



ECONOMY

# NagaWorld Workers Campaign Against Suspended Salaries

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Tran Techseng | Tue Mar 23, 2021 12:21 pm



Hundreds of workers crowd outside Phnom Penh's NagaWorld casino waiting to give samples for Covid-19 testing on March 12, 2021. (Chorn Chanren/VOD)

[responsivevoice\_button voice="US English Female"]  
More than 1,000 NagaWorld workers have joined an online campaign against suspended salaries after the casino closed due to Covid-19 infections among employees, workers and a union representative said.

NagaWorld union president Chhim Sithar said some 1,000 employees joined a Facebook campaign last week after the company stopped paying out salaries, and suspended annual bonuses and seniority allowances, since halting operations.

The union met with company representatives on March 12 to ask to be paid, but NagaCorp management claimed they did not have the money, Sithar said, adding that it seemed like retaliation for workers staying home from their jobs after learning about transmission among workers in late February.

"The company responded like they were angry with the workers, accusing unionists of leading the workers to revolt and not go to work," she said. "So we see that the company is denying to give salaries and seniority allowances to the workers as an attempt at revenge against workers who have been afraid to go to work since the night of the 25th," she said, referring to the night when some NagaWorld 2 workers were tested for Covid-19 and the building closed in the middle of the night with little explanation from the company.

Earlier this month, NagaCorp announced that the company made a net profit of \$102.3 million despite the reduced international travel and more than three months of closure. Gross gaming revenue halved compared to 2019, but the company reported 95 percent recovery of the mass market and 69 percent recovery of the VIP segment compared to before the closure last year.

Mike Ngai, chief operating officer of NagaCorp, did not reply to emailed questions.

Sithar added that Covid-19 infections in Phnom Penh were increasing, and it was unlikely the casino complex would be able to reopen soon.

"During this period, workers need financial support — salaries and seniority allowances — to allow them to survive," she said. "If the company still ignores [us] and refuses to provide bonuses, allowances and salaries to their employees during the closure, [workers] cannot live."

The union president said most workers have quarantined themselves at home, which started as a boycott and Covid-19 prevention measure after workers learned some colleagues were infected, and continued when NagaCorp announced it would "volunteer" to close in early March. As workers are not able to leave their homes and earn an income from the casino or elsewhere, workers were frustrated to see the company make more than \$100 million in profit and still refuse to support them while their employment is suspended, Sithar said.

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"The company donated [money] to the government as an aid to help the prevention of Covid-19 spread, so why don't they provide salary to their own staff," Sithar asked.

Bong Ratanak has worked as a bartender at NagaWorld 1 for more than six years, and the company promised to give him an annual health care and seniority pay package of \$300, but he said they later reneged, using the pandemic as an excuse.

The company usually distributes annual benefits in February or March, but employees have not received it yet, he said.

"I almost have nothing to say, I am so frustrated," he told VOD. "I have been working there for years. But when I am drowning like this, the company doesn't help us at all."

After the Naga complex reopened last July after a three-month closure, it cut employees' working days to fewer than 15 per month, so Ratanak took up occasional construction work in order to support his family and repay debts.

"Now everywhere is closing, I don't know where [to go] or what else to do," he said.

"It's impossible. We can't go out, only stay home. We don't know what we can get in return."

Hay Sopheap, 32, a casino dealer at NagaWorld 2, said she has been staying home since late February, in line with the Health Ministry's recommendations to prevent the virus's spread.

She joined the online campaign, demanding workers' salaries and benefits, after she noticed that NagaCorp founder and controlling shareholder Chen Lip Keong donated \$10 million to the prime minister's Covid-19 fund. The workers started posting their demands, tagging #NagaFamily, after management said in the meeting that workers would not receive salaries during the closure.

Sopheap, who's worked at NagaWorld for 13 years, said the company had asked employees to stop posting demands on Facebook, but she said they would not relent until the company provides salaries and benefits during its closure.

"I hope, after posting these messages on Facebook, the news is heard by the boss and he would have compassion and help us, because we also play a big part in making money, earning income for the company," she said.

Sin Chheav, a casino dealer at NagaWorld 1, said the online campaign was a good alternative to their usual strikes outside the casino complex in order to prevent further infections among casino workers.

"As a staff member working at NagaWorld, I want our boss to give us support like he did to the government, other additional money for incentives like bonuses and seniority allowances for all the efforts of all workers," he said.

Labor Ministry spokesperson Heng Sour would not comment on NagaWorld workers' demands, but he said that during a temporary closure of business during the outbreak, employers only have an obligation to provide transportation and accommodation to employees who were already receiving such benefits.

However, he noted that most employers provided between 20 and 50 percent of workers' wages while a business was suspended or after a worker accident "in real practice so far."



COVID-19, NAGAWORLD

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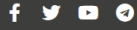
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