

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR ON THE OCCASION OF THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF SHIRUI LILY FESTIVAL ON 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2017 AT UKHRUL.

Dr. Mahesh Sharma ji, Hon'ble Union Minister for Tourism and Culture,  
Shri Yumnam Khemchand Singh ji, Hon'ble Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly,  
Hon'ble Ministers of the State Government,  
Leaders of various communities, Organizations and Unions,  
All the State Government Officers and Officials,  
All the participants in the Shirui Lily Festival,  
Members of the Media,  
Distinguished invitees,  
Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here this morning for the Closing Ceremony of the Shirui Lily Festival. At the outset, let me compliment the State Government and all others associated in organizing this Festival for their endeavour to make the people aware of our environment and rich bio-diversity as well as our rich cultural heritage. I also compliment them for taking the brand of Shirui Lily, the State Flower of Manipur, which was discovered by Frank Kingdon-Ward, one of the last great plant adventurers during his expedition to Manipur in 1946. He named it after his second wife Jean Macklin and the flower won the Merit Prize of the 1948 Royal Horticultural Society. Because of its rarity, it is now a well known plant. I also would like to congratulate the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur for his valuable initiative to make this Festival happen. I also strongly believe that the new State Tourism Festival will give a big boost to the promotion of tourism in the State, leading to more footfalls of tourists with Shirui Lily and picturesque Ukhrul providing the added attractions.

The lily which flowers in late May to early June, is becoming rarer and many experts have felt that it may ultimately become extinct, with the rising temperature and change in the habitat. Earlier, it was thought that due to forest fire the plant was being affected with a plant now bearing only a few flowers while about 3 to 4 decades back, a stalk carried not less than 12 flowers. Now, small bamboos are encroaching on the habitat of the lily and the latter is finding it difficult to compete with the gregarious bamboos. There is a need for proper scientific study on the flower, so that this renowned flower can continue to thrive in its original habitat. I am glad that ICAR has taken up tissue culture of this plant and I hope that it will perpetuate this plant not only in the original habitat but also in laboratory conditions so that it does not become extinct.

It is not only the lily but other flora and fauna are also facing tremendous threat to their survival as their habitats are not only altering but are under severe exploitation. Manipur is known for its orchids, flora and fauna and it will be a huge disappointment to all if this wealth is not preserved and marketed. The jhum cycle is becoming lesser and lesser with the need to feed the rising population and as a result, the soil is getting easily exposed and subject to erosion. Kingdon-Ward also found a number of *Primula* species on the Shirui slope but now the number has dwindled. Due to forest destruction on the Shirui range, Ukhrul headquarters is now facing very serious threat to its water supply. So the task at hand is huge.

On a positive note, Shirui Lily if marketed properly can become a major tourist attraction. It will not only create awareness about the need for protection of our environment, which our own people need to target but it can attract tourists which will not only improve the well being of the local population but can also bring in advanced knowledge and expertise to improve the environment. Manipur as such has huge tourism potential waiting to be tapped in the form of its bio-diversity and natural beauty. The

State is economically backward and tourism can be the key to our economic development. Connectivity is a major determinant for a place to develop into a tourism hub and Manipur is lagging behind on this count. It is with this in mind that I steadfastly pursued the case of having direct flights from Delhi and Mumbai to Imphal with the Central Ministry. I am also taking up strongly the cause of cleaning up Loktak Lake, a main tourist attraction and the pride of the State.

I hope that greater awareness prevails and the lily is allowed to bloom in its full grandeur so that it can also draw the tourists. So also the other varietal flowers of the state, which can hold any viewer in thrall. If I, in my official capacity, can be of some assistance it will be my pleasure to do so. I am also hopeful that because of Shirui Lily Festival, may a peaceful atmosphere prevail both in the Hills and Valley Districts and most importantly, the brotherly relations between the Hills and Valley people be restored forever.

I thank the organizers for inviting me to this function which prompted me to visit this beautiful District of Ukhrul and interact with you all.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.