

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF A CONFERENCE ON "LINKING PROSPECTIVE FOOD ENTREPRENEURS WITH GOVERNMENT SCHEMES & MARKETS" ON 19TH JANUARY, 2017 AT HOTEL CLASSIC GRANDE, IMPHAL.

Shri L. Lakher, Principal Secretary, Department of Commerce & Industries, Govt. of Manipur,

Shri Om S. Tyagi, Senior Director, Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India,

Other dignitaries on the dais,

Friends from Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to inaugurate the Conference on "Linking Prospective Food Entrepreneurs with Government Schemes & Markets". I am proud to be associated with such an initiative taken by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India in collaboration with the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India as I strongly believe that the future of the North East region of the country particularly Manipur will largely depend on tapping the agro-horticultural potential which is available in abundance.

The North East comprises of contiguous states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura along with Sikkim and the region is gifted with diverse agro-climatic conditions suitable for growing various cash crops, fruits and vegetables. Agriculture, no doubt, remains the mainstay for majority of the populace in this region but horticulture is also an important sector that has been gaining ground as a major contributor to the economies of these states. Food processing industry, especially agro-horticultural based has been identified by experts as a thrust area for putting the region properly on the path of development. Fruits and

vegetables like banana, pineapple, orange, papaya, lemon, potato, sweet potato, tapioca chillies, turmeric, onion, ginger, bamboo shoot and jack fruit which are indigenously produced have good marketing scope, if properly harvested, processed and packaged. At present, there are only a few food processing units in the region and bulk of even the domestic demand for processed food is met by imports from other parts of the country.

I am very happy to know that the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry has launched an awareness drive in the North East for young entrepreneurs on the vast scope of business opportunities in the field of food processing industries in the region. There is huge potential of raw horticultural produce of fresh fruits, vegetables, medicinal and aromatic plants, spices and herbs in the region. Unfortunately, there is a lack of awareness about schemes among agro commodities producing groups and the prospective entrepreneurs. There is also lack of proper handholding for the prospective entrepreneurs. However, all these are bound to change with all the efforts being made by the stakeholders to bring change in the area through various financial assistance schemes and awareness initiatives.

Here, I would also like to dwell on the essentiality of the role of proper technology. There is a need of creating facilities for primary and secondary processing in the region by infusion of proper technology. Proper marketing links between farmers and manufacturers have to be established, so also technological support. Agro-based economy has failed to flourish as it should due to limited utilization of technology and innovation. Therefore, sensitising the budding and prospective food entrepreneurs about Government Schemes and Markets is a welcome move in the North East. It is also necessary to diagnose the problems in this region for providing an improved production and marketing environment and value-added economic benefits to the farmers through appropriate science and technological policies in the food processing industries. I have been given to understand that ASSOCHAM has

also been supporting budding entrepreneurs through several incentives and schemes for the development of food processing industry in various parts of the country including the North East. I would even urge ASSOCHAM to help in identifying prospective entrepreneurs in other fields of Industry too and be their spokesperson for attracting investors to the region and Manipur in particular.

As you are well aware, unemployment is very high in Manipur and the agro-horticultural based industry is one area where a large number of the unemployed youths of the state can be gainfully engaged. The caveat, however, is that the youths need to be skilled. To be successful entrepreneurs, skill is a prerequisite that is why, skill development for the youths has to be given due importance. It was to this end that I initiated recently a Skill Development Seminar with the active participation of the Central as well as the State Government. Food processing industry based on agro-horticultural produce was a focus area in the Seminar and I was encouraged by the response from the young participants. Agro-Horticultural based industries can hold the key to the development of the state.

I am happy that the Conference is designed to be a common platform to bring the Central Government, State Government and other policy makers and brainstorm the possibilities for development and growth of food processing sector in the state. More importantly, it has the objective to create awareness about government supported schemes and programmes for the small, budding and tiny processed food entrepreneurs and to discuss key issues and challenges by the existing food manufacturers in the state.

It is heartening that the Conference will see the participation of resource speakers from Institutions and Central Ministries who have key roles in developing and strengthening the food processing sector particularly for small farmers in the state. The target group consisting of the tiny and small entrepreneurs, farmer's producers' organisations, self-help groups and

so also other stake holders are also participating in the conference. I am sure every participant will have a takeaway from this joint venture.

I am fully confident that comprehensive decisions will be taken in the Conference for inclusive growth and way forward in the field of food processing for the welfare of people in the NE states and Manipur in particular.

I, once again, thank the organizers for inviting me to this important function.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.