

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF 29<sup>TH</sup> GOVERNOR'S CUP INVITATION POLO TOURNAMENT, 2019 AND 18<sup>TH</sup> GOVERNOR'S CUP WOMEN'S POLO TOURNAMENT, 2019 ON 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2019 AT IMPHAL POLOGROUND.

Shri H. Deleep Singh, Honorary President, Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association,

Shri S. Buddhachandra Singh, Advisor, Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of Media,

Captains and Members of participating teams,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel privileged to be a part of this Closing Ceremony of the 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Governor's Cup Invitation Polo Tournament and 18<sup>th</sup> Governor's Cup Women's Polo Tournament, 2019. I still carry fond memories of a similar occasion when I participated in the closing function of last year's edition at this very oldest pologround in the world. I can say without any hesitancy that this time also, the tournament must have been full of excitement and fiercely competitive like last year.

Manipur is known as the 'powerhouse' of sports. It is, therefore, no wonder that the creativity and the spirit of competitiveness powered by the martial characteristic of the people of Manipur gave the world the popular indigenous game called 'Sagol Kangjei' which is now known as Polo all over the world. Polo is the pride of the State and it is definitely something to be proud of for every Manipuri. But the irony today is that the game is suffering from a serious growth deficit at its own place of birth. The original game of Sagol Kangjei was at its peak in Manipur for a long time till the British annexation of Manipur in 1891. The decline of the Polo game thereafter

affected the popularity of Manipuri Pony also and this trend continued till 1970. By then, the game almost died in its birthplace and Manipuri Pony was in danger of complete extinction. Driven by a strong apprehension of permanent loss of this internationally recognized Manipuri Pony breed as well as game from its birthplace, a group of Polo enthusiasts ventured to revive and revitalize this game not only as a National Cultural Heritage but also with the noble thought to save Manipuri Pony from extinction. Thus, the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association was born in 1977 and subsequently registered in 1980. The Association deserves appreciation for their unrelenting efforts for a good cause. I would also like more and more young people on board in this mission to save the pony and the game.

These tournaments are organized by the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association with the main objectives to save Manipuri Pony and to popularize the game of Polo besides promoting tourism. One unique aspect of the tournaments is that the game is played on Manipuri pony. The polo pony of Manipur, a recognized breed of India though small, is sturdy and agile. These ponies are even now, literally semi-wild and there is tremendous pressure for their survival as the traditional grazing ground has shrunk. There is an imminent threat to this rare Manipuri Pony breed and so also the game of polo. The survival of this rare species is a serious question now. It is reported that the number of Manipuri Pony will be less than 500 in some years if the fast dwindling number is not checked in time. Human intrusion in their natural grazing fields has displaced the ponies, forcing them to come to the streets. The Manipuri pony is facing a serious challenge to its very existence and it is very pathetic to see the condition of the ponies standing on the roads without anybody looking after them. Food poisoning and road accidents are often found to be the main reasons for their death.

Concerted effort by all stakeholders is the need of the hour to save this breed from extinction. I hope these tournaments will help in highlighting this

issue and give the much needed boost to save the animal. The initiative taken by the State Government for developing Pony Sanctuary at Heingang, Imphal East District and Pony Breeding Farm at Lamphel, Imphal West District will certainly make a difference for the better. I am confident that the efforts of the State Government, commitment and dedication of all the members of the Manipur Horse Riding & Polo Association, polo players, different clubs, pony owners and most importantly, the people of Manipur will lead to a turnaround and brighter days are ahead for both the Manipuri pony and the polo game. Their contributions will be remembered by future generations for keeping an age old tradition alive against all odds and daunting challenges. I am informed that because of the tournaments, people have become more aware of the polo game and the role of Manipuri pony and this is definitely a positive outcome of these tournaments.

As in the earlier editions, the tournament has been a grand success and my compliments to the organizers. I would also like to convey my good wishes to all the participants. I am happy to announce financial assistance of an amount of Rs. 1.00 lakh from the Governor's Discretionary Fund to the organizers of these State Level Tournaments for this year also.

I thank the organizers for inviting me to this function.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.