

**JAPANESE AMBASSADOR HIS EXCELLENCY MR KENJI HIRAMATSU'S SPEECH ON
THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF 73RD ANNIVERSARY OF BATTLE
OF IMPHAL, WWII**

Honorable Chief Minister of Manipur, Shri Biren Singh,

Honorable Parliamentary Secretary of Nagaland, Shri Apok Jamir,

Mrs Akiko MacDonald,

Members of Manipur Tourism Forum and 2nd World War Imphal Campaign Foundation,

Distinguished guests,

●The Battles of Imphal and Kohima were among the bitterest battles during WWII. It is estimated that five thousand soldiers of Indian National Army, fifteen thousand soldiers of the British Commonwealth Force, and thirty thousand soldiers of the Japanese Army sacrificed their lives. The people of Manipur and Nagaland suffered greatly from these battles and aerial bombings which preceded.

●Today, we gathered here to bow our heads deeply before the souls of all those who perished and to express our feelings of profound grief and our eternal, sincere condolences. I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the value of reconciliation that we have achieved over the past seventy and some years, and to pledge our future-oriented cooperation, together with like-minded friends of Japan and India. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the conveners of this event and the State of Manipur for making such a precious occasion.

●Last November, I visited Imphal for the first time. I was then most impressed by the fact that the India Peace Memorial, founded by the Government of Japan, has been maintained properly and beautifully, thanks to the favor and daily effort of the people of Imphal, including the Manipur Tourism Forum, the 2nd World War Imphal Campaign Foundation, and the Indo-Japan Friendship Association Manipur. This afternoon, I presented the certificates of commendation to these organizations as well as the Kohima Cathedral, the Bishop of which says mass for the victims of the battles every day. Once again, I would like to express my deep appreciation to them.

●Japanese PM Shinzo Abe issued a statement on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. Let me quote a passage from the statement, as this reflects the sentiment and resolution I renewed today.

“Upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering. History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone. Each and every one of them had his or her life, dream, and beloved family. When I squarely contemplate this obvious fact, even now, I find myself speechless and my heart is rent with the utmost grief.

The peace we enjoy today exists only upon such precious sacrifices. And therein lies the origin of postwar Japan.

We must never again repeat the devastation of war.

Incident, aggression, war -- we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. We shall abandon colonial rule forever and respect the right of self-determination of all peoples throughout the world.

With deep repentance for the war, Japan made that pledge. Upon it, we have created a free and democratic country, abided by the rule of law, and consistently upheld that pledge never to wage a war again. While taking silent pride in the path we have walked as a peace-loving nation for as long as seventy years, we remain determined never to deviate from this steadfast course.”

- Nowadays, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and India have become genuine partners which share basic values and strategic interests. The people of these countries deeply interact and closely cooperate with each other in political, economic, social, and cultural domains. The current cooperation would not have been realized if our predecessors had not given hands of goodwill and support mutually for achieving genuine reconciliation among us.

- Reconciliation is what enables us to work together for the future. Achieving genuine reconciliation is one of my goals and lifework as a Japanese diplomat. It is the greatest delight to be here with my longtime friend, Ms. Akiko Macdonald, who is a leading figure of the reconciliation between Japan and the United Kingdom. We must pass down the meaning of our effort for reconciliation to the next generation.

- Thanks to the close relationship between PM Abe and PM Modi, the Japan-India relationship is experiencing an era of dramatic progress. This excellent bilateral relationship between the two countries should be translated into deeper friendship between Japan and the States of Manipur and Nagaland. The reason why I am making this second visit to Imphal and I was the first Ambassador of Japan to visit Kohima in January is because I am determined to move forward cooperation toward the future with the people of the States of Manipur and Nagaland, which have deep historical links with Japan. By the way, let me stress here how delighted I am to be with Honorable Parliamentary Secretary of Nagaland, Shri Apok Jamir and his colleagues tonight.

- Tomorrow morning, I will have a detailed discussion about concrete cooperation between Japan and the State of Manipur with Honorable Chief Minister Shri Biren Singh. But in a nutshell, I can say that Japan would like to contribute actively to the enhancement of connectivity and the economic and social development of the North Eastern region, including Manipur. The PMs of Japan and India have already agreed to enhance cooperation that contributes to the connectivity of the North Eastern region such as road network construction projects, and some of the projects have already been initiated. I strongly hope that the newly established state government of Manipur, in cooperation with the Center as well as with the governments of neighboring states, will create a favorable environment where Japan can cooperate in a variety of fields.

- As far as the commemoration of the victims of the war is concerned, we have seen a progress in the provision of financial support by the Nippon Foundation for a plan to build a war museum in Lotpa Ching, the Red Hill. I have been told that the construction is likely to start by the end of this year. We will continue to cooperate on this project. Presumably, there are still approximately ten thousand remains of the Japanese soldiers here; therefore, our

government will dispatch a team for collecting those remains within this fiscal year. I am counting on your support for the team.

- From the perspective of cooperation between Japan and the State of Manipur toward the future, people-to-people exchanges including youth exchange are extremely important, so we would like to promote those exchanges. From this perspective, today I would like to announce two initiatives.

First, we decided to invite twenty-five people of the States of Manipur and Nagaland to Japan this autumn. We would like young participants and those who have contributed to Japan-India partnership with no past experience in visiting Japan to come and see Japan first hand and facilitate further strengthening of our relationship.

Second, we decided to hold an official seminar in Imphal in November for students who are interested in studying in Japan. Since I've been hearing that the students here are quite interested in Japan, I am expecting a good number of students to attend it.

Both are modest initiatives; nevertheless, I hope those will be a steady step for further strengthening relationship between Japan and the States of Manipur and Nagaland. I am also aware that the first sports university in India will be constructed in the vicinity of Imphal shortly, so we are happy to promote sports exchanges. Also, given the abundant tourism-related potential of this region, we will work on the enhancement of exchanges in various areas.

- Lastly let me talk about a story about a mysterious link between Japan and Imphal. Last month, the North East Institute of Science and Technology announced that one species of iris that grows around Loktak Lake and is commonly used in the Chieiraoba Festival in Manipur is a new species in India. This species is known as the "Japanese iris" and called カキツバタ in Japanese. カキツバタ was an indigenous species of Japan for more than one thousand years. I regret I do not know how or why this Japanese カキツバタ was passed to Manipur, and has been loved as Kombirei. 'Yarapat Ki Kombirei'.

But like this episode, I hope that our humble initiatives will bear fruits and seeds and eventually bloom as flowers of friendship between Japan and the States of Manipur and Nagaland.

Thank you.