

# Ministry takes aim at monk scandals

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**T**HE Ministry of Cults and Religions held an emergency meeting yesterday to discuss the strengthening of Buddhist morals in the wake of several scandals involving monks, with one observer predicting the damage done by the recent indiscretions would take “a long time” to repair.

Min Khin, the minister of cults and religions, said that yesterday’s meeting – held at the Chaktomuk conference hall – was the “first-ever meeting” regarding scandals within the Cambodian monkhood.

“It is necessary because of the monk who filmed naked women and a former chief abbot who was arrested for robbery. These scandals impact our religion,” he told the 400 monks in attendance.

Neth Kai, a former monk at Srah Chak pagoda, was arrested on June 26 after being accused of using a cell phone to secretly record hundreds of videos of women showering in a public bathroom at the temple.

He was immediately defrocked and Phnom Penh Municipal Court has charged him with producing pornography. On Sunday, a local newspaper reported that a former chief abbot in Kampong Speu province was accused of robbery.

Lim Sokunthea, a senior monk in Phnom Penh, urged monks to use mobile phones, computers and the internet “in a suitable way”.

Khem Sorn, the chief monk of Phnom Penh municipality, said yesterday that the scandals must stop in order to let the Buddhist faith repair its tarnished reputation.

“The conflicts between monks, laymen and nuns really impacts the Buddhist religion, which must be avoided in the future to restore the religion’s good reputation,” he said.

Chheang Vannarith, executive director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, said the image of the religion in Cambodia had been negatively affected by the recent scandals. “There is a widespread negative perception of all Buddhists,” he said.

But the scandals have also provided a “turning point” for the religion in Cambodia, he said.

“I think [the image] can to some extent be repaired,” he said.

“This is a turning point in history for Cambodian Buddhism, if they restrict monks from the use of high technology. But the damage is so big that it will take a long time to repair.”