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ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN



(Ensuring Free, Fair & Democratic Elections & Referendums)

ECB/NOTIF-01/2021/4231

Dated: 16th March 2021

NOTIFICATION

Thromde Elections 2021:

Third Local Government Elections under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Election Commission of Bhutan, in pursuance of Section 197 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008, calls the Third Local Government elections under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan for the *Dzongkhag Thromdes* of (1) Thimphu *Thromde* of Thimphu Dzongkhag (2) Phuentshogling *Thromde* of Chhukha Dzongkhag and (3) Gelegphu *Thromde* of Sarpang Dzongkhag.

The Election Schedule and the details concerning *Demkhongs*, Selection Procedure for Nomination of Candidates, Electoral Rolls, EVMs, Polling Stations, Polling Officials, Polling Management, Security and other arrangements are hereby being notified as follows:

(A) Election Schedule

The Schedule shall be as follows:

Date & Time	Remarks
16 th March 2021 (Tuesday)	- Issuance of Notification calling elections for Dzongkhag <i>Thromde Tshogde</i> - Appointment of Electoral Officials
17 th March 2021 (Wednesday)	- Scheduling of <i>Dhamngoi Zomdu</i>
20 th March 2021 (Saturday)	- Commencement of the selection procedure (<i>Dhamngoi Zomdu</i>) for <i>Thrompon</i> and signature process by aspiring candidates for the post of <i>Thromde Tshogpa</i>
23 rd March 2021 (Tuesday)	- Last date for registration of postal ballots

Post Box No.: 2008, Democracy House, Kawajangsa, Thimphu: Bhutan

334851, 334852 (PABX), 334762 (EA to CEC), Fax: 334763

Website: www.ecb.bt E-mail: cec@ecb.bt

27 th March 2021 (Saturday)	- Freezing of the Electoral Roll (Section 12 of the Election Act) - Finalization of Electoral Roll and Postal Voter list
29 th March 2021 (Monday)	- Last date for filing of nominations of candidates for <i>Thrompon</i> and <i>Thromde Tshogpas</i>
30 th March 2021 (Tuesday)	- Scrutiny of nominations of candidates
1 st April 2021 (Thursday)	- Last date for withdrawal of candidature - Returning Officer to initiate sending postal ballot to registered Postal Voters
2 nd April 2021 (Friday)	- Commencement of election campaign
12 th April 2021 (Monday)	- Public Debate for Thimphu
13 th April 2021 (Tuesday)	- Public Debate for Gelegphu
14 th April 2021 (Wednesday)	- Public Debate for Phuentshogling
23 rd & 24 th April 2021 (2 Days) (Friday & Saturday)	- Operation of the Mobile PFBF
26 th April 2021 (Monday)	- End of election campaign
27 th April 2021 (Tuesday)	- Last day/time for receiving postal ballots by Returning Officer
28 th April 2021 (Wednesday)	- Poll Day and counting of results
29 th April 2021 (Thursday)	- Declaration of results & submission of the results to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo - Start of Election Petition Period
12 th May 2021 (Wednesday)	-End of Election Petition Period
13 th May 2021 (Thursday)	-Issuance of the certificate of election

(B) Polling Hours

1. The polling hours shall be from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

(C) Demkhong

2. A *Dzongkhag Thomde*, declared as such by decision of Parliament, shall form the *Demkhong* for election of the respective *Thrompon*.
3. A *Dzongkhag Thomde Tshogpa Demkhong*, declared as per the Final Delimitation Order issued vide Notification No. DC/CHAIR/2010/697 dated 16 October 2010, shall form the *Demkhong* for election of the respective *Dzongkhag Thomde Tshogde Tshogpa* and as per the directives of Hon'ble Supreme Court vide Order No. མཚོན་མཚོན་-CJB (27)2020/1608 dated 3rd December 2020.

