

Vietnam dog racing reaches home stretch

Real estate project to rise on Vung Tau race track after the 25-year license expires at the end of March 2023

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Dog racing, loved by aficionados and despised by animal welfare advocates, will end in Vietnam after March 2023.

The country's remaining dog racing track, located in the beach city of Vung Tau, about two hours drive southeast of Ho Chi Minh City, will close at the expiry of its operator's license.

Sports and Entertainment Services Co (SES), a joint venture between Australia-based Hemlock Services Corporation and Ba Ria-Vung Tau province's Tourism Company, received a 25-year investment license in March 1998, with around US\$5 million in charter capital. The permit has not been renewed.

Nguyen Ngoc My, a Vietnam-born Australian businessman who chairs SES, recalls how the business started: "In 1996, Ba Ria-Vung Tau province's chairman Nguyen Trong Minh asked me a question. He wanted tourists visiting the beautiful beach city to enjoy night-time entertainment and stay here overnight. And my solution was to open a greyhound track."

It took him four years to turn that proposition into reality, including applying for the necessary permits, importing the greyhounds from Australia, and building the racing track and stadium.

There was much excitement when Lam Son Stadium and its 450-meter track finally opened in May 2000, just a year after he set up a 10-hectare greyhound breeding and training farm in nearby Ba Ria town. Starting with 200 imported greyhounds, his stable eventually expanded to almost 500 dogs.

The greyhounds cost more than US\$2,000 per head to import, not to mention the other expenses such as airfare, feeding, maintenance and training.

The English Greyhound, or simply Greyhound, is a breed of dog engaged in coursing, hunting and racing. It runs at a maximum speed of about 70 kilometers per hour.



Handlers parade the eight greyhounds competing in a race at the Lam Son Stadium in Vung Tau, southern Vietnam. Source: Sports and Entertainment Services Co.

Vung Tau-based SES became a World Greyhound Racing Federation member in 2001. Formed in 1969, the WGRF is an international forum for the interchange of information, new technology and other developments to improve greyhound racing globally.

Meanwhile, animal welfare activists stepped up their campaign against the sport, noting that the greyhounds can spend up to 20 hours each day in cramped cages and many of them end up being euthanized after retirement.

Initially, the Lam Son track opened two nights each week for dog racing, but the event was reduced to just Saturday nights. Betting tickets range from 10,000 to one million Vietnamese dong (42.3 US cents to US\$42.3).

The racetrack now has about three months to go. “We’ve asked provincial authorities for another 25-year extension of the operation license. The province has not replied. Its

2021-2030 development master plan, with a vision to 2050, does not include a dog racetrack,” Nguyen says.

Nguyen cites the contribution of dog racing to Vietnam’s tourism industry, but after Lam Son closes, there will be no more greyhound racing tracks left in the country.

According to plans, the site will be used for a real estate project with shopping malls and offices.