

ADDRESS OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, THE HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR ON THE OCCASION OF REPUBLIC DAY, 2018

Dear citizens of Manipur,
Khurumjari,

I extend my heartiest greetings and best wishes to all of you on the auspicious occasion of Republic Day, 2018. After attaining Independence on 15th August, 1947, India became a Sovereign, Secular and Democratic Republic on the 26th day of January, 1950 under its own Constitution. The day marked the beginning of a new era for our country and it reminds us of the responsibility we have taken upon ourselves to build a society free from social discrimination, economic inequalities and religious prejudices. The Constitution provides the foundation of the structure of governance and also enshrines the goals, ideals and values that guided our freedom struggle. It truly became the guiding principle for a free India to chart its own destiny.

During the infant days of our nation, there were skeptics who doubted the wisdom of our Constitution. They have been proved wrong as the Indian democracy has stood the test of time. A vibrant democracy today and the supremacy of the people's will has been demonstrated time and again through the ballot in successive elections. Our robust democratic system has earned global respect. On this day, we should pay our homage and express our gratitude to the founding fathers of the Constitution, whose sagacity and foresightedness has made India into the great country of today.

Our Republic has seen difficult times along its journey since 1950, challenges of both internal and external creation. Even in the most trying circumstances, the country and the people never lost faith in the

wisdom of the Constitution and the inner strength of our democracy. Every time, we overcame the odds and emerged stronger. India today is easily acknowledged as a fast economically and technologically developing nation of the world. Reports say that our country will rank as the fastest growing large economy during the current year and it is indicative of the fact that the bold economic reforms initiated by the Central Government have started paying dividends. India is seen by the world as a reforming economy and in the light of the trends at play in the domestic and global economy, it has been noted that Aadhaar, Jan Dhan, Demonetisation, GST are working to create a new inclusive infrastructure in the country. However, friends, we should not fall prey to complacency. We should persevere with our collective endeavour to meet the needs and aspirations of the people.

Manipur has also been marching ahead along with the rest of the states and considerable progress has been made in various fields. The space occupied by the state in the field of sports and art & culture is well-recognised. The state is blessed with abundant natural resources, material and manpower resources, entrepreneurial skills and a vibrant society. These potentials if properly channelized can translate into tremendous economic growth for the state. As the state is still suffering from economic backwardness, we need to honestly introspect and take corrective measures, where required after proper diagnosis of the ills and weaknesses.

The year, 2017 continued to be difficult for the state but it was certainly better than the previous years. Things started looking up and social turmoil which at one point of time looked endemic in the state lessened considerably. The turbulent law and order situation arising out of the introduction of a legislation related to Inner Line Permit System

somewhat subsided and the Joint Action Committee spearheading the agitation against what they called anti-tribal Bills in Churachandpur agreed for giving a decent burial to the (nine) dead bodies killed in the agitation. Further, the dialogue initiatives taken up by the Central Government and the State Government have started showing results and there is tangible achievement in the containment of underground elements. Elections to the 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly were held in the early part of 2017 and people exercised their democratic right of electing their representatives in large numbers. It recorded the highest ever voting percentage of 86.43% and the election atmosphere remained generally peaceful. Consequent upon the elections, there has been change of guard under a new political dispensation and the present incumbent Government is making endeavours to obliterate the cliché ‘Hill-Valley divide’ in the state. I would call upon all those in power to work tirelessly with dedication and sincerity for the benefit of the people. The state machinery and the people must go hand in hand otherwise the gap between the ruler and the ruled will widen creating conflicts.

Of late, what has been disturbing me as a woman also is the rising graph of crime against women. Manipur is known for its tradition of respect for their women and this recent development does not speak well of Manipuris. The law and order apparatus in the state must do more to ensure that the perpetrators of such and other crimes are brought to book under the law and all citizens especially our women and children must feel safe and secure in our state.

Friends, on a positive note, the state has also witnessed a surge of developmental activities. The ‘Act East Policy’ powered by the Central Government is on the fast track and the state is on the threshold of an

exciting phase in its journey of economic development and cultural ties with its neighbouring Asian and other South East Asian countries. India and most of the ASEAN countries share age old cultural ties. Shared cultural ethos bond us and we can build on this relationship for a closer and healthier co-operation. 'Nata Sankirtan' which is very much a part of the Vaishavite tradition in Manipur is also widely practised in ASEAN countries. I am pursuing a project at Manipur University of Culture on Nata Sankirtan recognised as an intangible heritage by UNESCO in 2013 and the Act East Policy will get a boost if the old cultural ties are re-established. Manipur has huge tourism potential but connectivity has always been a deterrent. For the convenience of the travellers and to boost tourism, direct flight has now been introduced between Delhi and Imphal. Another feather to the cap of the State Government is the initiative of Flying Dispensary, a medical outreach to provide health services to the remote areas and hill districts in the state. It is expected to be launched in the near future. I would appeal for unstinted co-operation between the Government and the people in their shared objective of peace and prosperity for Manipur.

On this momentous day, let us all resolve once again to uphold and promote the secular, socialist and democratic values embodied in our Constitution. Let us work unitedly, setting aside our differences, to put Manipur firmly on the path of peace, progress and prosperity.

Once again, I convey my heartiest greetings and best wishes to all on this auspicious occasion.

Thagatchari.

Jai Hind.