

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EAST CIRCUIT: IMPHAL & KHONGJOM PROJECT UNDER SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME OF THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM, GOVT. OF INDIA ON 14TH AUGUST, 2018 AT KANGLA, IMPHAL.

Shri N. Biren Singh, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur,
Shri K.J. Alphons, Hon'ble Union Minister for Tourism, Government of India,
Shri Y. Joykumar Singh, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Manipur,
Hon'ble Ministers,
Hon'ble Chairman, Tourism Corporation of Manipur,
Shri Rashmi Verma, Secretary (Tourism), Govt. of India,
Dr. J. Suresh Babu, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Manipur,
Members from the Media,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to be associated with this inaugural ceremony of the Development of North East Circuit: Imphal & Khongjom Project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. I extend a warm welcome to you all to this ceremony at Kangla, the historical capital of Manipur. My special heartfelt thanks to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for its support and co-operation in making these projects successful.

Manipur is today considered the Gateway to South East Asia. The State is connected to the South East Asian nations through the Trans Asian highway. The opening of land routes and entry points from the State to Myanmar is going to help develop better trade ties between the north eastern part of the country with the rest of the South East Asian nations. I believe that these policies taken up by the Union Government under the Act East Policy of the Hon'ble Prime Minister will go a long way in boosting the economy of the whole NE region. It will have a positive impact on the economy of the region and transform its economic landscape. It will particularly help in the development of the State into a tourism hub which could give a multiplier effect in generating employment in the whole of our north-east region.

Today, there is a need to formulate plans to revive Government policies in order to adapt to new opportunities presented by the growth of the tourism industry. On top of this, I feel that a need to act proactively, participate and play our parts as responsible Governments to meet our sustainable development goals is becoming increasingly important today. Tourism is one industry which can form the backbone for the economy of the State of Manipur. Besides having centuries old rich culture and traditions, the State is blessed with great potential in areas such as sports, religion, biodiversity to grow in the tourism sector. I appreciate the recent developments that the State has made with its efforts to mainstream tourism for economic development while giving special focus on enhancing livelihood opportunities. Promotion of skill development in allied fields such as hospitality is a step in the right direction.

The State of Manipur offers a number of potential locations, which can be developed to become some of the finest tourist destinations, owing to the State's rich heritage, diverse culture and serene natural beauty. Loktak is one such destination with immense potential of becoming an excellent hub for adventure tourism. However, the State is largely unexplored due to several constraints that inhibit optimal development of the tourism industry. Infrastructure is inadequate and needs to be scaled up for growth of tourism. Major infrastructure requirements in Manipur include greater accessibility to unexplored areas, ease of finding accommodation, good eating-places, help and information centres, tour and travel services including guides etc. And as such, I feel that it should be our endeavour to develop major areas of tourism with adequate infrastructure and scale up promotional activities in order to reach out to a large number of potential visitors to the State.

The need to take the promotional campaign of Manipur Tourism to the next level is all the more felt as we make our efforts to develop this sector in the State. As a small State with limited resources, Manipur needs support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in its developmental works for tourism. With the help of funding from the Union Government and

the NEC, Manipur has been able to develop certain integrated tourist circuits that connects the tourist destinations of the State. Besides extending its support in developing infrastructures in the State, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has also been supporting the State in its promotional campaigns every year. Our promotional campaigns contribute to attracting tourists to the State in a huge way and I believe that the Ministry of Tourism will also continue to support us in our major promotions in the country as well as other countries.

We all are aware that proper connectivity is a must for the development of tourism anywhere. Manipur, unfortunately, in spite of having huge tourism potential is also bogged down by connectivity bottlenecks. The State is landlocked with 90% of the area in the hills. Capital city Imphal is connected with the rest of the country through two National Highways – NH 39 and NH 37 which are often dislocated due to damage caused by rain or bandhs and blockades. All the flights were hopping flights and took more than 5 hours to reach Imphal from Delhi. These were strong deterrents to the tourists. I pressured the Airlines authorities to start direct flights and now we are having direct flights from Delhi on almost all the days in a week and the flight time has cut down by about 3 hours. I am also pushing for similar flight service from other metropolitan cities.

To conclude, I congratulate the Government of Manipur on the completion of the Development of North East Circuit: Imphal & Khongjom Project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India which is yet another major milestone for the State. I thank the organizers for inviting me to this important function.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.