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Maoists shun gun for mobiles in Nepal poll campaign

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For 10 years, Nepal's Maoist guerrillas waged a bitter "people's war." Now they are waging an election battle -- with mobile phones.

With a peace deal in place and elections planned next month, Maoists say they have started using text messages to win voters after the election commission enforced a ban on putting up posters, banners and slogans in public places.

The Apr. 10 elections are a key part of the 2006 peace deal which ended a decade-long Maoist civil war that killed more than 13,000 people.

"A new thinking and leadership for a new Nepal... Give Maoists a chance this time," read a text message bearing the Maoist hammer and sickle sign at the top.

The polls, the first national vote in nearly nine years, will produce a special assembly to prepare a new constitution and most likely abolish the 240-year-old Hindu monarchy.

Maoist activist Deep Sikha said he had already sent about 5,000 text messages to prospective voters requesting for their support for his party.

Nepal now has about 2.5 million mobile connections among its 26 million people.

"SMS are being sent to voters by other members throughout the country," Sikha said.

(Reporting by Gopal Sharma; Editing by Bappa Majumdar)

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