

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE XXVIII GOVERNOR'S CUP INVITATION POLO TOURNAMENT, 2018 & XVII GOVERNOR'S CUP WOMEN'S POLO TOURNAMENT, 2018 ON 29TH MARCH, 2018 AT IMPHAL POLOGROUND, IMPHAL

Shri Y. Khemchand Singh ji, Hon'ble Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly,
President and Members of the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association,
Participating Players and Technical Officials,
Members from the Media,
Distinguished invitees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here this afternoon at the closing ceremony of the 28th Governor's Cup Invitation Polo Tournament, 2018 and the 17th Governor's Cup Women's Polo Tournament, 2018 organized by the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association. It is always a privilege and an honour to be at this historic Mapal Kangjeibung, the oldest living Polo Ground in the world. Polo having its roots in Sagol Kangjei of this state is gaining popularity all over the globe and I feel proud that Manipur has gifted this sports discipline to the world.

Manipur has not only pioneered Polo but stands tall in the field of games and sports. The state is popularly known in the country as the "Power House" of sports and it has been more than re-affirmed when the Hon'ble President of India in his inaugural address at Sangai Festival, 2017 called Manipur the Capital of Indian sport. Our boys and girls have excelled in different disciplines of sports and not only in one or two disciplines. They have brought laurels both at the national and international levels. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see players from the state in the teams of other states or the national teams. Our players are equally proficient in the fields of athletics and Martial Arts. It was indeed a proud moment for all of us when 8 (eight) boys from the state played from the national team in the Under-17 Football World Cup, 2017. Most recently, a girl from the state Km. Mirabai Chanu won the gold medal in her weight category in the World Weightlifting Championships, 2017 held in the

United States. Two girls from the state, Mrs. Mary Kom and Mrs. Sarita are also currently representing the country in the Commonwealth Games. There are many more players like them in different disciplines. In a landmark event, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India laid the Foundation Stone on 16th March, 2018 for establishing a National Sports University in collaboration with the Australian Government. I am sure this will give a fresh impetus to the development of sports in the state and Manipur will truly become a 'powerhouse' of sports in all respects.

The Governor's Cup Polo Tournament was started during the time of the fourth Governor of Manipur, Gen. K.V. Krishna Rao after he donated the winner's trophy. Later, the runners-up trophy was donated during the time of his successor, Shri Chintamani Panigrahi. Some of the current trophies were donated by Shri Gurbachan Jagat when he was the Governor during 2008 to 2013. The efforts of the past Governors were to see the development of the game in its birth place and I share an equal enthusiasm if not more to see the rapid growth of the game far and wide. Soon after the International Polo Tournament last year, I had met General Bipin Rawat, Chief of the Indian Army who is also the President, Indian Polo Association and solicited his encouragement and support for promotion of the game especially in building Manipur as a much needed center for women's polo in the country.

There has been a healthy turnaround as the lovers of the game have started forming associations and organising competitions of the game. I am really happy that the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association and its sister organisations, the Manipur Equestrian Association and the Manipuri Pony Society have been working hard to preserve the age-old traditions and save the Manipuri Pony Breed. The tournaments organised by the Associations have kept up the spirit of Sagol Kangjei and have given a fresh impetus to the movement to save the grazing grounds and the natural habitats of the Manipuri ponies. I am confident that the Government will translate the vision of the Manipuri Pony Conservation Policy into action in letter and spirit.

It is heartening to know that 14 men's and 3 women's teams participated in the present tournaments and I congratulate the winners. I would also like to console the runners-up and all other teams that participated in these tournaments that playing a game in its true spirit is what matters and they can always perform better next year. I compliment the organisers and all the participating teams for their efforts and enthusiasm. I am also happy to know that over thirty polo teams are actively working hard to keep the game alive with the lofty objective to save Manipuri ponies from extinction and keep the game of polo alive. Their efforts at this critical juncture are commendable. While being proud of the land that gave birth to the game of polo, we are also faced with a serious challenge. The growth of population, the fast-growing urbanization and the expanding development, we have unwittingly done an irreparable damage to the home of the ponies. We have to undo this damage as much as we can.

For the development of the game of polo in Manipur, there is a need for collective effort by all stakeholders. There is a need for better marketing of the game of polo in the state and outside as also the traditional game of Sagol Kangjei. Our umpires need to be familiar with the modern rules and their interpretation as well as application. This will make players from outside the state enjoy playing the game. Further, we need sponsors for the game which has very limited players and the cost is high. I am told that Germany has about 200 registered players of polo. If we look at other games like football, handball, volleyball where the number runs into lakhs, Polo is still far behind.

As I have mentioned earlier, if there is no pony there will be no polo. We should have a firm commitment to save the Manipuri Pony Breed, the pride of our state.

I, once again, thank the organisers for inviting me to this important function and look forward to attend the next also.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.