



ECONOMY

Great Duke Labor Dispute Continues Following Protests, Arbitration

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Nat Sopheap | Tue May 12, 2020 8:04 pm



Former employees of the closed-down Great Duke Hotel raise banners demanding severance pay and benefits on January 20, 2020 in Phnom Penh. (Panha Chorpoan/VOD)

[responsivevoice_button voice="US English Female"]

The owner of the closed Great Duke Hotel in Phnom Penh has until Friday to settle a monthslong dispute with former employees, a Labor Ministry official said after the ex-staff resumed protests this week and were earlier awarded compensation by arbiters.

Ou Ratana, an official in charge of labor dispute interventions, told VOD on Tuesday that the Labor Ministry would take legal action against the hotel owner if by Friday the employer had failed to comply with a decision in favor of workers reached by the Arbitration Council in February.

A meeting on Tuesday between former hotel employees, the owner and Labor Ministry

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A meeting on Tuesday between former hotel employees, the owner and Labor Ministry officials yielded no solution “because the employer said they don’t have money because of Covid-19,” Ratana said.

“We will give the employer a chance to consider the possibility of paying the workers based on the Arbitration Council’s decision,” he said, adding that the parties plan to meet again on Friday.

The former five-star hotel, once the InterContinental Phnom Penh, closed in December.

The **Arbitration Council decided in February** that former hotel workers would receive three of their four demands, including compensation for seniority benefits, late notice of termination and unused vacation time. Workers were not granted compensation for damages.

Chhoam Samphors, a former cook at the Great Duke who attended the negotiations, said workers and the hotel owner could not come to a resolution on Tuesday because the owner insisted he could not pay the compensation awarded in February.

The meeting came after more than 100 ex-employees of the hotel blocked Mao Tse Toung Boulevard in front of the property for nearly an hour on Monday.

Chea Chanmorn, one of the protesting workers who said he worked at the hotel for 20 years, said none of the employees had received any money from the hotel management in the nearly three months since the Arbitration Council settled the case, and the lack of payment was affecting workers’ livelihoods.

“If I want to find other work, it will be impossible because I am a bit old and have poor eyesight,” Chanmorn said on Monday. “I submitted a CV to a few places, but they have not called yet.”

“But if I get some money, I can buy a tuk-tuk to support my wife and children,” he said.

The Great Duke announced its closure on December 31, and the vacant building has since been prepared as a Covid-19 quarantine facility.

Ratana from the Labor Ministry told VOD on Monday that officials visited the protest site to ask workers to be patient, adding that the ministry would examine the Great

Duke owners' compliance with the dispute settlement.

"We agreed to follow the decision by the Arbitration Council but so far [the settlement] has not been followed," he said. "If they don't follow, the ministry will take legal action."

Samphors, who also participated in Monday's protest, said workers were prepared to demonstrate until the settlement is fulfilled.

"If the owner does not have a solution, our employees will continue to block the street or we might set up tents to stay there until there is a solution," she said.

Workers have sporadically **protested the hotel over delayed compensation** since the end of last year.

Chhorn Sokha, a representative of labor rights group Central, said the government should push the owner to fulfill its obligation to workers in order to avoid more protests and resulting costs to both former employees and the owner.

"We want the employer to follow the law's procedure...and what [employees] demanded was made after the hotel closed and so they need to settle their benefits according to the law," she said.

*(Translated and edited from the **original articles** on VOD Khmer)*



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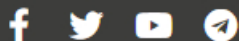
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