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ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN

(Ensuring Free, Fair & Democratic Elections & Referendums)



ECB/CEC-GE/2018/991

Dated: 19th of October 2018

Press Release

Declaration of the Results of the General Elections to the Third National Assembly 2018

The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) has the honour to report to the People of Bhutan on the key details related to the Third National Assembly General Elections 2018 in the 47 *Demkhongs* of the twenty Dzongkhags with Poll Day on 18th of October 2018.

Seats Won by the Parties

The two Political Parties who contested in the General Elections have won the seats as follows:

Party	No. of Seats Won	Remarks
Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa	30	<i>Ruling Party</i>
Druk Phuensum Tshogpa	17	<i>Opposition Party</i>

Further details of the Final Results are available on the Election Commission's Website:

<http://results.ecb.bt/NAGE2018>

Member-Elects

A total of **18** women candidates contested in the Primary Round. Out of the total **10** contested in the General Elections, **7** have been elected to the National Assembly.

In terms of academic qualification, **1** Member-Elect has PhD, **26** have Master's degree, while **20** have Bachelor's degree.

In terms of age profile, the Member-Elects of the National Assembly include **1** in the 20's age range, **14** in their 30's, **17** in 40's, **13** in 50's, and **2** in 60's.

Turnout

The total number of registered voters are **438,663** of which the break-up details are:

1. EVM Voters : **304,659**
2. Postal Voters: **134,004**
 - *Conventional Postal Voters: 31,641*
 - *Postal Ballot Facilitation and Mobile Booths Voters: 102,363*

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424 voters were added in the Supplementary list.

It may be noted that a total of 2,055 changes to Postal Ballot Registration were made as of 24th of September 2018 in the 20 Dzongkhags for the Primary Round. These included changes to vote in person at the designated Polling Station; at different Postal Ballot Facilitation Booths; changing Postal Ballot option or updating of the Postal Addresses.

A total of 313,473 (159,319 females and 154,154 males) voters turned out and cast their votes for the Candidate of their choice in the 47 Constituencies.

The turnout details are as follows:

	Female	Male	Total	%
A. <i>Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)</i>	104,870	94,683	199,553	65.50%
B. <i>Postal Ballot (PB)</i>	54,449	59,471	113,920	85.01%
Total	159,319	154,154	313,473	71.46%

The Overall Voter Turnout Percentage is 71.46%.

A total of 797 Postal Ballots had to be rejected, which was most regretful although it is a reduction from the total 2019 rejections in the Primary Round. The Postal Ballots rejections in the General Elections was mostly due to ballot paper left unmarked or not marked properly (44%) and no Identity Declaration Certificate or wrong VPIC (31%) with empty Envelope A or B and incompetent witness etc. being reasons for 25% of the rejection.

Election Campaign

The Public Debate of the Candidates were organised for each of the 47 *Demkhongs*.

A total of 536 Common Forums were organized for campaign by the Candidates of the 47 *Demkhongs* in the 20 Dzongkhags, 205 *Gewogs* and in some cases, in the *Chiwogs* as well. A total of 31,851 (15,780 female and 16,071 male) voters are reported to have attended the Common Forums.

The *Demkhong* election authorities were reminded to provide time after the common forums to the Candidates to talk in detail to the electorate about their party manifesto and

pledges in the local dialect, as had been done in the past after the formal Common Forums. This practice came into prominence during the General Elections 2018.

In addition, both Parties and Candidates carried out separate meetings as well as door to door campaigns to reach and secure the support of the electorate besides the distribution of the campaign materials such as placards, brochures, posters etc. and broadcast over television and radio. The unprecedented use of social media was marked by an overwhelming percentage of disputes and allegations being related in one way or other to social media.

Campaign Finance from the State

A total of Nu **14.100** million was provided by the State @ of Nu. 150,000/= per *Demkhong* per Candidate for financing the General Election Campaign, under the laws. Accordingly, all expenditures are required to be reported on a weekly basis with full report to be submitted within a month of the declaration of results.

The sponsored election campaign advertising including the Public Debates, Television, Radio and Print advertisements as well as Common Forums were conducted and provided as set out under the Laws.

Polls

The Polls on 18th of October 2018 were conducted in **865** Polling Stations in the Country on the Electronic Voting Machines. Wherever necessary, improvements have been made to the existing polling stations with **141** temporary polling stations set up where there were no appropriate public infrastructure.

As in the Primary Round, the Postal Ballot System included the Conventional Postal Ballot and Postal Ballot Voting at the **67** Postal Ballot Facilitation Booths and **29** Mobile Booths, operated on 10th, 11th and 12th of October 2018.

