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ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN

(Ensuring Free, Fair & Democratic Elections & Referendums)



ECB/NOTIF-01/2023/4403

Dated: 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

## NOTIFICATION

### Fourth Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly

#### Under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) in obedience to the Royal Decree of His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo issued on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 calling the elections to the National Assembly of the Fourth Parliament, hereby, in accordance with the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008, notifies the election schedule of the National Assembly Elections, 2023-2024 and the details concerning *Demkhongs*, Letter of Intent (LoI), nomination of candidates, electoral rolls, Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs), polling stations, polling officials, polling management, security and other arrangements as follows:

#### (A) Elections

1. There shall be a Primary Round of Elections in which the registered political parties whose LoI is found to be in order in all respects and accordingly accepted by the ECB shall contest in all the 20 Dzongkhags; and
2. The two parties securing the **Highest** and **Second Highest** total number of votes polled in the 20 Dzongkhags shall be invited by the ECB to nominate one candidate each to contest the General Elections in each of the 47 National Assembly Demkhongs.

#### (B) Election Schedule

3. The schedule of dates and time for the National Assembly Election shall be as follows:

| Sl.# | Event  | Date  |
|------|--|---|
| 1    | Issue of Royal Decree calling the National Assembly Elections and setting the process in motion      | 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2023<br>(Saturday) |
| 2    | ECB notification on the National Assembly Elections schedule   |   |
| 3    | Registered political parties to commence submission of Letter of Intent to contest the Primary Round | 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2023<br>(Friday)   |
| 4    | Release of Final Electoral Roll & Postal Voter List  |   |
| 5    | Last date for submission of the Letter of Intent by registered political parties                     | 4 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Saturday) |
| 6    | Scrutiny of Letter of Intent by the ECB  |   |
| 7    | Start of application for Election Campaign Fund by political parties                                 |   |
| 8    | The letter of acceptance/rejection of the LoI shall be issued  | 5 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Sunday)   |
| 9    | Commencement of the election campaign after receipt of acceptance of LoI from ECB                    |   |

|                          |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| 10                       | Last date of withdrawal of party  | 6 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Monday)  |
| 11                       | Returning Officer to start sending/ mailing Postal Ballots  |  |
| 12                       | First public debate for the Primary Round (Party Presidents)  |  |
| 13                       | Release of the Election Campaign Fund   | 7 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Tuesday)   |
| 14                       | Start of the Common Forum   |  |
| 15                       | Second public debate for the Primary Round (party representatives)  | 7 <sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) to 22 <sup>nd</sup><br>(Wednesday) November 2023             |
| 16                       | Third public debate for the Primary Round (Party Vice -Presidents)  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2023<br>(Thursday)   |
| 17                       | Operation of special early voting for PwDs  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> to 25 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Thursday, Friday &<br>Saturday) |
| 18                       | End of election campaign  | 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Tuesday) 8 am                                       |
| 19                       | Last day for receiving Postal Ballots   | 29 <sup>th</sup> November 2023<br>(Wednesday)  |
| 20                       | <b>Primary Round Poll Day</b>   | <b>30<sup>th</sup> November 2023</b><br><b>(Thursday)</b>                              |
| 21                       | <b>Counting of Results</b>  |  |
| 22                       | Declaration of results & submission of the results to His Majesty<br>The Druk Gyalpo  | 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2023<br>(Friday)  |
| <b>General Elections</b> |   |  |
| 23                       | Commencement of filing of nominations by candidates of the two<br>parties securing highest and second highest total votes in the<br>Primary Round | 4 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Monday)  |
| 24                       | Last date for filing of nominations by candidates   | 9 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Saturday)  |
| 25                       | Scrutiny of nomination of candidates  | 10 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Sunday)   |
| 26                       | Last date for withdrawal of candidature   | 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Tuesday)  |
| 27                       | Commencement of the election campaign upon acceptance of<br>candidature by Returning Officer  |  |
| 28                       | Candidates start submitting application for Election Campaign Fund  |  |
| 29                       | Release of the Election Campaign Fund by ECB  | 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Wednesday)  |
| 30                       | Commencement of Common Forum  | 14 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Thursday)   |
| 31                       | Commencement of public debate for candidates (GE)   | 14 <sup>th</sup> (Thursday) to 29 <sup>th</sup><br>(Friday) December 2023              |
| 32                       | Last date/time for receipt of applications for changes related to<br>address from registered postal voters to RO/DzEO/ECB head office             | 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2023<br>(Friday)   |
| 33                       | Returning Officer start sending / mailing Postal Ballots to voters  |  |
| 34                       | Operation of special early voting for PwDs  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Tuesday, Wednesday &<br>Thursday)  |
| 35                       | End of Election Campaign  | 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Sunday) 8 am  |
| 36                       | Last day for receiving Postal Ballots   | 8 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Monday)   |

