

A vast swathe of Boeung Tumpun lake is being pumped full of sand.

Millions of tonnes of sand are being pumped into the natural Boeung Tumpun lake in the centre of Cambodia's capital city Phnom Penh. Currently, I estimate the depth of the fully filled areas to be around 4m. New sand dunes are bulldozed to within a few metres of the lake's shanty stilt houses, imprisoning them in [...]

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Millions of tonnes of sand are being pumped into the natural lake. Once it's filled locals fear they will be evicted from the land which is to be used for commercial development.

Millions of tonnes of sand are being pumped into the natural Boeung Tumpun lake in the centre of Cambodia's capital city Phnom Penh. Currently, I estimate the depth of the fully filled areas to be around 4m. New sand dunes are bulldozed to within a few metres of the lake's shanty stilt houses, imprisoning them in stagnating patches of water. The 'Vietnamese' specialist pumping team estimate that it will take: "around 4 years to complete the project to fill the lake."

Heavy machinery is pumping the Mekong sand from barges in the river into the edge of Boeung Tumpun lake and then across it. The natural area, in the centre of Phnom Penh Cambodia, is home to some 2000 families who live on the stilt houses above the water. Locals harvest the green plants that grow naturally in the water to sell as a staple Cambodian food in Phnom Penh's markets.

Rumours abound that the residents will be evicted to develop the land once the lake is filled, unless they accept a payment from the developers who many believe want to build luxury apartments and shopping malls on the artificial island once the back-fill is completed. One home and small store owner, whose house is now surrounded by a bank of sand, tells me that: "They have offered me \$40000 to go but I want more money than that."

Is it possible that the lake's inhabitants will be evicted, should they not accept a payoff, in the same manner as the residents of the nearby Boeung Kak lake were? The Boeung Kak lake, also in the centre of Phnom Penh, was recently filled with sand and is currently undergoing development by a company with strong ties to the government. According to the local Phnom Penh Post, the area was earmarked for development: "by four firms - AZ Group, ING Holdings, Daun Penh Construction Group and SMEC International."

All images taken between 15th and 19th September 2012. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

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