



# Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind on the occasion of inauguration of Manipur Sangai festival 2017

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1. This is my first visit to Manipur as President of India and I am extremely happy to be inaugurating the **Manipur Sangai Festival**, which is the biggest festival of the state. Celebrated for 10 days every November since 2010, this is the perfect showcase for the cultural diversity and richness of Manipur, comprising its various communities and beautiful social fabric. The food and culture, adventure sports and crafts, handlooms and universally-admired dance forms of Manipur cannot find a more appropriate setting.
2. One can travel across the world but rarely come across a location as spectacular as Loktak Lake. I am told this is the largest freshwater lake in the Northeast, with the only floating National Park on our planet. It is a paradise for tourists and I am glad the Government is making efforts to promote the tourism potential of Manipur. Truly, this is a festival and this is a state that needs to be experienced at leisure!
3. Manipur's cultural traditions, its social, religious and ethnic mosaic, and its history of courage and resilience are an inspiration for everybody in India. The war of 1891 saw the brave people of Manipur resisting the colonial powers in a manner that has few parallels. The martyrs of 1891 are heroes who will always be remembered for their contribution to the cause of our freedom and human liberty. For every Indian the great **Bir Tikendrajit** and his comrades are cherished icons.
4. About half a century later, Manipur was the unfortunate location of some of the most bitter fighting in World War II. Today, the War Memorial in Imphal and the War Cemetery serve as reminders of those times. And of the tests and trials that the people of this state have gone through. Ironically, those war relics today have international tourism potential and attract visitors from the West and from Japan. But in the 1940s, by taking the brunt of the war on its soil, Manipur in a sense protected the rest of India. Every citizen in our country is forever grateful.

## Ladies and Gentlemen

5. Manipur is India's window to Southeast Asia and a key player in our Government's **Act East Policy**. As a result, there is a concentrated effort to quickly develop connectivity projects. The most prominent is of course the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway. In addition, an air cargo terminal complex is being planned at Imphal International Airport. Rail links are being enhanced. Jiribam is connected by a broad gauge line, and Imphal railway station has already been inaugurated. Finally, the regional connectivity scheme of the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation is giving a push to affordable air links in the region and particularly in Manipur.
6. I am confident that these efforts, and the partnership between the Union and state Governments, will bear fruit. The potential for tourism is immense. And the prospect of international trade, with Manipur linking the Indian economy to Myanmar and the rest of ASEAN, is unimaginably big. It is important that the benefits of such efforts reach local communities here, and provide new markets and jobs to Manipur's farmers and handloom weavers. On my part, I must tell you that I will be returning to Delhi with enough quantities of Manipuri black rice. It is one of my favourites.
7. Another favourite – not just my favourite; our favourite, the whole country's favourite – is the magnificent Mary Kom, Manipur's very own Olympic medallist. As I tweeted after she won the gold medal in the Asian Boxing Championship recently, "You make us prouder with every punch."
8. And how can we forget that Manipur is the heartland of Indian football. In the Under-17 World Cup hosted by India, our inexperienced but determined boys put up a fighting show – and eight of the 21 members of our World Cup team were from Manipur. This list included the captain Amarjit Singh Kiyam and the gallant goal-keeper Dheeraj Singh Moirangthem. The gutsy boys from Manipur won the hearts of all of India. We look forward to them achieving greater glory for the country.
9. Frankly, I would say Manipur is the capital of Indian sport. The traditional sport of **Sagol Kangjei** was the inspiration for modern polo. And here in Imphal is the oldest polo ground in the world. **Huyen Langlon** is a martial art that I believe deserves much greater international exposure. As does **Yubi Lakpi**, played with a greased coconut instead of a rugby ball. I have only mentioned a few of the many remarkable indigenous sports of Manipur. These are treasures that must be shared with the rest of the country and rest of the world.
10. In conclusion, I wish the **Manipur Sangai Festival** and all the participants here, as well as the Government and people of Manipur, every success. India takes great pride in Manipur's cultural identity, its social diversity – and economic potential. Together all of us need to ensure that Manipur realises this potential. And that every Manipuri, whatever his or her background, benefits. We must succeed. And we will succeed.

Thank you

Jai Hind!

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