

New regulation on lotteries by 2008

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The first regulation for the fast-growing lottery industry will be issued next year to stamp out fraud in the sector, which has been on the rise since the country launched its first lottery two decades ago.

Legislators will draw on the experience of other countries and regions to work out the regulation and stipulate aspects of lotteries such as distribution, sales, announcement of results and management of funds, an official with the Legislative Affairs Office (LAO) of the State Council said yesterday.

"Other countries and regions always make laws first before developing the lottery industry, while China has acted to the contrary," Ding Feng, deputy head of LAO's department of political science and law, labor, social security and legislative affairs, told a symposium in Shanghai.

"Lack of laws and regulations on lottery supervision has become a significant factor impeding the sound development of the industry," he said.

Calls for publishing regulations or even a law on lottery supervision have been voiced repeatedly in recent years.

At present, China has only a provisional regulation on the management of lottery distribution and sales, which was issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2002.

"But it's only a departmental regulation," Ding said.

China started drawing up a national regulation more than a decade ago but it has been repeatedly delayed due to divergences among different government departments, such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Civil Affairs and the General Administration of Sport.

"The regulation is expected to be issued next year, a result of growing public attention and the acceleration of the legislation process," Ding said.

Lotteries have generated enormous economic and social returns in China in the past two decades.

The country issued a total of 363 billion yuan (\$49 billion) worth of lottery tickets by the end of last year, and more than a third of the money was spent on public projects such as the development of public sports facilities, education and healthcare for the handicapped.

At the same time, stories of lottery winners continue to fuel the hopes of many who buy the tickets.

Last week, an unidentified person from Gansu Province won the country's largest ever individual lottery prize of 102.7 million yuan (\$13.9 million). The winner bought 20 identical "Double Colour Ball" tickets issued by the China Welfare Lottery at a cost of 40 yuan (\$5.4).

But the industry has also encountered growing problems such as fraud and malpractice.

Last month, a 36-year-old lottery vendor in Anshan, Heilongjiang Province, was jailed for life for taking advantage of a flaw in the Welfare Lottery "3D" system to cash 28 million yuan (\$3.8 million) in lottery tickets.

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In 2004, several people were found guilty of manipulating a scratch-and-win sports lottery in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, and were sentenced to varying terms in prison. The incident saw a lottery tickets contractor cheating his way to the top prizes - a BMW car and 120,000 yuan - by marking lottery tickets and employing four people to falsely claim the prizes.

The real lottery winner, Liu Liang, a young migrant worker, finally received the prize and accepted apologies from local sports authorities.

The authorities have also been stepping up efforts to crack down on lottery fraud.

Last month, the Finance, Public Security, Civil Affairs, Information Industry ministries and the General Administration of Sport jointly launched a campaign to crack down on illegal lottery selling on the Internet.(China Daily)

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