Polling Officials on Election Duty

A total of **5,307** Officials, not including Security Personnel and the permanent officials of the ECB, were deployed for the General Elections 2018 as follows:

- 1.Chief Election Coordinators: **20**
- 2.Deputy Chief Election Coordinators: **39**
- 3.Assistant Election Coordinators: **205**
- 4.Other Dzongkhag Dispute Settlement Bodies Members: **40**
- 5.National Observers: **47**
- 6.Micro Observers: **2**
- 7.Returning Officers:**47**
- 8.Assistant Returning Officers: **2**
- 9.Presiding Officers: **865**
- 10.Polling Officers: **2,404**
- 11.Lady Security: **865**
- 12.Office of Media Arbitrator: **3**
- 13.Social Media Monitors: **22**
- 14.Legal Officers: **5**
- 15.Booth Officials (Postal Ballot Facilitation and Mobile Booths): **602**
- 16.Dzongkhag Accounts Officer: **20**
- 17.Office Assistant in Returning Officer’s Office: **97**
- 18.Temporary staff at Postal Ballot Administration Unit: **22**

Election Disputes

The timely adjudication of disputes and addressing of the complaints and allegations as per the laws are key factors that contribute to free and fair elections and ensuring public trust in the integrity of the system and outcomes.

In the General Elections, a total of **21** cases were received and decisions taken, of which one case from Dokar_Sharpa Demkhong of Paro Dzongkhag was appealed to the Commission, wherein the decision of the Central Election Dispute Settlement Body (CEDSB) was partially modified and the complainants were warned and fined for the offence of cantankerous litigation under section 15.5 of the Election Dispute Settlement Rules and Regulations 2018 but the payment of expenses to the two witnesses was cancelled and the two witnesses were warned under section 29.1.5 of the Election Dispute Settlement Rules and Regulations 2018.

Out of the **21** cases, **14** cases were related to Social Media. From the total cases received, 4 cases were received during the 48-hours no campaign period. In total **7** cases were dismissed as being baseless.

Office of Media Arbitrator

In addition to monitoring the Print and broadcast media on daily basis, the Office of Media Arbitrator (OMA) received **9** Complaints related to Social Media of which eight were investigated and forwarded to the Commission while one was dismissed.

The Office of Media Arbitrator had:

1. During Primary Round, found **15** Facebook posts objectionable of which **3** were removed by the originating social media users on the advice of the Monitors while **4** were removed by the Facebook authorities on the request of the Office of Media Arbitrator. Despite repeated request by Office of Media Arbitrator, the Facebook authorities did not remove **8**.
2. During General Elections, **28** Facebook posts were found objectionable of which **4** were removed by the originating user, **6** were removed by the Facebook authorities. Despite repeated request by Office of Media Arbitrator, the Facebook authorities did not remove **18**.
3. During the General Elections, the 20 Social Media Monitors monitored **189** WeChat groups on a daily basis in 47 *Demkhongs* which was a specific measures put in place in response to the spate of disputes related to Social Media being filed.

Poll Day

No problems as such were encountered in the conduct of the Polls yesterday. No incidences were reported with regard to Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in any of the Polling Stations.

Media and Election Visitors Programme

A total of **363** national and **12** international journalists were accredited and issued permit cards to cover and report on the General Elections 2018. **2** International Observers from the Election Commission of India have observed the Elections. Similarly, **9** international visitors witnessed the elections under the Election Visitors Program.

New Features of the Third Parliamentary Election 2018

It may be noted that some key features include:

1. The Customized Strategy and Work plan for each Dzongkhag, developed within a national framework focusing on voter turnout was successfully drawn up and implemented in the 20 Dzongkhags much before the election year;
2. Introduction of Postal Ballot Facilitation and Mobile Booths;
3. Number of members in Polling Teams deployed in the Polling Stations revised and reduced in view of experience gained over time and based on number of voters assigned to a Polling Stations;
4. Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for key;
5. Focus on reaching those who had not been able to vote in the past including the aged, disabled etc;
6. Streamlining financial and procurement systems for timely and prudent delivery and use of election materials;
7. Development of more apps to digitize important procedure including result-relay and consolidation to make it more efficient and error-free; and
8. Purchase of 1,000 new Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) to ensure smooth elections.

Glimpses

Even as promises and pledges, images and sound bytes from the campaign period may linger and echo in myriad ways in the minds of the voters, we would like to add a few stories from around the country to offer a glimpse into some of the little known aspects of the conduct of the Elections 2018.

