

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE KHONGJOM DAY CELEBRATION, 2019 ON 23RD APRIL, 2019 AT KHEBACHING, KHONGJOM, THOUBAL DISTRICT

Shri N. Biren Singh ji, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur,
Hon'ble Ministers,
Hon'ble Members of Legislative Assembly,
Officers of Civil and Security Forces,
Friends from Media,
Distinguished Invitees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to be with you all on this solemn occasion and at this place of great reverence. Today is the 23rd of April and we are observing Khongjom Day to remember those Manipuri heroes who fell in the Khongjom War, fighting against the British soldiers. It is also a day to pay our homage and tribute to these patriots who laid down their lives for the sake of their motherland in the war of 1891. In the battle of Khongjom, the Manipuris showed to the world their indomitable courage and spirit of patriotism. The historic and gory battle that took place at Khongjom where the brave sons of Manipur laid down their lives almost to the last man still reverberates and remembered in every home in the State.

The Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891 is of great historical significance for the people of Manipur as it changed the course of history of the State. From an independent princely State, Manipur became a colonial subject of the British empire after it lost the war. Historical records amply bear out the fact that a handful of Manipuri soldiers with primitive weapons fought ever so valiantly against an overwhelming number of British soldiers with far more superior weapons attacking from different directions. But the brave Manipuri soldiers stood their ground and never gave up even in that hopeless situation. The raw courage and love of their motherland demonstrated by our

forefathers deserve praise and accolades from one and all. Paona Brajabashi and other freedom fighters like him have found their place in history and their heroic exploits have become over the years stuff of the folklore. The battle of Khongjom is not only a glorious saga of the freedom struggle of Manipur but is truly representative of the spirit of freedom that engulfed the whole country in a later part of history.

The Khongjom Day also reminds us of the hard historical reality that the British rule was the result of our own misadventure and misdoing. It was brought upon ourselves by the disunity and enmity among the Manipuri princes who craved for the throne and the British capitalised on this mutual mistrust by applying their 'divide and rule' policy. It is a lesson learnt the hard way that we put our sovereignty at peril whenever the people are disunited and disorganised. In a fast changing global environment, the present generation is confronted everyday by new challenges which are no less formidable. We have to learn from the pages of history and must not repeat our mistakes. All effort should be made to overcome the obstacles and put ourselves on the path of progress. Today, while remembering those who died for the cause of freedom of our motherland, we should also take a resolute stand to work with renewed vigour, dedication and selflessness for a better and brighter future.

Manipur is an integral part of free India which shook off the British shackles after a long drawn out freedom struggle. We are today the proud citizens of this vibrant democracy in the world. We should stand united as one and should not allow our differences come in the way. Let us focus on building a country of our dream where every Indian can live with honour and dignity. India is a vast country with full of diversities, be it geographical, social or cultural but these diversities should not be allowed to transform into adversities. On the contrary, these diversities should be converted into assets for building a robust and prosperous country. Our hard won freedom would

only be meaningful when we can build for ourselves a harmonious and prosperous society. We need to remember that India's freedom is not a gift from the colonial rulers but was achieved through countless sacrifices made by our forefathers.

Our State is full of natural as well as human resource and all concerned need to be focused and work with religious commitment so that the State can actively participate in the developmental race. Let us all work for the common goal of making Manipur a peaceful and developed State and this way, we would be paying our true respect and tribute today to those brave souls who sacrificed their lives for their motherland.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.