

Dated: May 1, 2011

BISP: Changing the lives of poor laboring class

Ms. Farzana Raja
Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme

May 1 reminds us of historic sacrifices of courageous laborers to secure their fundamental rights. The day is globally acknowledged as well as marked as the 'Labor Day'. The primary reason of the movement launched by laborers in the 19th century America was harsh and unjustified working environment and unlimited working hours, especially in the industrial areas of Chicago.

In those days of late 19th century, the status of a worker was deemed as a slave and endless injustices and oppression finally resulted as a mass movement of the Laborer class. Consequently, some labors were killed on the behest of employers for the crime of demanding an eight-hour workday. As a result of this sacrifice, the Labor Movement spread all over the world from the United States of America and the Labor Movement picked the momentum and resulted as huge relief and concessions for the laborer class.



Since then, a lot has been changed. However, an anti labor/working class has always remained dominant, especially in less developed parts of the world. The plight of labor community in Pakistan has never been different. However, the history of Pakistan is evident that it was the democratic government of Pakistan Peoples Party, under the leadership of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, that not only acknowledged the rights of laborers and peasants but also give them courage to raise their voice to acclaim their fundamental rights.

It's unfortunate that the democratic governments of Pakistan Peoples Party have been barred to materialize its labor friendly initiatives in the past. Thus, the economic conditions of the labor class in Pakistan are still far below the par. However, following the legacy of Shaheed Quaid-e-Awam and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the present democratic government has taken numerous legislative steps to insure the rights of the laborers including 10 % share in industrial profit.

To improve the living standard of the laborer class and to provide maximum economic opportunities to them, the successive democratic governments of Pakistan Peoples Party have always took considerable measures. Shaheed Quaid-e-Awam, in this regard, made hectic efforts to provide Pakistani labor class with economic opportunities abroad. This phenomenon ushered a new era of prosperity for the poor and downtrodden segments of society and it can be termed as an economic revolution for the laboring class.

Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is in a way continuity of the same vision. The programme, besides providing monthly cash grants to its beneficiary families as an immediate relief, it is providing demand driven vocational training to its beneficiary families under Waseela-e-Rozgar scheme in line with job opportunities available both at national and international level. Under the scheme, one member of each deserving family is being imparted skill/vocational training aiming to provide them economic self sustainability.

The initiative will be instrumental in improving the living standards of skilled laborers as the beneficiary families would be imparted training in those areas on priority basis that would be carrying more demand. These measures are in line with the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto as well as improving the lives of poor laborers remained her priority throughout her life and political struggle.

Besides her commitment with democracy and human rights in Pakistan, she had shown her utter dedication towards service to working class of the country. The vocational/skills training under Waseela-e-Rozgar initiative of BISP has also been contributing in empowerment and emancipation of working women. Under the initiative, only head of a registered deserving family or her nominated person could be imparted with this modern technical training.

It's worth mention here that the steps of BISP are encouraging women to play their role in the income generation activities. This role of women would bring prosperity for the working/laborer class. BISP has taken these measures while acknowledging the fact that the global economic recession and exceptional food inflation 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 ordinary laborer class in Pakistan has also become vulnerable in this scenario. Hence, Benazir Income Support Programme emerged as a long awaited ray of hope for the millions of hopeless of this country. The most important aspect of the programme remained its contribution in poverty eradication.

BISP is first ever such initiative in the social sector of the country, which has gained support and trust of various prestigious international organizations as transparency, objectivity and impartiality have been the hallmark of this programme. To improve the procedure further and establish utmost transparency, BISP has started a country wide door-to-door Poverty Survey.

Similarly, BISP has initiated the payment mechanism through Mobile Phone Banking. This step would strengthen the delivery system further but also facilitate beneficiary families in receiving cash grant without any hassle. With the introduction of this system, BISP will be able to obtain real time reconciliation and check on leakages.

These steps of the BISP would provide relief to people in need, especially, the laboring class in an effective, transparent and efficient manner. This initiative has benefitted the poorest of the poor of the society. One may hope that these measures would ultimately lead us towards the establishment of social welfare state. May Day, of course, provides us an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment of improving the lives of poor laboring class of the country.

****Especially written in connection with International Labor Day***