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## Nusrat Bhutto: a symbol of perseverance and struggle for democracy

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A remarkable chapter of country's political history and the struggle for a democratic Pakistan has ended with the sudden and sad demise of late Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto. The legendary Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto was not only the wife of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first elected prime minister of Pakistan and the mother of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, first women prime minister of Islamic World, but she was and is also a symbol of struggle against the most brutal tyranny and revival of democracy to safeguard the rights of the people of Pakistan. After Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she cared the nation as a mother. Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto fought against the dictator for the sake of the democracy and people of Pakistan.



Being the first lady of Pakistan, Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto always remained on forefront in serving the poor and destitute of the country. As a matter of the fact, she remained a driving force behind the launching of various pro-people and pro-poor policies during the democratic government of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. After the ouster the democratic government of "Quaid-e-Awam" by a military dictator, Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto faced all sort of sufferings with a tremendous courage and epic spirit. At one hand, she had to struggle for the life of her great husband and at other; she had to confront with the brute force of martial law regime.

Earlier, during the democratic era of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it was the visionary Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto who organized the PPP's Women's Wing as a powerful political force as well as the voice of the women. Very few are aware of her dynamic role in organizing the 1974 Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore. She did not stop playing her active role in the politics despite the various oppressive tools used by martial law regime to break her spirit. After the Shahdat of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979, it was Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto who reinforced the spirit of the party workers by assuming the leadership as the Chairperson of Pakistan People's Party.

It was the time when a military dictator was hell bent to eliminate Pakistan People's Party, the party of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto but Begum Sahiba stood like a rock to foil these evil designs of the tyrant. She initiated a phenomenal struggle for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan and remained on the forefront while establishing and running the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). The oppression and cruelty committed on people by martial law regime knew no bounds. The regime took Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto as a big threat so she was imprisoned to stifle her struggle for democracy.

These were the testing hours for the loyal and committed workers of Pakistan People's Party and many of them were lashed while some were even hanged publically. In the face of this ruthless autocracy and unjust sentences like flogging and torture, many so-called big leaders resorted to seek asylum abroad. The military regime could have been succeeded in its design to crush and eliminate Pakistan People's Party had it not been Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto to keep the flag of democratic struggle flying high.

During this marathon struggle for the revival of democracy and to end the brutal martial law regime, Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto was not only imprisoned but also beaten up harshly by the goons of the regime but she carried on with this historic struggle accompanied by her brave daughter, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. In 1982, she was diagnosed with cancer but this severe illness could not weaken her resolve and she continued her political work from abroad while providing full moral support and guidance to her daughter, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. In 1985, it was Begum Bhutto again who decided to boycott the elections under Gen Zia-ul-Haq and manage to gather the support of other major political forces of the time. Hence, the so-called elections were left with no credibility.

Begum Sahiba had to face unprecedented grief even after bearing the Shahadat of her husband. During her battle with martial law regime, she had to battle with cancer and then she lost her dearest and youngest son Shahnawaz. She was imprisoned and exiled but still carried out the mission of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. No one can even comprehend the intensity of the pain she would have been suffered as she had to face the loss of her other son when the forces of darkness killed Mir Murtaza Bhutto. Her health deteriorated rapidly after the death of Mir Murtaza Bhutto and she was never been able to recover again till the fateful day of October 23, 2011, when she breathed her last.

Today, Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto is no more among us physically. However, she will always remain a source of inspiration to all the political workers of Pakistan in general and PPP workers in particular keeping in view her political struggle and services for Pakistan People's Party. She will be remembered in history of Pakistan for her democratic struggle during most difficult time and for her unprecedented contribution and sacrifices for democracy as well as the country. May Allah rest her soul in peace and give all of us the courage to bear this immense loss and to follow in her footsteps by dedicating our lives for the service of our countrymen.

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