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Interactive Gaming

Online industry was "out of control," Cambodia's MoF says

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Mey Vann, Mekong Gaming Summit

Cambodia shut down its online industry as it was "out of control" and it now plans to focus on improving infrastructure in Sihanoukville to reinvigorate the town into an upscale tourism destination.

H.E. Mey Vann, director general of the Ministry of Finance, said that crime and other problems related to rampant online gambling in the southern beach town had been rising by the day and a ban on new licenses and the non-renewal of existing ones once they become due at the end of the year was the only solution.

Speaking on a panel at the Mekong Gaming Summit in Phnom Penh, Mey said the government planned further investment to improve roads and urban planning. He said work on a new highway between the capital and Sihanoukville would begin soon to improve connectivity.

Delegates at the conference questioned whether the ban on online gaming licenses was definitive and whether the town would be able to sustain the multitude of casino resorts that have sprung up without the support of the online gaming industry.

Panellists argued that without the online operations, Sihanoukville would stand a better chance of repositioning itself and attracting land-based gamers, which would ultimately provide more benefit to the local community.

"Sihanoukville will regain its lustre, it will become a beautiful resort," Daniel Li, CEO of Cambosia International told the panel. "We will see a massive change in culture and in the people going, with fewer violent and related crimes."

The town was once a backpacker haven, but has been undergoing a construction boom driven by online gaming. The development has raised environment and safety concerns, especially after a building collapsed in June killing 19 workers sleeping on the site.

Ben Lee, managing director of iGamiX Management and Consulting, pointed out that despite the number of casino resorts, there has been a shortage of hotel rooms in the city as online gaming firms have taken up capacity.

He gave the example of one 15-storey resort hotel, where only three storeys were available for guests. The rest housed 9000 Mainland Chinese workers in the online industry.

The Chinese are now leaving Cambodia in droves, though Mey said ultimately they will return.

He said the government supports land-based gaming, as it is not as "aggressive" as online gaming.

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