

Honourable Chief Minister of Nagaland, Shri
Neiphiu Rio, Honourable Madame Rio,
Honourable Deputy Chief Ministers,
Honorable Ministers
Chief Secretary Shri J. Alam, IAS
Representatives of the Japanese Associations
across India,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Viba zo mo.

Eighty years ago, this peaceful and beautiful land of Nagaland became, all of a sudden, engulfed in the ravages of war between the Japanese Forces and the British Commonwealth Forces.

For nearly three months, from early April to the end of June, the devastating “Battle of

Kohima” unfolded, culminating to the fierce fighting known as the “Battle of the Tennis Court.”

The people of Nagaland, who had nothing to do with the war, inevitably had to go through a great ordeal. Many were coerced into cooperation; so many people lost their lives or got injured under the cross fire; most people were forced to flee from the land of their ancestors.

In the end, the Japanese forces led by Lieutenant General Kotoku Sato decided to retreat on account of lack of replenishments. On their way back, countless soldiers lost their lives in the torrential monsoon rains due to lack of food and various fatal diseases. For the Japanese people, the Battle of Kohima is remembered, along with the “Battle of Imphal,” as one of the most disastrous battles in the

World War II.

In this milestone year of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Kohima, I feel deeply honoured to witness the inauguration of the Kohima Peace Memorial, established by the great leadership of the Honourable Chief Minister of Nagaland, Shri Neiphiu Rio.

This monument enables us to stand here in solemn silence, and offer our most sincere prayers to all the victims of the battle. I extend my deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the people of Nagaland who had to endure indescribable sufferings brought forth by the Battle of Kohima.

“May the souls rest in Peace,” I pray from my heart to the souls of all people: the people of Nagaland; the Japanese soldiers who gave their lives; the Indian National Army soldiers who took part in the campaign; and

those who fought on the British Commonwealth side.

In August 1945, Japan surrendered, and the Second World War came to an end. It was not until the mid-1970s, after the turmoil of the post-war reconstruction was over, that the former soldiers and their families visited Kohima in order to collect the remains.

The people of Nagaland, despite traumatic sufferings from the Battle of Kohima, welcomed the visitors warmly, as old friends, and provided them with all possible support.

Ms. Ajanuo Belho, who is present here today, is one of those who looked after them in the Kohima Village at that time, and is still a volunteer with the Kohima-Japan Bone Collection Team. They are making great efforts to help the Japanese Government in collecting the remains of the soldiers. I am deeply grateful

to the people of Nagaland for their magnanimous generosity extended to the Japanese people.

This generosity has fostered a new friendship between Japan and Nagaland. Donations were raised from Japanese veterans of the Battle of Kohima and their families to help build the Kohima Cathedral.

Today, right next to the Kohima Peace Memorial, an Eco-Park is going to be developed as part of the Nagaland Forest Management Project with ODA from the Japanese Government.

When completed, I can just imagine that many people in Nagaland will visit the Eco-Park to have a relaxing stroll with their families and friends, and enjoy the nature. I hope this Eco-Park will be loved by the people, and will become a new landmark in Kohima,

symbolising the friendship between Japan and Nagaland.

We are also witnessing another chapter of friendship being fostered, with many young people from Nagaland starting to travel to Japan for skill training and job opportunities. The Naga youths are getting very good reputation in Japan and the Japanese host companies are keen to welcome more of them.

In December last year, a Japanese sending organization called ARMS signed an MOU with Nagaland University to establish a Japanese language course here in Kohima. This, I hope, will encourage more and more Naga youths to learn Japanese language and seize skill training and job opportunities in Japan.

In conclusion, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the Honourable Chief Minister, Shri Neiphiu Rio, and all the people

of Nagaland for erecting this Peace Memorial. This Memorial, I hope, will invite more Japanese people to visit Kohima in the future.

I am convinced that the friendship originally fostered through the remains collection between Japan and Nagaland will be further strengthened through the construction of Eco-Park as well as the exchange of young people, and they will become new bridges between Nagaland and Japan, and between India and Japan.

Thank you very much.

Npezie