

Dated: Mar 25, 2011

## Three years: a story of commitment and service

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Today, the present Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led democratic government has completed three of its five years term. The people's government came in to power at a time when the negative effects of the myopic decision making of last decade had started to appear on the national economy, internal security, and even sovereignty of the country. The nation was lacking direction and was plunged into a deep abyss of disappointment and hopelessness.

Yes, a lot is still to be done in the line with the manifesto of PPP and in the pursuit of the vision of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. However, the achievements of the democratic government during this short span of time are not only of high significance but are also instrumental to set the future course of the development and progress of the country and the well-being and prosperity of the masses.



While entering in to the fourth year of its constitutional term, the government could rightly feel proud of numerous landmark achievements, like 18th and 19th constitutional amendments, 7th National Finance Commission award, social, political, legal as well as development reforms packages for Gilgit Baltistan, Balochistan and FATA. To strengthen the federation of Pakistan, the democratic government focused on inter-provincial harmony. In this regard, reconstitution of the Council of Common Interests, increase in gas development surcharge for Balochistan, allocation of Rs 120 billion to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as net hydel profit were the forward looking steps aiming to redress the grievances of the federating units.

The history would always remain witness of the fact that through the 18th and 19th constitutional amendment, people's government mobilized all political and democratic forces of the country, to purge all undemocratic articles from the constitution, which were introduced by un-elected regimes. As was envisioned by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the democratic government has taken measures to provide protection to women. These measures give women protection, not only inside but also outside their homes as well as at places of their work. Moreover, women have been empowered to have stakes in their family resources.

The democratic government has also ensured the rights of workers. The government brought all of them back to work who were thrown out of work places, and ensured continuation of work for others. These measures also include the decision to offer 10 percent share in the public sector organizations. Efforts to uplift the lives of poor and downtrodden segments of society and poverty alleviation remained top considerations of the democratic government during these three years. To reach out to the poorest of

the poor of society, the government initiated the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), directly under the patronage of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, as former being chief patron and the latter being the executive patron of the programme.

BISP was launched in a situation when global economic recession and exceptional food inflation had triggered the apprehensions that already impoverished would not be able to sustain this economic shock and will plunge deeper into the abyss of poverty and hunger.

The poor of the poorest of the society became more vulnerable in face of this economic crisis and were in dire need of immediate relief. This was a state of hopelessness where improving the lives of the downtrodden segments of society and the idea of their socio-economic uplift seemed an impossible goal to achieve. Though, the challenge was huge and unprecedented, the democratic government exhibited its commitment towards the people of Pakistan. Soon after its launch, BISP started to be seen as a long awaited ray of hope for the millions of hopeless of this country.

Besides contributing in the achievement of the prime objective, i.e, poverty alleviation programme is also proving instrumental in uplifting women status and respect in the society. Women have been made sole proprietor of the business initiated with the financial assistance of BISP and vocational/technical training is also being provided to women head of a beneficiary family or her nominee. Moreover, monthly cash grant is also being provided to the women head of the deserving families.

The fact that almost 10 million women have obtained their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) during the last two years is an apt reflection of the importance of various measures of BISP, as having a CNIC is a prerequisite to be a beneficiary of the programme. The holding of CNIC has ushered a new era of the women social emancipation and besides giving them identity, it has enable them to open and run their personal bank accounts, get the property registered on their names and obtain their passport etc.

In addition to the monthly cash grant, under the Waseela-e-Haq and Waseela-e-Rozgaar initiatives, small entrepreneurship and skill development among under privileged segments of the society are also being promoted enabling them to live a financially self sustained life.

Similarly, BISP has also introduced state of the art technology i.e, Mobile Phone Banking and Benazir Smart Cards as effective and transparent delivery mechanisms. These initiatives of BISP are highly significant to break the myth that people belonging to these helpless strata are not capable enough to use modern technology and they are not able to initiate and run their business to change their fate.

At the landmark occasion of the completion of three years of the present democratic government, we can proudly say that BISP is the first ever comprehensive social safety initiative in the social sector of the country. Moreover, it's the only programme, which has gained support and trust of various prestigious international organizations as transparency, objectivity and impartiality are the hallmark of this programme.

It's also an occasion to revive our resolve and commitment to make Pakistan a truly social welfare state

according to vision, wishes and dreams of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

**\*Especially written on the completion of three years of the democratic government led by Pakistan People's Party.**

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