

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE CULMINATING CEREMONY – SMILE TORCH EVENT ON 2ND MAY, 2019 AT THE INDIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION HALL, LAMPHELPAT, IMPHAL

Dr. Kh. Palin, Smile Train Partner Surgeon, Shija Hospitals,

Other dignitaries on the Dais,

All the participating Doctors,

Friends from Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you at the Culminating Ceremony today organized as a part of the Smile Torch Event by Shija Foundation. 'Smile Torch' is aimed at generating awareness about cleft and the efforts for its amelioration. The torch symbolizes the light of wisdom and the passion for knowledge – a metaphor for dispelling darkness of myths, fallacies and social stigma surrounding clefts.

'Smile Torch' is a unique national initiative for creating renewed awareness about cleft and its treatment and to sensitize communities about the challenges faced by children born with clefts. Smile Train, an NGO based in the United States, is working for the goal to eradicate the global problem of cleft lips and palates. I am happy that Shija Hospitals is a partner hospital of The Smile Train and has been rendering free surgical treatment for cleft lip and palate under Smile Train Shija Cleft Project. The project is also tasked to ensure that its benefit reaches to the masses of North Eastern part of India and even the neighbouring country of Myanmar. Mention can be made of Mission Barak, Mission Nagaland and Mission Myanmar designated for these outreach services.

Indeed, the Shija Foundation of Professional Doctors has been rendering a noble and humanitarian service for the people born with this

physical handicap. As you are well aware, cleft lip and palate are birth defects and affect the upper lip and roof of the mouth. Research has revealed that one in six hundred live births in this world is born with cleft lip or cleft palate or both. It is an undeniable reality that millions of children are suffering with unrepaired clefts in the developing countries. They cannot eat or speak properly and are not allowed to attend School or hold a job. Their lives are filled with shame and heartache as they cannot socialize with other children in the surrounding. It deserves unreserved appreciation that more than one million free corrective cleft surgeries have been performed all over the world under the “Smile Train”. Hats off to all who were involved in this incredible feat.

I am of the firm view that the main objective of welfare services associated with these initiatives should be to rehabilitate the children with handicap as normal citizens in the community and society they belong to. The biggest service we can give to them is to stamp out any mark of discrimination. We must encourage voluntary workers and voluntary organizations to set up hospitals, Nursing homes and other health care centres by providing incentives. The Government alone cannot bear the full burden of health care. At least, a part of it must be given out to voluntary services, to people who are willing to serve the health system. Apart from free corrective surgeries, other additional services under Smile Train Shija Cleft Project includes free diagnostic facilities, hospital accommodation, speech therapy and travelling allowance upto a permissible limit. However, many children born with such birth defects have not availed of these facilities simply due to lack of awareness. With a population of nearly 30 lakhs, it is estimated that around 5000 people are suffering from such birth defects in Manipur.

I congratulate the Award Winners of Smile Torch Spot Painting Competition under the theme -“What Makes Me Smile” held on 28th April, 2019. I am sure experience sharing by the patients and their families in

today's function will be immensely enriching for all stakeholders and help in finding a way forward. I congratulate Shija Foundation for their contribution in the health sector and bringing a smile to the faces of many people specially children in the state. I am also hopeful that Shija Foundation will continue to make their presence count in the health sector.

With these few words, I, once again, congratulate Shija Foundation for this memorable event and thank the organizers for inviting me.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.