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Be free to exercise your right of choice!



Strong and Representative Local Governments

for

Good Governance and the Community's wellbeing

Dear Voters of Bhutan,

With the conduct of the Local Government Elections 2011, the Kingdom of Bhutan is poised to complete the transition to Democratic Constitutional Monarchy as willed by our Beloved Monarchs.

It has become the responsibility and duty of every Bhutanese to ensure that this journey is secure with the destination in clear sight: to stray from this path is not an option for any of us.

As we go through the process of the First ever Local Government Elections it has become essential, based on our experience of activities of the Candidates and Political Parties in the past, that we reiterate and remind ourselves of some important aspects to be borne in mind.

I, therefore, take this opportunity to share a few concerns of the Election Commission and clarify certain issues.

1. Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)

We would like to inform the public that in the past some miscreants have been spreading stories that voting will not be secret and the casting of Vote in an EVM is not secret. People were also told that video cameras are kept in the Voting Compartments. These are all deliberate disinformation by the mischief mongers to mislead and misguide the Voters.

I, as Your Chief Election Commissioner, assure you that such a practice will not be allowed to take place. Anyone who spreads such stories must be reported to an election officer, an officer of law or any competent public official immediately or to the Election Commission at any of the phone numbers No.17111706, 17614447, 17603664 and 17602000 or to any election officers on duty at your Dzongkhag, Gewog or Chiwog.

2. Secrecy of Vote

Voting in an EVM is **secret**. So must be with the Postal Ballot. You need not fear to **Vote** or not to **Vote** for any person. No one has the right to know for whom you have cast your Vote. To force or coerce to reveal who the Voter has Voted for is an electoral offence. If anyone forces you, you can report to the election and police authorities instantly. The Voting Compartment, particularly when a Voter is inside, is out of bounds for any other person including an election official. Please cast your Vote as per your conscience, not based on pressure or at others' bidding. A political party or candidate will only know whether you came to Vote or not, but they will never know for whom you have cast your Vote.

3. Please Remain Above Politics

We urge Members of the Royal Family, Religious Personalities, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Political Parties, donors, Civil Societies and religious organizations to refrain from being involved or interfering in the conduct of lawful, free and fair Local Government Elections 2011.

4. Administrative & Disciplinary Actions for Ensuring a Level Playing Field

Public servants should not get involved in electioneering activities while in service or allow use of public facilities for activities by any candidates unless authorised by an election officer.

All Public and Civil Servants are hereby cautioned to remain firmly apolitical to ensure fair play and level-playing field for the contesting candidates. If found, in any way, to be favouring and campaigning for any candidate in an election, it will lead to transfer of his/her service from the current post on the eve or during an election by the Election Commission. Further, if the charges are proven serious, he/she shall be prosecuted.

5. Refrain from travels, tours and organization of public gatherings and meetings

All individuals and authorities and organization are advised not to organize any meetings, programmes and activities that would disrupt the election machinery or could be misconstrued as an extended campaigning.

6. Candidates not to Resort to Coercion & other Unlawful Means

Any activity through coercion or inducement is illegal and against the freedom and right of a Voter. A Voter shall not be made to do anything, in particular, commit his/her Vote against his/her own free will. Political Parties and Candidates must refrain from coercing and intimidating voters to support or commit to vote against the free will of a voter.

Please note that a contribution of any kind cannot be made by any person or organization to a Candidate. A candidate in a Local Government Elections is allowed to spend on his/her permissible election campaign activities a sum of not more than Nu.50,000/- from his/her own income. Any violation shall be treated as a serious offence punishable under the laws of the land.

7. Bribery

The candidates and their representatives are prohibited from making any gifts or rewards that would be understood as a bribe to persuade or dissuade a voter to support a candidate or commit to vote in a certain manner. A candidate may be barred from contesting the election and if elected, results may be declared null and void.

8. Misleading of Voters

The candidates and their representatives must not mislead any voter to attend their meetings, participate in activities, or collect money, and obtain consent or use disguised means to collect funds and sign Nomination Forms. A candidate may be barred from contesting the election in case he/she engages in such activities.

9. Misuse of Name of the Kings

A Candidate or his/her representative shall be guilty of violating Section 525 of the Election Act 2008 if he/she makes public statements conveying a Royal Command or resorting to royal patronage for ensuring electoral gains in the election as the Section provides that:

“A person shall be guilty of unfair means, if he/she obtains or uses any patronage of the Druk Gyalpo or any assistance from any person in the service of government for the furtherance of the prospects of any candidate’s election.”

Therefore, it is important that no candidate or their workers use or make any such reference.

10. Seditious Acts

The candidates and their representatives shall refrain from making any statements prejudicial to the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan or indulge in any act which may cause ill-will, differences or cause tension between different communities, religious or linguistic groups, undermine Sovereignty and National Security. Any candidate or his/her representatives proven to be guilty of such acts shall be dealt as per the Laws of the land.

11. Power to Choose – Right to Vote

It is very important for the people to select the right person to work in the best interest of the community and local government. If the people choose the right candidates, their interests would be better served and the country would become a successful democracy. This right must therefore be exercised dutifully by a Voter for the wellbeing of the Nation and all people of Bhutan. Therefore, we encourage all voters to participate in the nomination process. However, even if you could not participate in the nomination process, you can have your say by casting your vote on Poll Day or through the Postal Ballot.

12. National Holiday

The 24th of May 2011 is a National Holiday including for the private Sector. Please note that all employers are obliged to observe the day as a holiday and advise their employees to fulfill their duty to exercise the franchise, including granting reasonable leave to those employees wishing to go and vote in person.

13. Responsible Participation on the Poll Day

It is important that each one of us as patriotic Bhutanese take upon ourselves, as our sacred duty, to Vote, as a community united in common objectives committed to a common cause.

A Wish

We hope, you the Voters of Bhutan, in whom our Beloved Monarchs have entrusted the responsibility to shape the destiny of Bhutan through the exercise of your Vote, will not let Them down. Most of all, you must not let yourself down by yielding to pressures and corrupt practices.

The Pledge

Let us all Vote with a clear Conscience. Let us Vote in keeping with our collective aspirations and prayer for the highest repute and Glory of Our Nation - Glorious Bhutan- to elect Strong and Representative Local Government for Good Governance and Community well-being!

Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan
