

Speech by Shri L.K. Advani
Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha)

“PATRIOTS’ DAY” to pay homage to Bir Tikendrajit, Thangal General and other Indian patriots from Manipur

Organised by the Manipuri Diaspora Association, Delhi

New Delhi – 13 August 2008

Shri Tapir Gao, Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh; office-bearers of the Manipuri Diaspora Association, Delhi; other dignitaries on the dais; my dear Manipuri sisters and brothers; ladies and gentlemen;

I am very happy to have been invited to participate in the “Patriots’ Day” function today. It is indeed an honour for me to join you, and also join all my brethren in Manipur, in paying our respectful and grateful homage to the Manipuri heroes and martyrs who took part in India’s struggle against the British colonial rule.

The British used many tricks to establish their rule in India. “Divide and Rule” was one of them, but there were also other ploys.

Let us recall what they did to **Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi**, one of the legendary figures in India’s War of Independence in 1857. Her husband and the Maharaja of Jhansi passed away in 1853. Although their adopted son Damodar Rao was Maharaja’s heir and successor under the native tradition, the British rulers rejected Rani Laxmibai’s claim and decided to annex the state of Jhansi under the “Doctrine of Lapse”.

They did the same to Rani Chennamma of Kittur in Karnataka.

What the British did in Manipur was no less dishonorable. In the early 1890s, they used a family feud to capture Manipur and make it a part of their expanding empire in India. They sent a British officer, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, to Manipur to arrest Yuvraj Tikendrajit Singh and deport him out of the state. But Yuvraj Tikendrajit was not a meek person, ready to surrender. He defied the British and challenged the alien officer’s interference in the internal affairs of Manipur. The people of Manipur fully supported him in his patriotic defiance. Finally, Yuvraj Tikendrajit was captured, named as one of the main conspirators in the “War against British” and hanged to death, along with General Thangal, on 13 August, 1891.

Since then, August 13 has become a sacred day for all Manipuris, who observe it as “PATRIOTS’DAY”. By remembering Bir Tikendrajit, General Thangal and other patriots from Manipur, we keep alive the spirit of freedom and the love of Motherland. Incidentally, **the grit, valour and patriotism of the Manipuri people can be gauged from the fact that Manipur was the last territory that the British could capture in the whole of Asia.**

Friends, we are observing “PATRIOTS’ DAY” here in New Delhi. In just two days, we will be celebrating the 61st anniversary of India’s Independence from British rule. The closeness of the two dates has its own significance. It reminds us that countless patriots from every part of India — from Manipur to Maharashtra, and from Kashmir to Kerala — participated in the struggle to make India free. **We must never forget this essential truth since its remembrance serves to preserve and perpetuate the spirit of national unity.**

Hence, Bir Tikendrajit, Thangal General and other patriots from Manipur and other parts of the North-East are as dear to us as Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqullah Khan, Rani Laxmibai, Veerpandya Kattabomman and countless others from the rest of India.

I would like to express this unbreakable bond of Indianness in another way: ***“Manipur Dilli se door hai, lekin hamare dil se door na hai aur na kabhi hogi”*** (Manipur may be far away from Delhi, but it is not, and never will be, away from our hearts).

It is unfortunate that Manipur has been going through difficult times. Extremist and separatist forces are primarily responsible for this. What they are propagating and doing is totally against the basic spirit of “PATRIOTS’ DAY”.

My party and the NDA want to see a peaceful and prosperous Manipur, in which the legitimate concerns and aspirations of its people are properly addressed. I would like to assure today the BJP and the NDA shall work closely with all the patriotic and democratic forces in Manipur to achieve this objective.

The NDA Government, under the leadership of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, took many steps to promote peace and accelerate development in the North-East. As Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, I too contributed my bit to this effort. If the people of India give the NDA an opportunity to form the Government after the next parliamentary elections, it will be our sincere endeavour to carry forward the good work done during the six years of the Vajpayee Government.

An important step in this direction will be to give a further boost to India’s **“Look East Policy”** (promoting cooperation between India and countries in South-East Asia and East Asia), by integrating into it a strong **“Look North-East Policy”** (promoting peace and development in our north-eastern states). I would like to see new doors of trade, investment and business opened between Manipur and other North-Eastern states and the countries in South-East Asia. Manipur is indeed the Gateway to South-East Asia. Greater economic integration with the region will bring prosperity and create employment opportunities.

Friends, the Olympic Games are going on in Beijing. And how can I not pay tribute to the tremendous sporting talent in Manipur?

Manipur, with a population of less than 30 lakh, has produced many top-class athletes and sportspersons. It won the highest number of medals in the National Games held in Manipur in 2002. In the last National Games held in Guwahati in 2006, Manipuri sportspersons representing their own state, as well as other states, outnumbered their counterparts from all other states.

I am told that in the football match between India and Tajikistan being played in Delhi today, as many four players in the Indian team are from Manipur.

This goes to show that, with proper encouragement, our sportspersons from Manipur are capable of making a mark at the international level.

As I praise the excellent sporting talent in Manipur, I am constrained to refer to an unfortunate incident that took place recently.

Monica Devi, a weight-lifter of international repute, is the pride of Manipur and India. She had won the silver medal at the Commonwealth Games in 2006. Sadly, her Olympic dreams were shattered when she was not allowed to participate in the Beijing Games because of a doping controversy. It is now proved that the controversy was baseless and Monica Devi was not guilty. She could have perhaps won a medal for India, had this controversy not erupted.

This is a very serious matter. It shows our sports administration in a very poor light. There should be an impartial and speedy inquiry into this episode and the guilty should be punished. Equally important is the need to ensure that such incidents do not recur.

Before I conclude, let me heartily commend members of the Manipuri community in Delhi for their multifarious contribution to the cosmopolitan life in the national capital. I am told that your community is very large. Manipuri students studying in the various schools, colleges and professional institutes in Delhi have earned a good name for academic excellence. Manipuri women and men are known to be both skilled and hard-working. Your community has also enriched the cultural, artistic and spiritual life in Delhi, you being inheritors of a very precious heritage that is still alive in Manipur against all the odds.

With these words, I once again pay my homage to the Bir Tikendrajit, Thangal General and other Indian patriots from Manipur, and thank you for inviting me to perform my own patriotic duty.

Thank you.