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 37 | <b>General Elections Poll Day</b>   | <b>9<sup>th</sup> January 2024<br/>(Tuesday)</b> |
| 38 | <b>Counting of Results</b>  |  |
| 39 | Declaration of results & submission of the results to His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo | 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Wednesday)     |
| 40 | Start of election petition period   | 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Wednesday)     |
| 41 | Issuance of certificate of elections  | 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Monday)        |
| 42 | Completion of election petition period  | 24 <sup>th</sup> January 2024<br>(Wednesday)     |

**(C) Letter of Intent (LoI) for the Primary Round**

4. A registered political party intending to contest National Assembly Elections shall submit the LoI to the Registrar of Political Parties, ECB Head Office, latest by **5pm of 4<sup>th</sup> November 2023**. The LoI shall be as per the prescribed format provided in Compendium of Electoral Forms or available on the ECB's website at *www.ecb.bt*;
5. The LoI shall invariably include in the prescribed format, a tentative list of candidates for each of the 47 *National Assembly Demkhongs* who meet the required criteria;
6. Financial statement as at the end of month preceding the submission of LoI;
7. List of party offices in Dzongkhags and details of office bearers;
8. List of registered members by Dzongkhag;
9. The website and all social media accounts/addresses handles or use etc. of the party and candidates on the tentative list;
10. A copy of the party's election manifesto; and
11. A registered political party may submit at the time of filing LoI or earliest thereafter, the master copy of its proposed campaign materials so that the in-kind state sponsored materials could be made available at the earliest possible.

**(D) Scrutiny of Letter of Intent**

12. The ECB shall undertake the scrutiny of the LoI filed by the political parties on **5<sup>th</sup> November 2023** as per the procedure; and
13. The letter of acceptance/rejection of the LoI shall be issued on **5<sup>th</sup> November 2023**.

**(E) Nomination of Candidates for the General Elections**

14. The two political parties which secure the **Highest** and the **Second Highest** number of total votes in the Primary Round shall be invited by the ECB to

formally nominate one eligible candidate each to contest the General Elections in the 47 *National Assembly Demkhongs* from the accepted tentative list submitted in the LoI;

15. Besides the other criteria for a candidate, Section 209 (c) of the Election Act, 2008, specifically provides that:

**Section 209.** A person shall be deemed to be duly nominated to contest an election to the National Assembly, by a registered political party, if:

- (c) He/She is a member of a registered political party which could not qualify for General Elections but is admitted as a member and nominated as a candidate by a political party to contest in the General Elections. However, his/her membership in the original political party shall be forfeited.

**(F) Filing of Nomination Papers by Candidates**

16. The candidate nominated by the eligible political party to contest the General Elections shall submit his/her nomination papers to the concerned Returning Officer starting from **9:00 am to 5:00 pm of 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023**. The nomination papers must be complete, signed and countersigned as required and include the following prescribed forms:
  - 16.1. Nomination paper with the necessary attachments; ***Returning Officer Form No. 6A(GE)***; Notice of nomination of a candidate for NA-General Elections; ***Political Party Form No.3A(GE)***;
  - 16.2. Asset declaration;
  - 16.3. Tax clearance certificate;
  - 16.4. Audit clearance certificate;
  - 16.5. Security clearance;
  - 16.6. Copy of CID;
  - 16.7. Copy of marriage certificate & CID of spouse, (if applicable);
  - 16.8. Copy of formal university degree certificate with letter of attestation issued by ECB;
  - 16.9. Integrity vetting report (IVR);
  - 16.10. Non-performing loan (NPL);
  - 16.11. Determination of 5 years work experience;
  - 16.12. Relieving order issued by Head of the Ministry/ Department/Agency (if relevant); and
  - 16.13. Affidavit/ court clearance.

17. The screenshot (webpage) displaying the approved status of the security clearance, specified for election purposes, can be printed out and filed to a Returning Officer at the time of submission of nomination papers.
18. Audit clearance may be obtained as per the system put in place by the Royal Audit Authority (RAA) and the print-out copy submitted at the time of submission of nomination papers.
19. The attestation of the formal university degree shall be as per the *Guidelines for Interpretation and Implementation of Sections 176 (d), 177 (d) and 178 (d) of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 regarding the Academic Qualification Requirement for a Candidate contesting Elections to National Assembly, National Council or the Post of Thrompon, 2017*.
20. The asset declarations shall be submitted in accordance with the laws and scrutinized in line with the *Guidelines for Evaluation of the Asset Declaration of the Candidates Contesting Elections, 2018*.
21. The Drangpon of the Dzongkhag/Dungkhag Court of Justice, signing the affidavit, shall also be responsible to check from the court records that the aspiring candidate has not been convicted and received a sentence of imprisonment or does not have a pending criminal case registered against him/her in any Court of Law as required under the Electoral Laws.

**(G) Scrutiny of Nominations**

22. The respective Returning Officers shall undertake the scrutiny of the nomination papers filed by the candidates under intimation to the ECB.