(D) Selection Process of the *Dzongkhag Thomde* Candidates

4. A registered voter who fulfills the criteria laid down in Section 178 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008, is eligible to be nominated as a Candidate for election to the post of *Thrompon* or *Thromde Tshogpa*.
5. The selection process of the *Thromde Tshogde* candidates shall be as follows:

Thrompon

6. A registered voter of a said *Thromde Demkhong* who fulfills the criteria laid down in Section 178 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 is eligible to be nominated as a candidate for election to the post of *Thrompon*.
7. Every *Thromde Tshogpa Demkhong* is entitled to nominate one candidate each to contest the election for *Thrompon*.
8. The Dzongkhag Election Authority shall hold a *Dhamngoi Zomdu* in every *Thromde Tshogpa Demkhong* to select one candidate wishing to contest election to the post of *Thrompon*.
9. In the absence of any registered voter interested in contesting the elections, a statement to that effect shall be submitted to the Dzongkhag Election Authority by the designated team convening the *Zomdu*.

Thromde Tshogpa

10. A registered voter aspiring to contest *Thromde Tshogpa* elections shall produce signatures of at least 5 percent of the registered voters from the *Thromde Tshogpa Demkhong* supporting his/her nomination to the post of *Thromde Tshogpa*, provided no voter has supported more than one nominee.
11. Aspiring candidates, contesting for the post of *Thromde Tshogpa*, while seeking support of 5 percent of the registered voters of his/her *Demkhong* via signature drive, shall wear face masks, use hand gloves and maintain physical distancing while engaging with the voters.

(E) Electoral Rolls

12. The qualifying date for the Electoral Roll for the Third Local Government elections in the three *Thromdes*, 2021 shall be 1st January 2021. The Electoral Roll shall be frozen as of 27th March 2021, providing for the temporary embargo on entries in the Electoral Roll for a period of thirty days before the date of poll.
13. The final Electoral Rolls shall be published and provided to the Returning Officers and Candidates contesting the elections on 2nd April 2021.

(F) Election Campaign

14. A Candidate shall have more than 24 days for campaigning, which must stop at 8 a.m. of 26th April 2021 i.e., 48 hours before the commencement of poll on the poll day.
15. No Minister, Member of Parliament, official or member of a political party and Local Government post holders shall campaign directly or indirectly for any candidate in the Thromde elections. No travels or official tours shall be undertaken by a Minister or Member of Parliament particularly to his/her *Demkhong* during the election period, except to cast their votes on the Poll Day should they wish not to avail the postal ballot facility extended to them and their spouses under Section 331 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008. If such travel to a *Demkhong* becomes unavoidable, he/she shall first report to the ECB/concerned Returning Officer.

16. All banks or financial institutions shall report to the ECB any abnormal transaction of money, including in the account of a candidate contesting the Thromde elections in the three Dzongkhags.

17. The Election Campaign shall be conducted as outlined in the *Strategy for the Conduct of the Thromde Elections 2021 amid Covid-19 Pandemic* issued by the Election Commission of Bhutan.

Election Campaign Expenditure

18. A Candidate for the *Thromde* elections cannot exceed his/her election campaign expense beyond the ceiling fixed by the Election Commission i.e., total of Nu. 75,000/-.

Election Campaign Returns

19. A Candidate must submit accounts of campaign to the National Observers for his/her scrutiny and must file his/ her returns of election expenses to the concerned Dzongkhag Electoral Office or directly to the Public Election Fund Division within thirty days of declaration of the election result.

Public Debates of Thrompon Candidates

20. Public Debates shall be conducted for the Candidates whose nominations for the post of *Thrompon* have been duly accepted by the concerned Returning Officer.

21. The debates shall be conducted as per the *Guidelines for the Conduct of Public Debates for the Thromde elections, in three Dzongkhag Thromdes of Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu, 2021*.

Common Forum for Public Address by all Candidates

22. The Returning Officer, in consultation with the respective Election Coordinator and Security Coordinator shall arrange a Common Forum in each *Dzongkhag Thromde* in order to avoid inconvenience to voters of attending multiple sessions.

23. The Returning Officer shall facilitate the gathering of the electorate at an appropriate venue (open air such as football ground, futsal ground, stadium,

assembly ground/spacious hall such as auditorium, MPH of schools) and time in the *Demkhong* to hear the candidates. However, all individuals attending Common Forum (CF) shall ensure full compliance of all COVID-19 health safety protocols.

