

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE STATE LEVEL GRAND FINALE OF "63RD WILDLIFE WEEK CELEBRATION, 2018" ON 8TH OCTOBER, 2018 AT MSFDS AUDITORIUM, PALACE COMPOUND, IMPHAL

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

Shri Th. Shyamkumar ji, Hon'ble Minister (Forest & Environment),

Officers and Staffs of Forest Department,

All the Participants,

Members of the Print & Electronic Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am immensely pleased to be with you all on this auspicious occasion of the 63rd Wildlife Week State Level Celebrations, 2018. I take this opportunity to congratulate the officers, officials and all other people who have contributed to conservation and protection of forest and wildlife in the State. Such an observance every year in the country goes a long way in raising the awareness and invigorates the commitment for preservation of the unique flora and fauna diversity that we have inherited from our forefathers.

As you all are well aware, Manipur is known for its richness in biodiversity including the endemic flora and fauna, beautiful hills and valley, climatic features and cultural heritage. The abundant diversity of forest and its resources in the State is attributed to its ideal geographical location. Out of 34 hotspots across the globe, India has four biodiversity hotspots and out of these four, Manipur falls under two hotspots i.e. the Himalayan and the Indo-Myanmar hotspots. Its biodiversity includes an impressive array of about 4,000 angiosperms, 1200 medicinal plants, 34 species of edible fungi, about 500 orchids, 55 species of bamboo, 695 birds, 160 fish species, 21 migratory aquatic birds and multitude of butterflies and insects.

Another interesting fact is that the forest and tree cover of Manipur is 77.20% of the State's total geographical area. Around 8.42% of the total forest

area is under Reserved Forests including Wildlife Protected Area Network, 23.95% is Protected Forests and the rest belong to the category of the Unclassed Forests, which is in hills. Manipur is blessed with rich endemic wildlife ranging from big carnivores to micro-fauna. I am happy to know that the State Forest Department has been making relentless efforts and established Protected Area Network (PA Network) for in-situ conservation and protection of wildlife over about 4.2% of the total geographical area of the State through notifications of National Parks, Sanctuaries and Community Reserves. Today the State has 2 National Parks, 6 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 9 Community Reserves.

It is quite a revelation for me to know that among big carnivores, the State has Leopards, Clouded Leopards, Black Panther, Malayan Sun Bear and Himalayan Black Bear. Migratory or small resident population of tigers and elephants has also been reported in some parts of the State. The initiative of Project Tiger and Project Elephant started by the State Government is definitely a step in the right direction. Most importantly, Manipur is the home of brow antlered deer called Sangai, one of the rare and endangered deer species in the world, now available only in Keibul Lamjao National Park of the State. It is also called the dancing deer of Manipur. The national park is located in the southeastern part of the Loktak Lake and a unique floating biomass of vegetations locally called 'phumdi' plays a crucial role as the habitat of Sangai. It has a combination of aquatic wetland and terrestrial ecosystem. This national park has also been declared as Ramsar site. The Sangai was declared extinct in 1951 and then re-discovered at Keibul Lamjao in 1953. The Forest Department took initiative in 1975 and notified Keibul Lamjao as national park in 1977. With intensive in-situ conservation efforts by the Forest Department, the population of Sangai today has reached in the range of 260. I must congratulate the Forest Department for this achievement against all odds.

Manipur falls on Asian migratory flyway of birds having international significance. The amur falcons come a long way from Siberia and northern China to Manipur every year in the month of October and stay here for about 4-5 months. Their presence is significant to the agricultural crop production of the State as they feed on pests, grass hoppers, etc before the harvesting season. Therefore, I urge upon the people particularly, Senapati and Tamenglong districts, not to resort to poaching of these winter visitors to our State. I am happy to note that State Forest Department has taken up very proactive steps for successful conservation and protection programme for amur falcon and started a project in Tamenglong district. I have also been informed that Forest Department is also going to undertake radio tagging of amur falcon to track its migratory route and behavior. Such research is essential for the protection and conservation of such migratory birds.

I have been told that there is a very good wetland at Bishnupur district where the largest number of migratory water birds visit in Manipur mostly from China, Mongolia and Siberia during the period from October to February every year. But, the number of these migratory birds is declining every year due to certain reasons. One reason could be the high water level being maintained due to the construction of Ithai Barrage which has led to lack of food for migratory birds. I have also been supporting the cause for dismantling the Barrage for free flow of the phumdi to maintain the original eco-system to save Loktak Lake. Another important reason is disturbance caused to the roosting sides of the birds by the frequent use of LED lights by the fishermen. The State needs to look into these issues and I am told that in order to conserve the area and bring back migratory birds, the State Forest Department has taken an initiative to declare the area as bird sanctuary at Thinungei. I would request the Chief Minister to declare the first bird sanctuary at Thinungei at the earliest.

I am much disturbed to learn that Manipur faces an important issue of hunting of wild animals, particularly in hill districts. There are two kinds of hunting namely, subsistence hunting and commercial hunting. The Department has taken up various programmes of alternative livelihood in various districts including hills to divert the poor people from subsistence hunting. Whereas, commercial hunting which is being done by poachers and smugglers are being dealt under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 with the help of security organizations like Assam Rifles, Police, BSF, etc. I firmly believe that in due course, the efforts of the Department will bear fruit and we will be able to prevent hunting of wild animals especially in the hill districts. To promote economic activities in the State through sustainable use of forest resources, Forest Department takes up plantations of bamboo, agar, other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and medicinal plants. Training programmes are also organized for manufacturing of bamboo products and processing of Non-Timber Forest Products and medicinal plants. Efforts are also being made to develop market linkages. Social forestry plantations are also taken up to meet the requirement of fuel wood and fodder. The Forest Department under the State Government may take up such more projects which may develop the economy of the people so that the people dependency on other resources like forests and wild animals is reduced. Moreover, the State Government may curb the commercial killings of wild animals with effective measures.

I congratulate all the award winners, particularly children who have won the prizes in various competitions like Debate, Quiz, Painting, etc. I urge all the Village Chiefs and the civil societies in Manipur particularly Hill Districts to come forward and join hands in protection and conservation of our flora, fauna and environment. I, once again, thank the organizers for inviting to this important function and wish the celebration a grand success.

Thank you,
Jai Hind.