**(H) Last Date for Withdrawal of Candidature**

23. The last date for withdrawal of candidature shall be **5:00 pm on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023**.
24. After the last date set for the withdrawal of candidature, it is mandatory for the validly nominated candidates to attend the respective public debates organized by the ECB and BBS.
25. If a candidate is unable to attend the public debate owing to compelling reasons, then, based on a determination made by the Returning Officer, permission may accordingly be accorded.

**(I) Replacement Candidate**

26. In a *Demkhong* where candidature has been cancelled or a candidate passes away, the replacement candidate may be nominated or election in that *Demkhong* may be postponed in accordance with Sections 233 to 237 of the Election Act, 2008.

(J) *Demkhong*

27. The National Assembly Demkhongs are as follows:

| <b>Dzongkhag</b>        | <b>Parliamentary Constituency</b> | <b>Gewogs</b>  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Bumthang</b>         | Chhoekhor_Tang                    | Chhoekhor, Tang & <i>Thromde</i>   |
|                         | Chhumig_Ura                       | Chhumig & Ura  |
| <b>Chhukha</b>          | Bongo_Chapchha                    | Bjagchhog, Bongo, Chapchha, Darla & Getana   |
|                         | Phuentshogling                    | Doongna, Geling, Loggchina, Meadtabkha, Phuentshogling, Samphelling & <i>Thromde</i> |
| <b>Dagana</b>           | Drukjeygang_Tseza                 | Drukjeygang, Gozhi, Karna, Khebisa, Laryab, Tshangkha, Tseza & <i>Thromde</i>        |
|                         | Lhamoi Dzingkha_Tashiding         | Dorona, Gesarling, Tashiding, Tsenda-Gang, Karmaling, Lhamoi Dzingkha & Nichula      |
| <b>Gasa</b>             | Khamaed_Lunana                    | Khamaed & Lunana   |
|                         | Khatoed_Laya                      | Khatoed & Laya   |
| <b>Haa</b>              | Bji_Kar- Tshog_Uesu               | Bji, Kar-Tshog, Uesu & <i>Thromde</i>  |
|                         | Sangbaykha                        | Sangbay, Gakiling & Samar  |
| <b>Lhuentse</b>         | Gangzur_Minjey                    | Gangzur, Khoma, Kurtoed, Minjey & <i>Thromde</i>                                     |
|                         | Maenbi_Tsaenkhari                 | Jarey, Maenbi, Maedtsho & Tsaenkhari   |
| <b>Monggar</b>          | Dramedtse_Ngatshang               | Balam, Chagsakhar, Dramedtse, Na-Rang, Ngatshang, Shermuhoong & Thang-Rong           |
|                         | Monggar                           | Chhaling, Drepoong, Monggar, Tsakaling, Tsamang & <i>Thromde</i>                     |
|                         | Kengkhar_Weringla                 | Gongdue, Saling, Silambi, Kengkhar & Jurmed  |
| <b>Paro</b>             | Dokar_Sharpa                      | Dokar, Loong-nyi, Nagya & Sharpa   |
|                         | Lamgong_Wangchang                 | Dopshar-ri, Doteng, Hoongrel, Lamgong, Tsento & Wangchang & <i>Thromde</i>           |
| <b>Pema Gatsel</b>      | Nanong_Shumar                     | Nanong, Shumar & Zobel   |
|                         | Khar_Yurung                       | Chhimoong, Chongshing, Dungmaed, Khar & Yurung                                       |
|                         | Nganglam                          | Chhoekhorling, Dechhenling & Norboogang  |
| <b>Punakha</b>          | Kabisa_Talog                      | Barp, Guma, Goenshari, Kabisa, Talog, Toedpaisa & <i>Thromde</i>                     |
|                         | Lingmukha_Teodwang                | Chhubu, Dzomi, Lingmukha, Shelnga_Bjemi & Teodwang                                   |
| <b>Samdrup Jongkhar</b> | Dewathang_Gomdar                  | Dewathang, Gomdar, Orong, Phuentshogthang & Wangphu & <i>Thromde</i>                 |
|                         | Jomotsangkha_Martshala            | Langchenphu, Lauri, Serthig, Martshala, Pemathang & Samrang                          |
| <b>Samtse</b>           | Dophuchen_Tading                  | Duenchhukha, Dophuchen, Doomtoed, Tading   |