(G) Postal Ballots

24. The operation of postal ballot shall be as per *the SOP for the Conventional Postal Ballot, Postal Ballot Facilitation Booth (PBFB) and Mobile PBFB for Thomde Elections 2021*.

25. The schedule for the processing of postal ballots for the *Thomde* elections shall be as given below:

1 st March 2021 (Monday)	- Commencement of registration of postal voters
23 rd March 2021 (Tuesday)	- Last date for registration for postal ballot
1 st April 2021 (Thursday)	- Commencement date for the issue of postal ballots by the Returning Officer
27 th April 2021 (4:00 p.m. Tuesday)	- Last date for receipt of postal ballots by Returning Officer
28 th April 2021 (2:00 p.m. Wednesday)	- Counting of postal ballots by Returning Officer

26. A person who applied for postal ballot shall not be allowed to vote in person as his/her name will be included in the Postal Voters' List and marked as 'PB' in the Voters' List sent to the polling station by the Returning Officer.

(H) Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC)

27. The ECB shall accept either the Citizenship Identity Card (CID) or Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC) for the purpose of identification of the voter on the poll day so as to mitigate the risk of transmission and spread of COVID-19 at the VPIC issuance centers during *Thomde* elections.

(I) Electronic Voting Machines

28. The Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) shall be used for polling in all *Demkhongs*.

(J) Indelible Ink

29. Indelible ink shall be used during the *Thromde* elections and marked from top of the nail to the bottom of the first joint of the left index finger.

(K) Polling Stations

30. There shall be at least one polling station in every *Thromde Tshogpa Demkhong*, so that managing a polling station would be simple and also convenient for voters.

31. The arrangement of polling stations shall be as outlined in the *Strategy for the Conduct of the Thromde Elections 2021 amid Covid-19 Pandemic* issued by the Election Commission of Bhutan.

(L) Election Officials

Chief Election Coordinators

32. The *Dzongdag* of the respective *Dzongkhag* shall be appointed as the Chief Election Coordinator, *Dzongrab* of the respective *Dzongkhag*, Executive Secretary of the respective *Thromde* and *Dungpa* of *Phuentshogling Dungkhag* as the Deputy Chief Election Coordinators responsible for carrying out the roles, responsibilities and duties as provided in the Electoral Laws and Appointment Orders.

National Observers

33. The Election Commission shall depute senior officers from the Civil Service as National Observers for each of the three *Dzongkhag Thromdes*.

34. The Observers shall be vested with the authority, roles and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and in particular the

relevant provisions contained in the Guidelines for National and International Observers and the Appointment orders.

Returning Officers

35. The Election Commission shall appoint a senior officer as Returning Officer for each of the three *Dzongkhag Thromdes*.

36. A Returning Officer shall be vested with the authority, roles and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Returning Officers and the Appointment Order.

Presiding Officers and Polling Officers

37. Returning Officers shall appoint the Presiding and Polling Officers from the list of government officials working in the same Dzongkhag, provided by Dzongkhag Election Office. The appointment shall not be earlier than one day before the Poll day, unless otherwise authorized.

38. Presiding Officers are vested with the authority, roles and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Presiding Officers.

Counting Supervisors & Counting Assistants

39. The Returning Officers shall authorize the Presiding Officer and Polling Officer I in a polling station to function as the Counting Supervisor and the Counting Assistant to count the results after the close of Poll.

40. Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants shall be vested with the authority, roles and responsibilities as per the provisions in the Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Handbook for Counting Supervisor and Counting Assistant.

Assignment of Duty Stations

41. National Observers, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Polling Officers, Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants shall ensure that he/she is not being placed in the Dzongkhag where his/her *Gung* or *Mitsi* is registered, unless authorized otherwise.

(M) Law and Order & Deployment of Forces

42. The Royal Bhutan Police shall be responsible for deploying security personnel at every polling station as per the *Election Security Rules and Regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan*.

43. Security personnel shall ensure that he/she is not being placed in the Dzongkhag where his/her *Gung* or *Mitsi* is registered, unless authorized otherwise.

44. The Election Security Focal Officers of a *Thromde* shall work in close coordination and cooperation with the election officers as a team towards conducting the elections smoothly.

