

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE 'CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SHIRUI LILY FESTIVAL, 2019' ON 19TH OCTOBER, 2019 AT TNL GROUND, UKHRUL, UKHRUL DISTRICT

Shri L. Jayantakumar ji, Hon'ble Minister (Health & Family Welfare),
Shri Letpao Haokip ji, Hon'ble Minister (IFCD),
Shri L. Kaisii ji, Hon'ble Minister (Tribal and Hill Area Development),
Shri Th. Radheshyam Singh ji, Hon'ble Minister (Education),
Dr. Ranjan Sapam ji, Hon'ble Chairman, Tourism Corporation of Manipur,
Leaders of various communities,
Representatives of various Organizations,
All the State Government Officers and Officials,
All the participants in the Shirui Lily Festival,
Members of the Media,
Distinguished invitees,

I am delighted to be here today at the Tangkhul Nagal Long (TNL) ground for the Closing Ceremony of the Shirui Lily Festival, 2019. At the outset, I would like to thank the State Government and all others associated in organizing this Festival for their endeavour and commitment to 'celebrate' this rare flower and make the people aware of our environment and the need for its protection. I also compliment them for taking the brand name of Shirui Lily, the State Flower of Manipur, for popularizing it far and wide. The flower was discovered by Frank Kingdon-Ward, one of the last great plant adventurers during his expedition to Manipur in 1946. He named it after his second wife Jean Macklin and the flower won the Merit Prize of the 1948 Royal Horticultural Society. Because of its rarity and beauty, it is now a well-known plant. Organizing the festival at the State level has been a significant step of the State Government as the flower has gained a stronger foothold and has become better known to the people.

It is unfortunate that the Lily which flowers in late May to early June, is becoming rarer and many experts have felt that it may ultimately become extinct, with the rising temperature and change in the habitat. It was earlier thought that due to forest fire, the plant was being affected with a plant now bearing only a few flowers while about 3 to 4 decades back, a stalk carried not less than 12 flowers. Nowadays, it is a common sight of small bamboos encroaching on the habitat of the Lily and the latter is losing ground to the gregarious bamboos. There is need for more vigilance on the part of all stakeholders and a proper scientific study on the flower, so that this renowned flower can continue to thrive in its original habitat. I am glad that ICAR has taken up tissue culture of this plant and hope that it will perpetuate this plant not only in its original habitat but also in laboratory conditions so that it does not become extinct.

Manipur falls in one of the top biodiversity hotspots in the world and surely, the acclaimed Lily is indicative of such richness. The focus on global warming and climate change and its impact on our biodiversity and the efforts being made to leverage timely remedial measures are laudable. Nothing requires them more than the Lily. As already mentioned, if intervention is not made now with the urgency it deserves, the plant may be lost forever. It is not only the Lily but other flora and fauna are also facing tremendous threat to their survival as their habitats are being gradually eroded. Since assuming the gubernatorial post, I have been endeavouring to protect our valuable environment and on several occasions, I have had discourses on the dangers being faced by orchids as well as other rare plants of this State. Many a time, I have initiated and organized tree plantation programmes at various places of the State and encouraged various Civil Society Organizations to take up tree plantation to arrest the dooming downslide. Manipur is known for its orchids, flora and fauna and it will be a huge disappointment to all if this wealth is not preserved and used to our

advantage. The jhum cycle in the hills is becoming lesser and lesser with the need to feed the rising population and as a result, the soil is getting easily exposed and subject to erosion. Frank Kingdon-Ward also found a number of Primula species on the Shiroy slope but now the number has dwindled. Due to forest destruction on the Shiroy range, Ukhrul headquarters is now facing very serious threat on its water supply. So the task at hand is huge.

On the positive side, Shirui Lily Festival if packaged and marketed properly can become a tourist attraction. Going by the increase in footfalls from the previous editions, the festival can lead to a boom in tourism for the district and the State in general. Such a festival will not only create awareness about the need for protection of our environment which needs to be prioritized by our own people but it can attract tourists which will not only improve the well being of the local population but can also bring in advanced knowledge and expertise to improve the environment. Let me now congratulate the winners of the various competitions and hats off to them. They have added value to the festival.

With these words, I thank the organizers for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to visit Ukhrul again and interact with you all.

My best wishes.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.