|                         |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
|                         | Phuentshogpelri_Samtse                                    | Norboogang, Phuentshogpelri, Samtse & <i>Thromde</i>   |
|                         | Tashichhoeling  | Norgaygang, Pemaling, Tashichhoeling & Tendruk   |
|                         | Ugyentse_Yoeseltse  | Sang-Ngag-Choling, Namgyalchhoeling, Ugyentse & Yoeseltse  |
| <b>Sarpang</b>          | Gelegphu  | Samtenling, Chhuzanggang, Gelegphu, Jigme Chhoeling, Serzhong, Tareything, Umling & <i>Thromde</i> |
|                         | Shompangkha   | Dekidling, Chhudzom, Gakiling, Senggey & Shompangkha   |
| <b>Thimphu</b>          | North Thimphu<br>Thromde_Kawang_Lingzhi_Naro_Soe          | North Thimphu <i>Thromde</i> , Kawang, Lingzhi, Naro & Soe   |
|                         | South Thimphu Thromde_Chang_<br>Darkarla_Ge-nyen_Maedwang | South Thimphu <i>Thromde</i> , Chang, Darkarla, Ge-nyen & Maedwang                                 |
| <b>Trashigang</b>       | Bartsham_Shongphu   | Bartsham, Bidoong, Yangnyer, Shongphu  |
|                         | Kanglung_Samkhar_Udzorong                                 | Kanglung, Samkhar, Udzorong & <i>Thromde</i>   |
|                         | Radhi_Sagteng   | Merag, Phongmed, Radhi & Sagteng   |
|                         | Wamrong   | Khaling & Lumang   |
|                         | Thrimshing  | Kangpar & Thrimshing   |
| <b>Trashi Yangtse</b>   | Boomdeling_Jamkhar  | Boomdeling, Jamkhar, Tongmajangsa, Yangtse & <i>Thromde</i>  |
|                         | Khamdang_Ramjar   | Ramjar, Khamdang, Toedtsho & Yalang  |
| <b>Trongsa</b>          | Draagteng_Langthil  | Draagteng, Korphu & Langthil   |
|                         | Nubi_Tangsibji  | Nubi, Tangsibji & <i>Thromde</i>   |
| <b>Tsirang</b>          | Kilkhorthang_Mendrelgang                                  | Barshong, Patshaling, Kilkhorthang, Mendrelgang, Rangthangling, Tsholingkhar & <i>Thromde</i>      |
|                         | Sergithang_Tsirangtoed                                    | Doonglagang, Gosarling, Sergithang, Pungtenchhu, Semjong & Tsirangtoed                             |
| <b>Wangdue Phodrang</b> | Athang_Thedtsho   | Athang, Bjenag, Darkar, Gase Tshogongm, Gase Tshowogm, Nahi, Thedtsho, Ruebisa & <i>Thromde</i>    |
|                         | Nyishog_Saepu   | Dangchhu, Gangteng, Kazhi, Nyishog, Phangyuel, Phobji & Saepu                                      |
| <b>Zhemgang</b>         | Bardo_Trong   | Bardo, Nangkor, Shingkar, Trong & <i>Thromde</i>   |
|                         | Panbang   | Bjoka, Goshing, Ngangla & Phangkhar  |

**(K) Electoral Roll**

28. The qualifying date shall, in relation to the Electoral Roll for the *Parliamentary Elections, 2023-2024: National Assembly*, be the **1<sup>st</sup> October 2023**. Therefore, all those who are not younger than eighteen years of age as

on **1<sup>st</sup> October 2023** shall be deemed to meet the minimum age requirement to be a voter.

29. Those born on or before **9<sup>th</sup> December 1998** and on or after **9<sup>th</sup> December 1958** shall be deemed to meet the legal age requirement for candidates.
30. Similarly, those voters whose *Mitsi* had been registered in a *Demkhong* on or before **30<sup>th</sup> September 2022** shall be deemed to meet the durational requirement to be a voter or candidate from that *Demkhong*.
31. The draft Electoral Roll for the *Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024* was issued on **21<sup>st</sup> October 2023** for public inspection and the public invited to file Claims and Objections by **27<sup>th</sup> October 2023**.
32. The Final Electoral Rolls for the *Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly* shall be published and provided to the Returning Officers on **3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**.

**(L) Election Campaign**

33. A political party/candidate may proceed with the election campaign upon the receipt of acceptance of the LoI from ECB in case of Primary Round or acceptance of his/her candidature by the concerned Returning Officer in case of the General Elections.
34. The campaign for the Primary Round shall be party based, focusing on the party ideology, manifesto, pledges, vision and mission.
35. The campaign in the Primary Round shall be led by the central party leadership and the respective candidate-designate in the accepted tentative list of candidates who shall be deemed to be the representative authorized by the party in the respective *Demkhong* for the election campaign.
36. A political party/candidate shall conduct the campaign as per the election campaign schedule approved by the concerned Returning Officer with copy endorsed to the concerned National Observer.
37. Returning Officer in collaboration with election security personal must conduct surprise inspections of persons, vehicles and properties at entry points and within a *Demkhong* to prevent or check movement of unauthorized persons, documents, money, alcohol, arms and ammunitions and restricted items.
38. A political party/candidate shall be liable for all acts of commission and omission of their election representatives and held responsible for the conduct of their party workers or supporters.



### ***Common Forum for Public Address by All Candidates***

39. The Returning Officer in consultation with the respective Election Coordinator and Security Coordinator shall arrange at least one Common Forum in each *Gewog/Chiwog/Dzongkhag Thromde*, for both the Primary Round and the General Elections, to provide the contesting political parties/candidates equal opportunity to address the electorate while reducing the necessity to call for public meetings in the *Gewog/Chiwog* or *Dzongkhag Thromde* by each candidate separately thereby avoiding inconvenience to voters of attending multiple sessions.
40. The Common Forum shall be organized as per the *Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common Forum for Election Campaign, 2018*.

