

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF MANIPUR SANGAI FESTIVAL, 2018 ON 21ST NOVEMBER, 2018 AT HAPTA KANGJEIBUNG/BOAT, IMPHAL

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman ji, Hon'ble Union Defence Minister,
Shri N. Biren Singh ji, Hon'ble Chief Minister and all his Cabinet Colleagues,
Hon'ble Members of Legislative Assembly,
All the High Ranking Civil and Security Officers,
Members of the Media,
Distinguished Invitees,
All the participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Pum-na-mak-pu Khu-rum-jari,

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be in your midst today on this occasion of inaugurating the Sangai Festival, 2018. Today's inaugural function will be the opening of a chain of events celebrating the rich cultural and traditional assets of Manipur during the Festival spread over ten days till 30th November, 2018. I also heartily welcome Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman ji, Hon'ble Union Minister of Defence to join us all in this greatest tourism festival of the State.

The Sangai Festival is now recognized as a National event and has brought the cultural flavour of Manipur to centerstage. It is very comforting that the Tourism Department under the State Government has been making relentless efforts to woo the tourists and make Manipur a popular tourist destination. The Manipur Sangai Festival is definitely a significant step towards this objective by making it a calendar event in the State. Manipur has a rich legacy of age old traditions and culture and they are the pride of its people. The Sangai Festival spreading over 10 days provides an opportunity

to showcase various aspects of our rich traditions and culture, besides promoting our handloom and handicraft products which are of high utilitarian and artistic values.

With its undulating green valleys and hill ranges, Manipur is undoubtedly a beautiful State with a huge potential for developing into a tourism hub. It abounds in natural beauty with the Valley and the Hill Districts arrayed to satisfy every tourist's palate for nature. When we speak of the serene beauty of Loktak Lake, we can also speak of the resplendent beauty of the Siroi Hills in the same breath. As a matter of fact, a number of places in the hill districts of the State have the potential for being developed into popular hill stations. Now under the Act East Policy ardently pursued by the Central Government and the State Government alike, steady increase in the tourism infrastructure like hotels and road & transport and specific initiatives taken up by the State Government like the Sangai Festival, things have started looking up in the tourism sector. Increased commercial and trading activities will also enhance the number of visitors to the State. But we are still far away from realizing its full tourism potential. The irony is that Manipur has been known till the recent past more for its law and order issues rather than its tremendous natural beauty, rich culture and abundant human resources. I must say that things have changed for the better under the present State Government and the law and order situation generally has been brought under control. It has been possible with the active co-operation of the people. We need to initiate a multi-media campaign focussing on the positives about the State. This would be helpful to project the State appropriately. The number of footfalls of tourists in the State has increased manifold during the last two/three years.

It is a well established fact that Tourism is the fastest growing sector in today's development scenario anywhere in the world. Tourism has become the economic lifeline of countries without much natural resources. It has

successfully transformed the economic landscape of these countries and helped in maintaining a vibrant economy. Tourism infrastructure such as accommodation, road & transport are prerequisites for attracting the tourists and these need to be engaged on priority particularly in the hill districts. But what is also equally important if not more is the marketing aspect. Tourism sector has become very competitive like never before and this is all the more reason why marketing should be packaged neatly to be able to catch the imagination of the tourists. This is one area where I feel the concerned authorities need to focus and do some hard selling to figure on the tourism map.

As in previous years, I am sure this time too, all concerned authorities have put in their best efforts to organize the festival successfully. It is always a daunting challenge to organize a festival of such a scale especially where foreign dignitaries and nationals participate. There is always room for improvement and shortcomings noticed or encountered in the current festival should be taken note of and redressed in the festival next year. Our attempt should be for a larger domestic as well as foreign participation of entrepreneurs and cultural troupes to add novelty and make the festival more attractive and appealing every year. The festival is also undoubtedly a strong platform for our artistes to showcase their talent. I would urge them to continue their efforts for improving their performance so that the rich cultural heritage of the State is displayed in the true spirit for the tourists.

I congratulate all those involved in the organization of this festival and making the event successful. I, once again, thank the Hon'ble Union Minister of Defence for her gracious presence and also thank the organizers for inviting me to this function.

Pum-na-mak-pu Thagat-chari,
Jai Hind.