

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF  
MANIPUR AT THE KHONGJOM DAY CELEBRATION, 2017 AT  
KHONGJOM WAR MEMORIAL AT KHEBACHING, THOUBAL ON  
APRIL 23, 2017

Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri N. Biren Singh ji,

Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Shri Y. Joykumar Singh ji,

Hon'ble Speaker, Shri Y. Khemchand Singh ji,

Hon'ble Minister (Education), Shri Th. Radheshyam Singh ji,

Hon'ble Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and MLAs,

Distinguished Invitees,

Friends from the Media and

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here today to observe 'Khongjom Day' at this revered ground of Khongjom. The 23<sup>rd</sup> day of April has great historical significance for the people of Manipur as it was on this day in 1891 and at this hallowed ground that the brave sons of Manipur laid down their lives for the sake of their motherland fighting against the mighty British in the Anglo-Manipuri war. The Day reminds us of the unflinching courage, patriotism and sacrifice of the people of Manipur who fought to protect the freedom of their motherland and the Khongjom river turned red with the blood of the dead and wounded Manipuri fighters.

Historical accounts of the battle show that a handful of Manipuri soldiers with primitive weapons fought against an overwhelming number of British soldiers with guns attacking from different directions. But the brave Manipuri soldiers stood their ground and never gave up even in that hopeless situation. The raw courage and love of their motherland demonstrated by our forefathers deserve praise and accolades of the highest order. Freedom fighters of the like of Paona Brajabashi and others have

made their place in history and the battle of Khongjom is a glorious saga of not only the freedom struggle of Manipur but also reflective of the spirit of freedom of the entire country. It is only befitting that the State Government has constructed a War Monument at this historical place of Khongjom.

In a global environment which is fast changing, everyday sees new challenges confronting the present generation. But we have to learn from the pages of history and keep ourselves ever disposed to rise to the occasion. We must not repeat our past mistakes and all effort should be made to put ourselves on the path of progress. Today, while remembering those who died for the cause of freedom of their motherland, we should also promise to ourselves to work with renewed vigour, dedication and selflessness for a better tomorrow.

We are today the proud citizens of free India. It is time to forget our differences and build a country of our dream where every Indian can live with honour and dignity. India is a vast country with full of diversities, be it geographical, social or cultural. It should be our endeavour to turn these diversities into positive assets for building a robust and prosperous country. These diversities should not be allowed to become differences which would gnaw away at the root of a united India. Development can happen only when there is peace and stability. We need to stand united so that centrifugal forces which tend to divide the country are kept at bay. We need to remember that India's freedom is not a gift from the colonial rulers but was achieved through countless sacrifices made by our forefathers.

Manipur has passed through tumultuous days in recent times. The state has been saddled with law and order issues which have often derailed the development aspirations of the people. On a number of occasions, ethnic and social tensions, extortion from the public, businessmen, contractors, government employees and officials, abduction for ransom, senseless killing due to inter-group rivalries and violence against civilians continued to be a

matter of serious concern. Strikes and bandhs have become a common occurrence. Most recently, the state reeled under an economic blockade on the National Highways for more than 4 (four) months leading to acute scarcity of essential commodities. In all these, the ultimate sufferers are the common people. I would urge that these aberrations should be discouraged in the larger interest of the people and all issues should be resolved through the democratic process of dialogue. I trust that both the Government and the general public will wholly cooperate with each other to maintain peace and harmony in the state.

It is an ungratifying fact that the State has not been able to catch up with other states in the country in the race for development and the gap seems to be widening. There could be several reasons - manmade or otherwise. Though Manipur has several positives also, yet all concerned need to be focused and work with religious commitment so that the State can be equal partners with other States in building the Nation. The government should review its service delivery role regularly and strive for improvement in the interest of the people. All development programmes have to be made inclusive so that all citizens get their due. Manipur is full of potential. Let us all work for the common goal of making Manipur a peaceful and developed State. While paying our respect to those brave souls at this hallowed ground of Khongjom, let us rededicate ourselves to the great ideals of all our forefathers who sacrificed their lives for the cause of this state and the country.

I thank the organizers for inviting me to this observation and may the Khongjom reverberate forever with the paeans of glory to those brave sons of Manipur who sacrificed their lives for their motherland.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.