### ***Any other public meetings, small meetings or rallies***

41. Any additional public meetings, small meetings or rallies shall be subject to the provisions of the law, Code of Conduct and as per the campaign schedule and use of vehicles as approved by the Returning Officer.
42. A smaller meeting may be conducted only **after 7 am** and **before 4 pm**

### ***Abnormal Financial Transaction***

43. All banks or financial institutions shall be responsible for reporting to the ECB any abnormal transaction of money, including in and/or out of the account of a political party or candidate contesting the elections.

### ***Conduct of Representatives or Supporters***

44. The party and candidate shall be held responsible and answerable for the conduct of their representatives or supporters also including those of the nature of interference to lawful electoral works and/or cause to undermine law and order in a place of elections.

### ***No Freebies***

45. A political party/candidate contesting the National Assembly Elections, and all concerned shall neither serve meals or refreshments, nor pay, gift or reward the general public or voters for attendance of election campaigns or produce, wear and distribute T-shirts and/or caps etc.

### ***Past Attributes or Past Achievements***

46. A political party, candidate, Government or Non-Governmental authority, Organization or any individual shall not screen any audiovisual products or documentary clips or display/distribute any written or pictorial materials which attributes or depicts the past achievements of a particular aspiring

candidate whilst in Government or public service or otherwise, including the portrayal of a candidate in any audiovisual product.

***No Travels or Official Tours by A Member of Parliament***

47. No travels or official tours shall be undertaken by a Member of Parliament to any *Demkhong* other than the place of ordinary residence during the National Assembly Elections period except to cast votes on the Poll Days if he/she decides not to avail the Postal Ballot facility. If such travel to a *Demkhong* becomes unavoidable, he/she shall first report to the concerned Returning Officer.

***No Usage of Title, Sign, Insignia or Symbol***

48. No candidate shall use the title, designation, rank, *Kabney/Rachu*, *Pata/Gyentag* or any other sign, insignia or symbol of an office held earlier, on person, car or any personal effects as may be used during the campaign period by the candidate, representatives, or supporters.
49. The Office of the Returning Officer and venue of the election events shall be, as far as possible, at locations that do not require the wearing of the *Kabney/Rachu* and *Pata/Gyentag*.

***Prohibition on Election Campaign 48 hours Before Poll***

50. Election campaigns must stop 48 hours before the hour fixed for commencement of poll.

***Election Campaign Finance***

51. Each political party contesting the Primary Round shall be eligible to receive Election Campaign Fund at the rate of **Nu. 150,000/-** per *Demkhong*.
52. A political party contesting the Primary Round cannot exceed the election campaign expenditure ceiling of **Nu. 300,000/-**, in each of the 47 *Demkhongs*, fixed by the ECB and notified to the public i.e. **Nu. 150,000/-** provided as public campaign funds by the state and up to **Nu. 150,000/-** from the party's own funds as raised through the permitted sources of income.
53. A candidate contesting the General Elections shall be eligible to receive Election Campaign Fund at the rate of **Nu. 150,000/-**.
54. A candidate contesting the General Elections cannot exceed the election campaign expenditure ceiling of **Nu. 300,000/-**, fixed by the ECB and notified to the public i.e. **Nu. 150,000/-** provided as public campaign funds by the state and up to **Nu. 150,000/-** from the party's funds as raised through the permitted sources of income.

55. The maximum expenditure limit shall not include in-kind sponsorship from the state, provided by ECB under the Public Election Fund Act, 2008, Public Fund Rules and Regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2018 and Strategy for the Implementation of the Provisions Related to Election Advertising Amendment, 2023.
56. The parties and candidates shall ensure that funds are neither received, directly or indirectly, from sources other than the permitted ones within the approved ceilings nor use any such funds directly or indirectly, for electoral purposes.

#### ***Election Campaign Returns***

57. A political party representative in each *Demkhong* during the Primary Round and a candidate in the General Elections must submit weekly accounts of the campaign expenses to the National Observer for his/her scrutiny and file election returns within thirty days of declaration of the election result as per the prescribed procedures, regardless of being elected or not, failing which the name of a political party may be removed from the register of political parties or a person may be disqualified as a member holding elective office or candidate in future elections.

#### ***Public Debate***

58. Three rounds of public debate between the contesting political parties in the Primary Round shall be conducted. The first round of public debate shall be conducted amongst the party Presidents. The second round of public debate shall be conducted amongst the party representatives, and the third round of public debate shall be conducted amongst the party Vice-Presidents.
59. The Primary Round debates for the Political Party Presidents and Vice-Presidents shall be arranged in the capital and among the candidates in the Dzongkhags by the ECB and BBS.
60. The Public debates for the General Election shall be conducted in the respective Demkhongs by ECB and BBS.
61. The debates shall be conducted as per the ***Guidelines for Conduct of Public Debates for National Assembly Elections, 2023***.

