Children sit on top their inundated homes, where Shukaku, Inc., has been pumping fill into Boeung Kak lake, (File photo).

Phnom Penh authorities say they have postponed a deadline for lake residents to settle with a development company, temporarily delaying the prospect of eviction for hundreds of families.

Hundreds of demonstrators from villages around Beoung Kak lake gathered outside City Hall Monday to protest a written order issued by
Phnom Penh officials last week demanding they settle with the developer, a joint venture of Cambodian and Chinese companies called Shukaku Erdos Hongjun Property Development.

Daun Penh district officials met with 10 lake resident representatives following the demonstration, backing off the seven-day ultimatum they had given last week. In a March 2 letter to resident of the area, district officials said they must settle with the company or face “strong action in conformity with the law.”

The Boeung Kak lake development has been an ongoing issue for residents for nearly four years. Many maintain that a company buyout offer of about $8,000 per family is not enough to start anew. Nor do many of them want to be relocated to a site far outside the city.

As a counter offer, residents say they want 15 hectares of the 133-hectare commercial development, a proposal that has so far been rejected.

Following Monday’s meeting, Keuth Che, deputy administrative director for City Hall, said the city would delay the seven-day settlement ultimatum.

Ly Srey Mom, a lake resident representative, told reporters after the meeting that she welcomed the postponement but that residents
are still demanding 15 hectares of the development.

“I want the government and City Hall to think of the people’s interests as a large [factor],” she said.

Keuth Che said he would forward the 15-hectare proposal to Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuktema on Wednesday and inform residents of his decision through their respective village chiefs.

Ly Srey Mom said residents will wait five days for an answer, or “we will come to meet Kep Chuktema once again next Monday.”

In 2007, the city government issued a $79-million, 99-year lease to Shukaku, Inc., which is owned by ruling party Senator Lao Meng Khim. The deal sparked unrest from residents who said they had legal rights to the land.

In 2008, Shukaku began filling the Boeung Kak lake, ultimately flooding out hundreds of families and sparking continued protests from residents both at the lake and in front of City Hall.

Ou Virak, president of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said the postponement of an impending eviction did not constitute a resolution to the underlying problems in the debate.
“It can temporarily ease the situation, but in the end, a violation of their rights is still a violation of their rights,” he said.

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