

# Forum calls for better use of dog racetrack

Ian Sio Tou

Guest speakers and audience members of yesterday's Macau Forum hosted by local broadcaster TDM urged the government to better use the plot of land on which the controversial Yat Yuen Canidrome stands.

Yesterday's forum debated the future of the greyhound racetrack, whose concession will expire at the end of the year.

Chief Executive Fernando Chui Sai On said last week that the government would listen to residents' views on the fate of the city's greyhound racing dating back to the early 1930s.

Addressing the forum, guest speaker Loi Man Keong, vice-president of local think tank Collective

Wisdom Policy Centre (CWPC), pointed out that the racetrack does not attract as many bettors as it used to, adding that its tax payments were a trifling matter nowadays.

According to official figures released by the Gaming Inspection and Co-ordination Bureau (DICJ), the Yat Yuen Canidrome recorded a gross revenue of 145 million patacas last year, down 18.5 percent year-on-year. The racetrack's betting turnover fell 19.3 percent year-on-year to 630 million patacas last year.

"It's not as prosperous as it was in the 80s...now the government only charges it one million patacas in rent [a year]," he said. "Of course, I think many residents



Pedestrians walk past Yat Yuen Canidrome in Fai Chi Kei yesterday.

living in Fai Chi Kei want it [Yat Yuen] to go...and use the land for sports and cultural facilities," Loi said, adding the government should discuss with the operator the future of the racetrack as soon as possible.

The Yat Yuen Canidrome is located in the densely populated Fai Chi Kei district.

He also said that in response to residents' need for public facilities in Fai Chi Kei the government should plan how to better use the sizeable plot of land.

Loi's centre is affiliated to the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (commonly known as Kai Fong).

Fellow guest speaker Billy Chan Hon Keong, vice-chairman of the

Macau Animal Protection Society (ANIMA), said the facts show that dog racing is declining all over the world, adding that such a cruel activity should be terminated.

He also said that over the past three years none of the retired greyhounds had been adopted even though his group had urged the operator to set up an adoption programme.

Chan also said that over 10,000 retired greyhounds had been culled by the company over the past 50 years, adding that in the first half of this year about 160 greyhounds were euthanised.

ANIMA has launched a campaign collecting signatures locally and elsewhere to push the government to end the city's dog races,

the only in the Far East. As of last night, the group had collected 337,039 signatures.

Fellow guest speaker Lee Hay Ip, representing the Macau Association of Geotechnical Engineering, said if the usage of the plot of land would be changed it could meet Fai Chi Kei residents' needs for more public facilities.

He said the plot of land, covering about 43,000 square metres, could be used for the construction of a new bus terminal and a new drainage system for the flood-prone district, adding that the area's current bus terminal was noisy, polluted and often affected by flooding.

About a dozen audience members voiced their opinions, and most of them urged the government to close down the racetrack to create new space for public facilities. One resident said that residents in Fai Chi Kei suffered a lot from the noise and stench emanating from the racetrack, adding that the plot should be used for public facilities instead.

ANIMA plans to hold a vigil outside Government Headquarters on September 30.

Gaming executive-cum-lawmaker Angela Leong On Kei is the executive director of the racetrack which reported liabilities of 43.6 million patacas at the end of last year. ■



A member of the audience (standing) addresses yesterday's Macau Forum debate programme hosted by local broadcaster TDM in Areia Preta Park.

Photos: Ian Sio Tou

# Cultural critic urges govt to rebuild people's confidence

Leong Lok Ian

Cultural critic Pan Lei Chin Pang said yesterday that the government needed to regain locals' trust if it hoped to see less opposition to public projects in the future.

Lei, who teaches at the University of Macau (UM), was invited to Praça do Tap Seac by reporters to talk

about the government's controversial Hotel Estoril and Estoril Swimming Pool redevelopment plan.

The long-abandoned hotel is located next to Praça do Tap Seac.

The government has said it plans to redevelop the dilapidated casino-hotel and the nearby area into the city's arts hub. It also wants to turn

the Estoril Swimming Pool into an all-season swimming pool, possibly with a retractable roof.

The government conducted a public consultation for about two months about the controversial project. The consultation ended yesterday.

The project was met with opposition from some members of the public as they felt that the building's façade and the mosaic on it represented an important part of Macau's gaming history, pointing to the fact that the casino-hotel was built by the city's then casino monopoly company STDM, and Hotel Estoril's casino was the first to feature western style games of luck in Macau. Others felt that the architecture is unique and should be repaired so as to serve as a tourist attraction.

However, there are also those who think that the mosaic featuring a scantily clad woman is too vulgar for the government's proposed youth activities centre there, and believe that the building should be demolished to make room for an entirely new edifice.

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Alexis Tam Chon Weng has suggested moving the mosaic to a museum.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Lei said he noticed that many people he had spoken to, rather than talking about the casino-hotel, instead expressed distrust in the government's ability to complete a project.

Lei said the people were afraid that the government will waste even more public funds, as it would just add to the list of troubled public proj-



Pedestrians walk past the leakage-hit Tap Seac Commercial Centre (commonly known as "Tap Seac Glass House") in Praça do Tap Seac yesterday.

ects initiated by the government in the past decade. As an example, he pointed to the nearby Tap Seac Commercial Centre (commonly known as the "Tap Seac Glass House") which has been rendered unusable by water leaks since its completion almost a decade ago.

Lei said the government should look into why the public have so much mistrust in its public projects, urging the government to rebuild trust if it hopes to see less opposition to its future projects.

Lei also criticised some of the reasons given for demolishing the building, such as the age of the building, or its architecture style. "How would you ever have a 100-year-old building," he said, adding, "If you take everything that is less than a century old down before they could reach that age?"

"People often overlook a building's aesthetic value if it doesn't fit

into the commonly accepted style, such as an old church," Lei said, adding, "But Hotel Estoril is quite unique in its own way, it is a casino-hotel that, unlike modern casino-hotels, is quite modest in its design, using colours and a design that blend into nearby buildings, unlike Grand Lisboa which stands out like a sore thumb."

Urban planning advocacy group Root Planning started collecting signatures last Sunday for its petition to urge the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) to add Hotel Estoril and Estoril Swimming Pool to its cultural heritage protection list. The signature campaign, which had collected over 100 signatures by late last week, has been extended until Thursday.

Lei said he agreed strongly with the call for a cultural value reevaluation process, as it would help settle the divide between the public and the government about the fate of Hotel Estoril. ■



Cultural critic Pan Lei Chin Pang speaks to reporters in Praça do Tap Seac during a group interview yesterday.

Photos: Leong Lok Ian

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A FEW SHOWERS AT FIRST.  
FORCE 2 TO 3, BECOMING  
FORCE 4 SOUTH TO  
SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY  
WILL RANGE  
BETWEEN 70% AND  
95%.



25°C~31°C

Source: SMG