#### **(M) Remaining Apolitical and Above Politics**

##### ***Religious Events***

62. No religious events involving public gathering shall be conducted as notified in advance by the ECB vide **Public Advisory No. ECB/(Media-4)2023/3020 dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023**.

63. The Dzongdag as the Chief Election Coordinator of the concerned Dzongkhag is vested with the authority to issue approval in their respective jurisdictions.
64. Private religious events such as the wrathful practices and rituals such as *tordog, torphang* etc. will be prohibited in particular by the political parties or candidates and/or their representatives and supporters.
65. Religious personalities shall neither vote in the elections nor participate, directly or indirectly, or give grounds to reasonably construe support, opposition or dislike of any candidate contesting the elections.

***Religious, Civil Society Organization and Public Entities***

66. Religious and Civil Society Organizations and public entities shall not participate, directly or indirectly, or give grounds to reasonably construe support, opposition or dislike of any candidate contesting the elections.

***Civil Servants***

67. A civil servant shall be permitted to attend electoral events like public debates and common forums organized by the ECB. However, no civil servant shall campaign directly or indirectly, or participate in the electoral forums organized by the political parties and candidates or give grounds to reasonably construe support, opposition or dislike of any candidate contesting the elections.

***Midhey Gothrips***

68. No Members of Parliament and the Local Government officials i.e., the *Thrompons, Gups, Mangmis, Gewog Tshogpas, Thomde Tshogpas & Dzongkhag Thomde Ngotshabs*, shall not campaign directly or indirectly for any political parties and candidates, however, they shall be permitted to attend electoral events like public debates and common forums organized by the ECB.

**(N) Postal Ballots**

69. The schedule for the Postal Ballot process shall be as given in the election schedule above and also detailed in the *Strategy for Conduct of the Fourth Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly*.
70. The Postal Ballot system shall include Postal Ballot method and special early voting for PwDs as per the postal voter list.
71. The postal voters shall receive the postal ballot package from the Returning Officer at his/her postal address given during the registration and are reminded to return the marked postal ballot directly to the Returning Officer at the earliest.

72. A postal voter shall intimate to the Returning Officer any change in postal address or if he/she wishes not to use the conventional method and instead prefer to vote in person at the polling station on poll day. Such application for change in details of postal voter must reach the concerned Returning Officer/DzEO/ECB head office latest by **15<sup>th</sup> December 2023** for General Elections.
73. Special early voting facilities shall be provided as a special service for PwDs who cannot travel to the polling stations, from **23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023** for Primary Round and **2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024** for the General Elections.
74. A person who applied for Postal Ballot, be it by any option, cannot vote in person at a polling station on poll day as his/her name will be included in the postal voters' list and struck off from the voters' list sent to the polling stations.

**(O) Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC)**

75. Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC) issued by the ECB and original valid Citizenship Identity Card (CID) issued by DCRC shall be the valid document for identification of voters at the polling stations during the Elections.

**(P) Polling Hours**

76. The polling hours shall be from **8 am to 4 pm**. However, those voters already in the queue at **4 pm** shall be allowed to vote with issuance of tokens to those in the queue with the last voter present at that time in the queue being given token No. 1.

**(Q) Electronic Voting Machines**

77. The Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) shall be used for polling in all *Demkhongs* on poll day.

**(R) Indelible Ink**

78. Quality indelible ink shall be used during the elections and care must be taken in applying the indelible ink as a line running from top of the nail to the bottom of the first joint of the **Right Index** during the **Primary Round** and the **Left Index** during the **General Elections**.

**(S) Polling Stations**

79. The polls for the *Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly* shall be conducted in a total of **809** polling stations, the details of which are indicated in the Final Electoral Roll for the *Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly*.

**(T) Poll Day**

80. The poll days, **30<sup>th</sup> November 2023**, for Primary Round and **9<sup>th</sup> January 2024**, for General Elections, shall be declared public holidays in the 20 Dzongkhags.

81. All employers are required by law to grant the required number of days as election leave for any voter wishing to go to vote in person.

82. No one shall carry any sort of audio/photo/video recording device in and around a polling station on poll day except those authorized to do so.

83. No one shall carry any arms or weapons which can be used to cause bodily harm on poll day except by those who are authorized under the Electoral Laws for security duty.

84. A permitted media agency or journalist shall be allowed into a polling station but not have access to the voting compartment when a voter is inside it and be escorted out of the polling station after a few minutes.

**(U) Election Result Counting, Consolidation and Declaration**

85. The Postal Ballots shall be counted only by the concerned counting officer appointed by the Returning Officers who shall consolidate it with the EVM results received from the Counting Centers (polling stations) and verify the information received through the **Google Result Sheet/phone calls** against the hard copy, following the standard procedures and in the required forms.