In Bumthang, the mobile Postal Ballot Facilitation Booth team of *Tshampa* and *Gomthang* in Bumthang Dzongkhag risked life and limb traversing inhospitable terrain for 3 days to facilitate 77 voters to exercise their franchise in the General Elections. Many pictures from other Dzongkhags, notably Zhemgang in the summer, also speak of similar high adventures and commitment of the voter education and polling teams.

In Chhukha Dzongkhag, election officials who went to conduct common forum at Getana Gewog on 5th of October 2018 were stranded in the middle of the forest till 1:00 a.m. on the way back. They could reach home only after another vehicle came to pick them up.

On 13th of September 2018, 22 Polling Officials of Dagana Dzongkhag, including security personnel, deployed to Samchumthang and Karmaling Gewog Centre Polling Stations managed to cross the Sheti Buger and Khainikhola rivers. However, due to heavy rainfall the Labrangkhola river got swollen and the team couldn't cross it and the team were stranded between the Khainikhola and Labrangkhola rivers. An army truck and a JCB had to be deployed to get the team to safety. The next day Excavators and two private JCBs were hired to divert the flow of the river and clear the road block caused by rain fall the previous night. With no other option, the Polling officials then took a ride in the bucket of the JCB to cross the river and managed to reach the respective Polling Stations on time.

An election officer in Lunana suffering from severe altitude sickness was saved by the services of the medical officer in the Polling Team the local health services and the medical supplies, promptly and generously supplied by the team filming *Yak In The Classroom* in the gewog, even as inclement weather delayed evacuation for a few days.

Lhuentse Dzongkhag initiated an all-women polling team at Autsho Central School for the Postal Ballot Facilitation Booth as well as Primary Round Poll Day. For the General Elections Poll Day, Paro Dzongkhag boasted an all women team at the Drugyel Polling Station. The procedures went smoothly without any problems with action speaking louder than words to encourage women in the community.

In Monggar Dzongkhag, the Officials had to work round the clock, at a stretch, on couple of occasions. Similarly, the Pema Gatshel team completed investigations on a dispute at 6 a.m. in the morning of the Poll Day, beating the record of the Central Investigation Team who could complete investigation in Paro at 5 a.m earlier in the campaign period.

Benporong Polling Station in Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhags is a remote Polling Station with no road and electricity connectivity. All Polling Officials Mobile phones were switched off to save the battery for the Poll Day.

Twelve postal ballots addressed to Shompangkha of Sarpang Dzongkhag were mistakenly sent to Sombaykha of Haa Dzongkhag as discovered out on the eve of Poll during the Envelope A sorting. These were immediately asked to be sent to Thimphu and *Bhutan Post* delivered them to the Shompangkha Returning Officer on Poll Day just in time for the counting.

In Thimphu Dzongkhag, a group of 35 Prisoners cast their votes at a Mobile Booth in Lingzhi where they were stationed. They were very glad to have an opportunity to avail such facility during the historic event.

In Trashigang Dzongkhag, the Polling Team of Khiliphoo Polling Station under Merag Gewog on Poll Day had to assign an official to walk to a nearby hill top and relay 2 hourly voter turnout from there as the mobile network connectivity at the Polling Stations was unreliable.

Tsirang Dzongkhag, as indeed some other Dzongkhags too, crosschecked against the entire Electoral Roll of the Dzongkhag and called more than 5,000 voters who did not turn up in the Primary Round to remind them about the General Elections and the upcoming Poll Day. This was an extra effort to increase the voter turnout.

In Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag, a total of 4 buses were hired by the election authorities to ferry **154** summer resident voters of Sha Khotakha *Chiwog*, since there is no public transport facility there.

For the success of the Third Parliamentary Elections 2018, including the National Council, Primary Round and the General Elections we would like to celebrate the hearty participation of the voters who turned out to vote, acknowledge the participation of the National Council Candidates, four registered Political Parties and their Candidates and salute the entire team of dedicated election officials, security personnel and polling officers who worked tirelessly with commitment. Further, we would like to acknowledge the support rendered by the Interim Government, Security agencies, Ministries, Dzongkhag and Gewog Administrations, Media and other Agencies including the transport, telecom, postal, Banking and Power service providers for their support in the conduct of the Third Parliamentary Elections 2018.

Above all, the Election Commission of Bhutan offers its deepest gratitude and homage to His Majesty The King, His Majesty The Druk Gyal Zhipa and His Holiness The Je Khenpo for Their Eternal Grace and Blessings that ensures and assures the continued unity, happiness and well-being of the People and the everlasting good fortune of the Pelden Drukpa.

Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan