

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu  
on the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Imphal

Shri N. Biren Singh, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur,  
Sir Dominic Asquith, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom,  
Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of the Nippon Foundation,  
Members of the Manipur Tourism Forum and the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War Imphal  
Campaign Foundation,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

My emotions are stirred deeply as I stand here today on the soil of Imphal.

The name of Imphal has a special meaning for the Japanese people. 75 years ago, one of the fiercest battles of WWII was fought here. Countless precious lives were lost among the British Commonwealth Force, the Indian National Army, and the Japanese Imperial Army. The people of Manipur and vicinities were forced to endure tremendous sacrifices and severities. On their retreat, heavy rains poured unto the Japanese soldiers; and many more lives were claimed even after the battle ended.

I feel deep sorrow as I think of so many fallen souls and the enormous grief their families and friends must have undergone. Together with the Japanese delegation visiting Imphal, this morning, we offered our silent prayers at the monuments dedicated to those British, Indian and Japanese soldiers who perished on this land. Even today, the remains of the war dead lie buried under this soil. I am deeply grateful for the humane acts of those Manipuris who have been assiduously helping us recover these remains.

I would like to especially thank Shri N. Biren Singh, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur, and all the conveners, in particular, the Manipur Tourism Forum, for giving us this solemn opportunity to remember our past and look at the future. I am pleased to participate in this commemorative event with my friend, Sir Dominic Asquith, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom. We also attended the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in Kohima. Our presence here and in Kohima attests to

our reconciliation and the friendship we have nurtured after WWII, together with the people of these lands.

We can truly appreciate the peace we enjoy today only by remembering what we went through. We know that the foundation of our today exists upon the precious and tremendous sacrifices of the past.

Today, Imphal has come to embrace a place for such reflections. The Imphal Peace Museum will be of great significance for us all. I would like to commend the generous support by Mr. Yohei Sasakawa and the Nippon Foundation and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, as well as the strenuous efforts by the Manipur Tourism Forum. I am convinced that everyone who visits the Museum and learns about the history will come to share our resolve for preserving peace.

Standing on this podium today, I am also deeply touched with the warmth which the people of Manipur and their neighbors have kindly extended to us. We are connected through this shared history, which has evolved into our present bonds. As the Ambassador of Japan, I am committed to furthering these strong connections with the North East of India. This is my third visit to Imphal and the tenth visit to the North East. I established, together with the Foreign Secretary of India, the “Act East Forum”, to discuss how Japan and India can join their hands to contribute to the development of the region.

Our ties will become even deeper if our people know better about each other. Two years ago, I promised to start a youth exchange program. Soon after, Government of Japan launched the “IRIS Program” and two teams of young and promising youths of the North East have already been dispatched to Japan under this program. This January, 24 of them, including 6 Manipuri youths, enjoyed a first-hand experience of Japan.

We would also like to invite apprentice nurses from the North East to Japan, under the Technical Internship Training Program (TITP), thereby contributing to better healthcare in the region. Already we are in discussions with nursing schools in Manipur to advance this program, with

the full support of the State Government.

Furthermore, we would like to boost intellectual dialogue with the North East. I feel there is huge potential in our collaborations with the people of the North East. Intellectual dialogue can stimulate innovative thoughts and help us to transform them into concrete actions.

I sincerely wish our relations will continue to grow as we commemorate this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and take our new steps towards the future.

Thank you very much.