86. Candidates or their representatives can witness and observe all stages of the polling and counting procedures but shall not make public statements on estimates and guesses before the official declaration of the results.

87. A permitted media agency or journalist may witness and observe the counting procedures but shall ensure that they comply with the procedural requirements of the Returning Officer and not obstruct or interfere with the process or make public statements or online posts on estimated poll results before the official announcement and declaration of the results.

88. All stakeholders are advised that prohibition on Exit Polls provided in the Election Act are as follows:

Section 343: No person shall broadcast, telecast, or publish before the close of poll, any:

- (a) Statement or news relating to the manner in which voters have voted at an election;
- (b) Public opinion survey reports on an election shall not be released to the general public prior to closure of polls; or
- (c) Forecasts or predictions relating to the probable results of an election based on the information provided by or obtained from voters or observers at an election.

**(V) Election Officials**

***Chief Election Coordinators***

- 89. The *Dzongdags* shall be appointed as the Chief Election Coordinators (CECo); *Dzongrabs/Dungpas/Executive Secretaries* of the *Dzongkhag Thromdes* as the Deputy Chief Election Coordinators; and the *Gewog Administrative Officers* as the *Gewog Election Coordinators* in the respective *Dzongkhag, Dungkhag, Dzongkhag Thromdes* and *Gewogs* for the purpose of the conduct of the National Assembly Elections, 2023-2024.
- 90. The Election Coordinators shall be responsible for carrying out the roles, responsibilities and duties as provided in the Electoral Laws and in accordance with the appointment order issued by the ECB on **3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**.
- 91. The Chief Election Coordinator of a *Dzongkhag* shall be responsible to submit a comprehensive report on the elections, as provided in the *Handbook for Election Coordinators 2013*, in the concerned *Dzongkhag* within ten days of the declaration of the results.

***National Observers***

- 92. The ECB shall appoint a National Observer in each of the 47 National Assembly *Demkhongs* and 1 Micro-Observer, in *Jomotsangkha\_ Martshala Demkhong* of *Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag* to assist the National Observer.
- 93. An Observer is vested with the authority, roles, and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Observers, to observe the elections.
- 94. An Observer shall, besides submission of required reports, report any infraction requiring immediate action to the ECB instantly through SMS and other social media platforms.

### ***Follow-up on Observer Reports***

95. The Policy and Planning Coordination Division of the ECB shall consolidate the reports submitted by the Observers for review and decision by the Commission on a weekly basis and as and when an immediate decision is required.

### ***Returning Officers***

96. The ECB shall appoint a Returning Officer, for the National Assembly Elections, in each of the 47 *National Assembly Demkhongs*.
97. A Returning Officer is vested with full authority, roles, and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Returning Officers.

### ***Presiding and Polling Officers***

98. The appointment of presiding officers and polling officers for the elections shall be as per the appointment orders issued by the concerned Returning Officer on or before **27<sup>th</sup> November 2023**, in case of the Primary Round and **6<sup>th</sup> January 2024**, in case of the General Elections.
99. Presiding officers and polling officers are vested with the authority, roles, and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral laws, Rules, Regulations, Handbook for Presiding Officers and Handbook for Polling Officers.

### ***Counting Supervisors & Counting Assistants***

100. The presiding officers shall serve as the counting supervisors and a polling officer as the counting assistant authorized as such in the appointment orders issued by the concerned Returning Officer.
101. Counting supervisors and counting assistants are vested with the authority, roles and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants.

### ***Media Arbitrator***

102. The Media Arbitrator appointed for the *Parliamentary Elections, 2023-2024: National Assembly* shall be vested with the authority and be responsible for fulfilling the roles and responsibilities as provided in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations, and the appointment order.
103. The ECB shall appoint Social Media Monitor(s) and a Legal Officer as part of the Media Arbitrator's team.



### ***Accounts Officers***

104. Each Dzongkhag Administration shall identify and appoint Accounts Officer(s) to be responsible for managing and keeping the accounts for all expenditures related to the National Assembly Elections 2023-2024 in that Dzongkhag, except for the Public Election Campaign Fund which shall be handled directly by the Public Election Fund Division of the ECB with verification by Observers.
105. The finance and expenditure records and accounts shall be maintained and submitted in line with the *Guidelines for the Maintenance of Financial Records and Accounts for an Election in the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2023*.

### ***Assignment of Duty Stations***

106. The National Observers, Returning Officers, Micro-Observer, Presiding Officers, Polling Officers and Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants shall not be posted to the Gewog where his/her *Gung* or *Mitsi* is registered.

### ***Authorization to Record Election Related Events***

107. The general public are hereby notified that the officials appointed on election duty are being officially authorized to photograph, video-graph and/or record any election-related event or activity which may be used as evidence in the election dispute settlement system.

### **(W) Election Control Rooms**

108. Control Rooms shall be established in the office of the Returning Officers and at the ECB Headquarters to effectively supervise, direct, monitor and backstop the conduct of elections.
109. The control rooms shall be set up and function in the manner detailed in the *Manual for Control Rooms*.
110. All concerned officials shall be provided with a copy of the *National Assembly Election Directory, 2023* to facilitate effective communications during the elections.

