

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY OF MANIPUR SANGAI FESTIVAL ON 21ST NOVEMBER, 2016 AT HAPTA KANGJEIBUNG, IMPHAL.

Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri O. Ibobi Singh ji,

Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Shri Gaikhangam ji,

His Excellency, Mr. Kenji Hiramatsu, Ambassador of Japan to India,

His Excellency, U Salai Luai, Chief Minister, Chin State Government, Myanmar,

Friends from the Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Participants from both inside and outside the country,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here with you all at the opening ceremony of the Manipur Sangai Festival, 2016 and I am deeply impressed by the splendid arrangements unfolding before me. It is a matter of satisfaction that the Department of Tourism of the State Government has been making relentless efforts to make Manipur a tourist destination and the Manipur Sangai Festival, which has been made a calendar event, is one such venture towards this objective.

The Festival which is a 10-day event commencing from the 21st November of every year is representative of our persevering attempt to showcase the best traditions and culture of the state besides promoting our handloom and handicraft products. The whole idea behind the Festival is to capitalise on these precious assets to generate tourism in the state. Unfortunately, there is the tendency of bandhs and strikes happening all of a sudden in the state thereby disturbing the normal life of the people. In such a scenario, participation by the public in such an important event of the state becomes restricted and the number of visitors is also drastically diminished. Further, for reasons best known to them, certain sections of the people are boycotting the current festival. This is not a happy state of affairs. Therefore, I sincerely appeal to all not to launch any kind of bandh, strike or blockade during the Festival. This is not the festival of one community. This is the festival of all the communities who are living together from time immemorial. We all should ensure that this Festival is made a success every year in the interest of the state and its people.

Every one of you will agree that Manipur is a state of great natural beauty with potential to develop into a major tourist destination. There are places in the hill districts which can be developed into popular hill stations. The places in the valley districts are no less enchanting. I would not be wrong to say that Nature has been bountiful and bestowed on Manipur all its splendour. Unfortunately, realisation of its full potential as a tourism hotspot is still a far cry. Manipur is known more for its law and order issues rather than its beauty and tremendous human resources. It is a fact of life that negative reports travel much faster than positive attributes. Due to this, tourists generally do not like to take the risk of visiting Manipur. It is for the State Government and the people of Manipur to work towards dispelling these negative reports.

Tourism industry is considered the fastest growing sector and its economic multiplying factor is the highest. As industry and factories have an insignificant presence in the state, Tourism appears to be the most viable alternative to drive the economy of the state forward. Many countries without much natural resources have harnessed tourism as the main component of their economy with great success. Marketing is the key and I feel that Manipur has faltered in this regard. A greater effort needs to be made to ensure that Manipur is on the tourism map. The issue of accommodation will automatically be addressed if there is a rise in the number of tourists and for this, investment will be forthcoming. What a tourist needs is not a five star hotel but a basic clean, hygienic and affordable accommodation. The concerned agencies of the State Government should inspect the hotels and other places of stay regularly to ensure that they are maintained at a minimum standard of hygiene and cleanliness. I have also been given to understand that the number of good hotels is increasing in Imphal area, at affordable prices and it is a significant development towards attracting tourists. Paying guest system can also be introduced in a big way as Manipur now has many private houses which easily meet the standard. It is encouraging to learn that paying guest system has started at some places in the state. Further, the civic authorities and the people should make Manipur a much cleaner state, with clean roads and surroundings.

I am impressed by the number of stalls and believe that this year's festival will see a substantial increase in the number of tourist footfalls from the state as well as outside the state including those who are coming from abroad. For this to happen, better publicity and creating a more festive mood at the venue is indispensable. Further, publicity of the Festival must also be

started well ahead in travel magazines, beside the social media, which have now become an important media for communication. I am glad that the Department of Tourism has launched a website for the festival and activities are being web cast. This is a step in the right direction and will definitely help in providing some publicity and information to those who would like to visit Manipur during the Festival.

This Festival is providing a platform for our artistes to showcase their skills and I am sure they will make more efforts to improve their performances so that the rich cultural heritage of the state, both from the hills and the valley is displayed for the tourists in its true spirit. The International Polo Tournament being held as a part of Sangai Festival will be another visual delight on offer. Before I end, I would once again appeal to all those who are behind the bandhs and boycott that they should come forward for discussions. Only discussions and dialogue can be the solution of all problems.

I congratulate all those associated with the organisation of this Festival for making a concerted effort to make this event successful in spite of all difficulties. I thank the organisers for inviting me to this function.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.