

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE CLOSING FUNCTION OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> MANIPUR POLO INTERNATIONAL, 2016 AT MAPAL KANGJEIBUNG, IMPHAL ON 29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2016

Shri Th. Lokeshwar Singh ji, Hon'ble Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly,

Km. Ak. Mirabai Devi, Hon'ble Minister (Social Welfare & Co-operation),

Mrs. Mary Kom, Hon'ble Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha),

Dr. M. Premjit Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Central Agricultural University,

Shri P.V.S.L.N. Murty, Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, Guwahati.

Shri S. Buddhachandra Singh, President, Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association and his team,

Participants from different countries and states,

Distinguished Invitees,

Esteemed Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**KHURUMJARI.**

I am privileged to be invited to the Closing Function of the 10<sup>th</sup> Manipur Polo International, 2016 which is organized as part of the Sangai Tourism Festival, 2016. I feel humbled to be able to walk on this hallowed polo ground of Mapal Kangjeibung which is said to be the oldest living polo ground in the world.

It is common knowledge that the present day polo had its origin in the traditional Manipuri Polo called 'Sagol Kangjei' and over the years, the game has evolved from the traditional to the modern form. Lt. Joseph Sherer of Sylhet Light Infantry learnt Sagol Kangjei from the Manipuris in the late 1850s and in 1859, as Superintendent of Cachar, he established the Cachar Kangjei Club. He took our Manipuri Polo Team to Kolkata in March, 1864 to play the first polo match for exhibition. Thereafter, the game continued its outward journey to different parts of the country and the globe. In Manipur,

the game has remained a common man's game whereas in the rest of the world including other parts of the country, it is the game of the very rich and high profile people.

The game of Sagol Kangjei flourished in Manipur for a long time till the British annexation of the state in 1891. Even after India became independent in 1947, the downward slide of polo and Manipuri pony continued till 1970 and by then, the game almost died in its place of birth and Manipuri pony was in danger of complete extinction. It was at this juncture that a group of polo enthusiasts formed the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association to take up the challenge to revive and revitalize this game as a game as well as national cultural heritage and also save Manipuri pony from extinction. The Association organised the first Manipur Polo International in the year, 1991 as a tournament approved by the Indian Polo Association and the only one of its kind played on pony. Another unique aspect is that the tournament is played at the historic and oldest living pologround in the world – Mapal Kangjeibung or Imphal Pologround.

The game of Polo is the pride of Manipur and it is definitely a precious contribution from the state to the world of sports. But it is also a sad fact that the game is suffering from a serious lack of growth. The sorry state of the game could be due to several reasons ranging from lack of sponsorship, high cost of the game to competition posed by modern games. This has also resulted in the sharp decline of the number of original ponies. One of the main objectives for organizing this tournament has always been to save Manipuri pony along with popularizing the game of Polo in its birth place, besides promoting Tourism. The polo pony of Manipur, a recognized breed of India, though small, is sturdy and agile. These ponies are even now, literally semi-wild and there is tremendous pressure on them as the traditional grazing ground has shrunk. The Manipuri pony is seeing bad days and it is very pathetic to see the condition of the ponies standing on the roads without anybody looking after them. Renewed efforts need to be made to save this

breed from extinction. I am told that the State Government has already taken some initiatives in this direction. The Pony Sanctuary at Heingang, Imphal East District and Pony Breeding Farm at Lamphel, Imphal West District being developed by the State Government will certainly make a positive impact. The recent Pony Policy of the Government is also a significant step.

The Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association has been organising this tournament every year as a part of the Annual Sangai Festival. Alongside the Sangai Festival which has been showcasing the rich tradition and cultural heritage of the state with an aim for promoting tourism, the Polo Tournament itself has been a major attraction of the festival. This year also, the foreign teams participating in the tournament have made it more competitive and exciting. I am sure the presence of these foreign players has given a fresh impetus in our effort to popularize the game. I hope the participants in the tournament especially our friends from other countries have enjoyed fully the heady blend of the game and culture.

I congratulate the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association for organizing this International Tournament successfully, with the participation of teams from other parts of the globe. This will enable Manipur to figure on the Polo map of the world, which I feel it richly deserves. I hope that the participants will take back pleasant and happy memories of playing polo at its birth place. I also hope that they have had a memorable outing and a good time during their short stay in Manipur. A word of appreciation too for those who have contributed generously for such a worthy cause of the state.

My congratulations also to the winning team and all other participating teams for a successful Manipur Polo International and hope they will come again in the next edition of the tournament.

With these words, I thank the organizers for inviting me to join this function.

Thank you,

**THAGATCHARI,**

Jai Hind.