### **(X) Election Code of Conduct**

111. The Election Code of Conduct shall continue to be in force from **3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023** until the completion of the election period i.e. till the declaration of the General Election results on **10<sup>th</sup> January 2024**.
112. All election officers, candidates and voters must comply with the Election Code of Conduct and the provisions of the Electoral Laws, Rules and Regulations and Guidelines.

113. All electoral stakeholders may use the social media for election or campaign purposes but shall ensure to abide by the Electoral Laws, Election Code of Conduct and specifically adhere to the requirements under the *ECB Social Media Rules and Regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2018*.

**(Y) Law and Order & Deployment of Forces**

114. The *Dzongdags* of the twenty *Dzongkhags*, Executive Secretaries of *Dzongkhag Thromdes* and the Gewog Administrative Officers in the *Gewogs* shall serve as the focal points for all administrative matters in the *Dzongkhags*, *Thromdes* and *Gewogs* respectively for the election period.
115. The *Dzongdags*, Executive Secretaries and the Gewog Administrative Officers shall be responsible in ensuring that their respective jurisdictions are conducive and congenial for the conduct of free and fair *Parliamentary Elections 2023-2024: National Assembly*.
116. The Royal Bhutan Police and the Royal Bhutan Army shall deploy security as per the *Election Security Rules and Regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2012*.
117. The Royal Bhutan Police and the Royal Bhutan Army shall ensure appropriate coverage and deploy adequate number of men and officers so that there is no possibility of any security threat and incidences affecting the electoral process in their respective jurisdictions.
118. The Election Security Focal Officers of the concerned *Dzongkhag* shall work in close coordination and cooperation with the election officers as a team towards conducting the elections smoothly.
119. Election Security personnel shall be fully empowered and authorized, under Section 38 of the Election Act, to detain any individual or group on sufficient grounds to suspect that he/she/group is a threat to peace and harmony and free and fair elections are likely to be undermined.

**(Z) Election Dispute Settlement System**

120. The quasi-judicial role of the ECB during the election period shall be fulfilled through the election dispute settlement system which includes three levels of decision-making and appeal:
- 120.1. *Dzongkhag* Dispute Settlement Body;
- 120.2. Central Dispute Settlement Body; and
- 120.3. Full Commission.

121. Election disputes may be filed with a Returning Officer, Observer, Chief Election Coordinator, or the Chief Election Commissioner but must contain all details as in *Election Dispute Settlement Form 1A (PR/GE)*.
122. The adjudication of election disputes shall be guided generally by the principles and provisions of the laws of the land and in particular by the Electoral Laws, Election Dispute Settlement Rules and Regulations and the Election Dispute Settlement Manual.
123. All concerned are reminded that, any complaint related to an election shall be dealt as per Election Dispute Settlement Rules and Regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2018.
124. The ECB shall appoint Legal Officers on deputation to the Central Dispute Settlement Body and Dzongkhags, wherever necessary. The Dzongkhag Legal Officers and other Dzongkhag Sector Officers may be coopted to assist and serve on the respective Dzongkhag Dispute Settlement Body during the election period as and when necessary.
125. The Election Dispute Settlement Bodies shall automatically dissolve in the following manner:
  - (a) The Central Election Dispute Settlement Body on **24<sup>th</sup> November 2023**, for Primary Round and **3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024**, for General Elections i.e. six days before the Poll Day; and
  - (b) The Dzongkhag Election Dispute Settlement Body on **21<sup>st</sup> November 2023**, for Primary Round and **31<sup>st</sup> December 2023**, for General Elections i.e. nine days before the poll day.

### *Appeal*

126. An appeal against a decision of the ECB or an issue related to the poll day or EVM may be lodged to the High Court of the Kingdom of Bhutan from **10<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024**, in accordance with the provisions of the Election Act, 2008 related to the filing of an election petition.

### **(AA) International Observers & Media**

127. The Policy and Planning Division of the ECB shall co-ordinate and liaison all matters that concern the International Observers, National and International Media permitted to observe the elections as provided in the *National and International Observers Guidelines, Media Coverage of Elections Rules and Regulations* and the *Social Media Rules*.

**(BB) Other Reference**

128. All stakeholders, general public and Election Officials shall, besides all the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations, Guidelines, Handbooks, Orders and Notifications, also refer to the *Strategy for the Conduct of the Parliamentary Elections, 2023-2024: National Assembly* for additional information and guidance in the conduct of the elections.

Now, thereof, from the day of issue of this notification, the ECB notifies the general public on all matters relating to the *Parliamentary Elections, 2023-2024: National Assembly*.

**Issued on the 21<sup>st</sup> Day of the 9<sup>th</sup> Month of the Water Female Rabbit Year,  
corresponding to the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**

(Sonam Topgay)

**Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan**