

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE STATE LEVEL OBSERVANCE OF WORLD AIDS DAY, 2018 ON 1ST DECEMBER, 2018 AT 1ST BN. MANIPUR RIFLES GROUND, IMPHAL

Shri N. Biren Singh ji, Hon'ble Chief Minister,

Shri L. Jayantakumar Singh ji, Hon'ble Minister (Health & Family Welfare),
President and Members of the Executive Committee, Manipur AIDS Control Society,

Members of the Media,

All the participants,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here on the occasion of the World AIDS Day, 2018, which is observed every year on the 1st of December. It is undoubtedly an important event all over the world. It is particularly relevant in the State of Manipur as the people of the State have experienced the painful impact of HIV epidemic for the last more than two decades. Many innocent young people in the State have died due to AIDS related diseases, a number of children have been made orphans and many young women widows. This year, the World AIDS Day, 2018, is being observed with the theme "Know Your Status" to reach out to people living with HIV, who do not know their status and ensuring that they are linked to quality care and prevention services.

It is encouraging to know that significant progress has been made in the AIDS response since 1988 and today three in four people living with HIV know their status. But we still have miles to go. The latest UN-AIDS report shows a large number of affected people in need of timely intervention. Many barriers to HIV testing remain. Stigma and discrimination still deter people from taking an HIV test. Access to confidential HIV testing is still an issue of concern. Many people get tested only after becoming ill and symptomatic.

Awareness campaign has to be a thrust area. On the positive side, the good news is that there are many new ways of expanding access to HIV testing. Self-testing, community-based testing and multi-disease testing are all helping people to know their HIV status.

I derive great pleasure from the fact that the State Government has already framed the State AIDS Policy of Manipur. I am informed that the State of Manipur was the first and only State in India to have a State AIDS Policy as early as 1996. Now, it is imperative to make modifications and improvements in the policy statement so as to suit the changing circumstances and trend of the epidemic. I do hope that the experts and intellectuals in this field shall give their suggestions which will be of immense help to the society in mitigating the bane of HIV and AIDS in this highly prone area.

It is important to note the dismal picture presented by statistics. It is revealed that the magnitude of the problem in Manipur is highly alarming in the sense that innocent pregnant housewives who represent the general population, have been infected by HIV. If new-born children are infected, the future of Manipur would not be as bright as it should be. I suggest that small children should get utmost care and protection in this regard. It is the responsibility of the society at large, particularly women, to have greater involvement in the fight against HIV and AIDS to safe guard the future of Manipur. HIV testing is a must for expanding treatment and ensuring that all people living with HIV can live a healthy and productive life.

Our State in the North Eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent is renowned throughout the world for excellence in the field of games and sports, Art and Culture and a beautiful composite civilization comprising a number of small ethnic groups. However, it is unfortunate that Manipur is also identified as an epicentre of HIV and AIDS though well on the recovery path today. I am sure those HIV infected women do not indulge in high

risk behaviour and they may have contracted the virus from their partners out of ignorance and negligence. I am for wholehearted promotion of voluntary HIV testing before marriage.

We all are happy that the National AIDS control programme is being successfully implemented in the State with funding through the NACO, Government of India. The Manipur AIDS Control Society is the nodal agency for implementation of this programme. The programme is implemented through active collaboration between various Government and non-Government Agencies. Innovative programmes suitable to this hilly State are being taken up by the Government. I hope that the efforts will translate the aims and objectives of this year's theme into action.

The HIV and AIDS issue is no longer a mere health issue. It has covered all aspects of life - social, economic, legal, human rights and even political. The all-out and concerted efforts of the health officials and concerned activists of the State will not be sufficient in tackling this issue. The civil societies have to be actively involved. Here, I would like to appreciate the role of non-Government Organizations and agencies during the last two decades in providing preventive services and care to the people. Without the active role of the NGOs, the situation would have been worse.

On this occasion, I appeal to the young people, particularly women to become more and more aware of HIV and AIDS issues and also to participate actively in the programmes and policies of the Government and NGOs in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Let us join in making a HIV free Manipur. I, once again, thank the organizers for inviting me to the observance of World's AIDS Day and wish it a grand success.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.