

# The Phnom Penh Post

Celebrating 20 Years 1992 - 2012

www.phnompenhpost.com

ISSUE NUMBER 1395

TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2012

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## Courting a good reputation

**Buth Reaksmeay Kongkea**

CAMBODIAN judges and prosecutors needed to work hard to shake a bad reputation for corruption, Justice Minister Ang Vongvathana told a delegation of senior judges and prosecutors yesterday.

His comments came at the start of a two-day workshop hosted by the ministry geared towards building judicial integrity and people's belief and trust in the court system.

"In our judicial system, and the role of courts, national and international opinions have been focusing on corruption, because it was a strong mechanism affecting people's belief in judicial systems in Cambodia," Ang Vongvathana said.

The training, administered with the assistance of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and representatives of the Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons project, is aimed at strengthening, understanding and implementing a code of conduct for court officials.

Ang Vongvathana said the Ministry of Justice would also implement a national strategic plan in which it would play a main role aimed at combating corruption in court systems.

His ministry had received no positive reaction or positive



Members of Cambodia's judicial system participate in a workshop focusing on judicial ethics yesterday in Phnom Penh. HENG CHIVOAN

feedback from judges or prosecutors since the 2007 promulgation of the Code of Conduct for Judges and Prosecutors and, despite a February directive for strict obedience, the code seemed to have been all but ignored, he said.

Yi Yuth Vireak, country project co-ordinator of Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons, said the workshop was aimed at reviewing the Code of Conduct for Judges and Prosecutors and providing further technical assistance for improving judicial professionals in the future.

This technical assistance specifically related to the handling of drug-trafficking cases, Yi Yuth Vireak said.

"So far, I have noted that the ethical practices for judges and prosecutors are still weak in Cambodia. Through this workshop, we hope it will help the participants to explore or learn more in order to improve their work in future."

Cambodian Centre for Human Rights trial monitor Monika Mang agreed that public perceptions of the court system were dire.

"There are many issues, but the most important thing is the discipline in the courtroom.

"When the judge picks up a mobile phone in the middle of the hearing – think of the public perception about who is talking to the judge during the hearing," she said. ■