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**ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN**

*(Ensuring Free, Fair & Democratic Elections & Referendums)*



ECB (Media-09)/2014/ 531

Date: 16/9/2014

### **National Voters' Day Celebration**

The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) celebrated its First National Voters' Day throughout the country on 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 coinciding with the International Democracy Day. The Commission has decided to celebrate the day as per the Resolution passed during the Fourth Meeting of the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) last year under the Bhutan's Chair.

The National Voters' Day was celebrated in all 20 Dzongkhags of the country. The theme for the National Voters' Day was "**Youth in Democracy**", albeit the fact that more than half the population of Bhutan comprises of youth; the voter turnout of youth has been found to be low.

The National Voters' Day is a call to all voters and especially the youth to remind them of their importance and responsibility in a democratic society. A society with a universal value based on freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural system and their full participation in all aspects of their lives through a secret ballot.



The National Voters' Day celebrations in the capital were held in three different locations. The day started with the morning session held at the Clock Tower,



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afternoon in the RIM Auditorium and it concluded with live panel discussion in the BBS studio in the evening.

The grand celebration at the Clock Tower was graced by Lyonchen Tshering Tobgay, ministers, government secretaries, member of international community, Chief of Police, CSOs, members from political parties, students and teachers from different schools and staffs from Thimphu Dzongkhag among many others.

Welcoming the large gathering, the Chief Election Commissioner, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, reminded the gathering that in order to ensure a vibrant democracy it is crucial that the general mass of whom the



youth is a significant part, must participate. He said, to commemorate the first National Voters' Day celebration, VPICs for a total of 44,500 youth who will attain the eligible voting age on or before 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2016, will be distributed.



At the clock tower, the Lyonchen in a symbolic gesture awarded VPICs to five students, *mitsi* transfer cases of three individuals and VPICs to two old voters who had lost their VPICs had applied for new. Lyonchen Tshering Tobgay in the

Key Note address to the gathering said the VPICs are gift from His Majesty the King and called on the youth to participate in democracy by exercising their



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rights. He also offered gratitude to their Majesties The Kings on behalf of the people of Bhutan for bestowing us with the gift of Democracy.

Political parties' representatives from all five parties also addressed the crowd



and emphasized on youth participation. All the five parties spoke in one voice on two issues, the first being the gratitude to our Fourth Druk Gyalpo in bequeathing this sacred gift of democracy to the people of Bhutan and the second in instilling the

importance of the active participation of youth for bettering this vision of democracy dreamt by our Visionary Kings.

To solemnly bind the occasion, the National Voters' Day Pledge was read out by the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner and the distinguished guests, students and the other participants intoned after him very enthusiastically.

The programme at the clock tower ended with visit to different stalls that exhibited works of the various Departments and Divisions of the ECB and signing of autograph.

In the afternoon, Elocution among seven Middle and Higher Secondary schools in and around Thimphu was conducted in the RIM Auditorium. The theme of the elocution was *"The Bhutanese Democracy of My Dreams"*.

Boys and girls delightfully presented their dreams with full conviction and at times questioned the audience in

many concurrent issues, making many of the adult audience ponder deeply on it.





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Do adults share with our children their dreams of the Bhutanese Democracy? Or are words they express unachievable mere utopian illusions?

But there is no question or doubt that the confidence they exuded with promising words of dreams that leapt out into the horizon yet unreached, democracy with a difference does seem plausible.

The winners of the elocution were awarded cash prizes and certificates by the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner.

In the evening, a panel discussion by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) was conducted to share the experiences of people from different walks



of life. The panel consist two Members of Parliament from National Assembly, one from National Council, one Election Officer, a general voter from Darkala gewog and a young student voter from Royal Thimphu College. The panelists shared their individual experiences and hopes and aspiration touching upon the democracy lived and democracy yet to be achieved in this land of happiness.