

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE PROGRAMME ON AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON FINANCIAL SERVICES (LOAN & INSURANCE) ON 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL, 2018 AT IMA KEITHEL, IMPHAL

Shri Th. Shyamkumar ji, Hon'ble Minister (MAHUD), Manipur,  
Shri L. Lokeshore Singh ji, Hon'ble Mayor, Imphal Municipal Corporation,  
All the Bank and State Government Officials,  
All the Vendors of Ima Keithel,  
Members of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
KHURUMJARI,

I am delighted to be here in this Awareness Campaign on Financial Services for women vendors of Ima Keithel. I have visited this market and interacted with the vendors on several occasions. I have taken this initiative of awareness campaign to generally make the women vendors aware of schemes under which financial assistance can be accessed from the financial institutions and insurance companies in line with the Prime Minister's financial inclusion policy and women empowerment.

Ima Keithel in Manipuri or Mother's Bazar is the only market in the world that is run by all women, a place where equality is preached and practised. It is the perfect symbol of women empowerment. In a nation where Patriarchy has ruled and thrived over centuries, there are women who have stood tall on their own. The Ima Market is a unique entity where women find their identity and voice.

The dawn-to-dusk Ima Keithel is more than just an all-women market in Imphal. The market is a vibrant commercial hub with some 4,000 women vendors from both the Imphal Valley and the hills of the state catering to thousands of customers daily. It is also a critical centre for deliberations on

important socio-political issues of the state. The market has survived the onslaught of disruptive forces over centuries. Since their ascendancy in 1891, the British began to control trade and commerce in Manipur, thereby undermining the business potential of Manipuri women. The women withstood the exploitative policies of the colonial power and launched Nupi Lal (Women's War) in 1904 and 1939. Post India's Independence in 1947, Ima Keithel continued to be under constant threat of displacement or relocation.

Going back in history, a tradition called Lallup required adult male members of the Meitei community to serve the king. They would stay away from home as and when called by the king. In the circumstances, it became imperative for the women to switch from the traditional jobs of housewives such as weaving, paddy cultivation and household chores to outdoor economic activities. This instilled in them the confidence of running a market in the heart of Imphal. A wide range of commodities are traded in Ima Market – vegetables, spices, fruits, fishes, eatables, toys, earthenware, textiles and other locally produced garments. It is not only about the women selling and buying goods, But also about the men and women producing these commodities.

But Ima Keithel is under threat from large-scale penetration of cheap products and new technologies from other parts of the country as well as abroad. Retail chains trading imported goods at competitive prices are adversely impacting local production and indigenous markets. Besides, the women traders are facing the challenge of increasing dependence on exploitative local moneylenders. Private micro-financing organisations, without any social obligation or motivation to promote the women traders, operate like such moneylenders. Most of the women traders, therefore, fall back on personal savings for credit requirement. The traditional Marup – a

rotating system of sharing savings among the members – does not provide any option for long-term savings.

Given the fact that credit requirement for the women traders is comparatively small, the banks and micro-financing institutions can come up with innovative ideas to salvage the situation. Reasonable insurance cover for women entrepreneurs and their families assured under a liberal policy regime could also help the poor and credit-starved women traders and their households indirectly. We should reap full benefit from Central Government flagship programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Loan Yojana, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Suraksha Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana. I am hopeful that today's campaign will be successful in building the awareness of these schemes.

The welfare of the vendors is of paramount importance. I have advised the State Government to initiate action for taking up robust welfare measures. I had a formal meeting in the Raj Bhavan with various representatives of Financial Institutions of the state to take a holistic look into the matter of credit support and strategise ways and means to help the vendors in some way or the other. I am also aware of the problem of the street vendors. We must think about getting their problems addressed.

We must all work concertedly for betterment of the economic condition of the women vendors of Ima Keithel while at the same time keeping its traditional and historical character intact. Let the Ima Keithel remain vibrant, a shining example of equality and empowerment.

THA-GAT-CHA-RI.