45. Desuups shall be mobilized as per requirements to supplement and complement the efforts of the RBP and to enforce the COVID-19 health safety protocols.

(N) Election Control Rooms

46. For the purpose of monitoring, supervision and direction of the conduct of elections, election Control Rooms shall be set up in the Office of the Returning Officers at the *Thromde* level and at the Election Commission headquarters for the national level.

(O) Election Code of Conduct

47. The Election Code of Conduct shall come into force from the date of the notification calling for elections issued by the ECB and shall continue to be in force until the completion of the election period in the *Demkhongs* of the three *Dzongkhag Thromdes* i.e., 16th March 2021 to 28th April 2021.

48. All election officers, political parties, candidates and voters must comply with the Election Code of Conduct and the provisions of the Electoral Laws, Rules and Regulations and Guidelines.

(P) Poll Day

49. The Poll Day for the Thromde Election 2021 shall be on **28th April 2021**.

50. The Poll Day shall be declared as a public holiday in three Dzongkhag Thromdes.

51. All employers are required, by law, to grant the required number of days as leave of absence for a reasonable period as is necessary to enable him/her to vote at the election, subject to the exceptions made in Sections 339 and 341.

(Q) Demkhong with No Candidate or Only One Candidate

52. If there is no Candidate after the last date for filing of nomination of Candidates notified herein, the election will be postponed till further notice.

53. The *Demkhong* in a *Dzongkhag Thromde* with only one candidate after the last date of filing of nomination of Candidates announced herein will be conducted as 'Uncontested Election' in accordance with Sections 575 and 576 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008.

Now, thereof, from the day of issue of this Notification, the Election Commission of Bhutan notifies the general public on the Election Schedule of the *Thromde Tshogdes* in Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu and all matters relating to it.

Issued on the 3rd day of the 2nd Month of the Iron Female Ox Year corresponding to 16th March 2021.

Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan

Copies to:

1. Hon'ble Prime Minister, Royal Government of Bhutan, Kingdom of Bhutan
2. Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan, Royal Court of Justice, Supreme Court of Bhutan, Thimphu
3. Hon'ble Speaker, National Assembly, Parliament of Bhutan, Thimphu
4. Hon'ble Chairperson, National Council, Parliament of Bhutan, Thimphu
5. Hon'ble Opposition Leader, National Assembly, Parliament of Bhutan, Thimphu
6. Hon'ble Zimpon, Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon, Tashichhoedzong, Thimphu
7. Hon'ble Secretary to His Majesty the King of Bhutan, His Majesty's Secretariat, Tashichhoedzong, Thimphu
8. Hon'ble Secretary to His Majesty the Druk Gyal Zhipa, Thimphu
9. Hon'ble Chief Justice, Royal Court of Justice, High Court of Bhutan, Thimphu
10. Hon'ble Chief Operations Officer, Royal Bhutan Army, Thimphu
11. Hon'ble Chief of Police, Royal Bhutan Police, Thimphu
12. Hon'ble Commandant, Royal Body Guards, Dechencholing, Thimphu
13. Hon'ble Chairperson, Anti-Corruption Commission, Thimphu
14. Hon'ble Chairperson, Royal Civil Service Commission, Thimphu
15. Hon'ble Auditor General, Royal Audit Authority, Thimphu
16. Hon'ble Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet, Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu
17. All Hon'ble Secretaries to the Royal Government of Bhutan
18. Election Security Coordinator, Royal Bhutan Police, Thimphu
19. Director, Bureau for Law and Order, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Thimphu
20. Director, Road Safety and Transport Authority, Thimphu
21. President, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Thimphu
22. Managing Director, Bhutan Post, Thimphu
23. Drangpon, Royal Court of Justice, Thimphu, Chhukha and Sarpang Dzongkhags
24. Dzongdag, Dzongkhag Administration, Thimphu, Chhukha and Sarpang Dzongkhags
25. Dungpa, Dungkhag Administration, Phuentshogling
26. Executive Secretary, Dzongkhag Thromde, Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu
27. Returning Officers, Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu
28. National Observers, Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu
29. Dzongkhag Electoral Officer, Thimphu, Chhukha and Sarpang Dzongkhags