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# CAMBODIA BAN

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BBC NEWS

# Cambodia bans texts for elections

By Guy De Launey
BBC News, Phnom Penh

**Mobile-phone text messaging in Cambodia has been suspended for the weekend, so that users are not bombarded with political texts during an election.**

The National Election Committee has asked phone networks to turn off the service until after the polls have closed in Sunday's local elections.

Human-rights and opposition activists have criticised the move, calling the action unnecessary.

With no little irony, users were informed of the move by text message.

Providers gave customers just a few hours' notice.

The largest local operator, Mobitel, apologised "for any inconvenience".

Millions of Cambodians own mobile phones, and SMS text messaging is the way that many of them prefer to communicate.

At around two cents a time, it is by far the cheapest way of staying in touch.

**'Authoritarian'**

But human-rights workers think there is more at stake than the extra expense for phone users.

They say there is no justification for the sudden suspension.

The leader of one organisation told the BBC that the move suppressed freedom of expression at a crucial time, and was a reflection of an authoritarian regime.

The National Election Committee insists that it is independent of any political party.

In a statement, it said that by law no campaigning is allowed on election day or the day before.

The ban on text messaging would prevent parties from using the service to rally support, and ensure what it called a "quiet environment".

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