting, after visiting their counterparts all around the region are considering the idea of trialling a pilot project in a tier 2 city such as Atami in Shizuoka Prefecture, well known for its hot spring resorts," added Coskun.

Speaking on a conference panel at this November's MGS Entertainment Show, Takayoshi Koike, a former investment banker and currently CEO of consultancy service Capital and Innovation estimated that the government would allow up to nine IRs "at most".

He noted that potential locations include Hokkaido, Miyagi, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Osaka, Tokushima, and Nagasaki.

In the case that the IR Implementation Bill is passed in 2018, Koike stated that he expects several local governments to start their respective request for proposals (RFP) soon after, this would then be followed by a selection process conducted by the central government starting in 2019.



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