

Dated: Dec 27, 2011

Shaheed Benazir Bhutto: Champion of National Reconciliation

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27th December 2007 will always be remembered as a tragic and sad day in the history of Pakistan when the most popular, courageous and able leader of the country Shaheed Benazir Bhutto sacrificed her life in struggle of saving the future of the people and the country itself. The cowards made the endearing leader of the people their target because she espoused democratic values and had firm resolve to give the people of Pakistan their fundamental rights.

The brutal assassination of the popular leader of the masses took place immediately after her historic speech to a massive public rally held at Liaqat Bagh Rawalpindi where she expressed her uncompromised commitment with the revival of true democracy in the country and to create a social welfare state where the socio-economic rights of every citizen are protected. The anti-democratic forces were afraid of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto as they were aware of the fact that she was a forceful advocate of the democratic and human rights of the poor.



By targeting Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the enemies of democracy and the rights of the people actually wanted to murder the hopes and aspirations of the poor masses of the country. These were the segments of society who were seeing Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto as a beacon of hope and an invigorating force for their dreams of getting rid of the shackles of ignominy, hunger and poverty.

Therefore, this coward plot of depriving people of Pakistan of their most popular leader was in fact a conspiracy hatched by undemocratic fascist forces to keep the masses deprived of their fundamental rights and hence, dreams of a better future for them and their coming generations. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was Champion of national reconciliation and she was aware of the fact that it was the only way forward to re-build the nation.

Today, the democratic government of the country is confronting with the same challenges posed by undemocratic mindset. However, the political heirs of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto firmly believe in her agenda of greater national reconciliation among all the political forces of the country. Therefore, the government is focused on serving people instead of engaging itself in politics of confrontation and one may hope that ultimately sanity and rationality will prevail among the all genuine political forces of the country.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was fully aware of the potential of threat to her life at the very moment she decided to end her exile and make her return to Pakistan. The present democratic government, while keeping in view the same vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and

considering the domestic and global political landscape as well as rapidly changing geo-political realities, is fully determined to foil every plot against the democracy and the people of Pakistan.

I can still recall that on every occasion when people informed her about the impending danger to her life, she would reply that if she does not come to Pakistan to lead the party, the party would get weakened and eventually it would tantamount to weakening the people of Pakistan and endangering the security and integrity of the country. Therefore, the phenomenally courageous leader came back to Pakistan without any consideration of her personal safety.

The deep love and reverence of the people for Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto could have been observed on her day of Shahdat when the people from every nook and corner of Pakistan were seemed to be engulfed in a deep sense of grief and sorrow. It was the day when every eye in Pakistan was full of tears and every heart was bleeding with deep sorrow.

I can never forget the most terrible journey of my life when we were taking Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto coffin from Rawalpindi to Naudero. Besieged by a great sense of pain and agony, I was gathering every moment that I had the privilege to spend with my great leader. These were of course the great learning curves and the best moments in my entire life. The memories of long years of democratic struggle under her amazing leadership were fresh in my memories, passing like flash of lights one after the other.

It was an epic struggle of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto for revival of genuine democracy in the country and I still feel pride and honor to be with her in all the rallies held in various parts of the Punjab as pre-election campaign after her return from exile. I had the privilege to accompany her in our rallies in Rahim Yar Khan, Bahwalpur and outskirts of South Punjab for upholding the flag of democracy which is the roadmap of making Pakistan a welfare state.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was and is a great inspiration for women like me who wanted to make a positive contribution in the society. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto always wanted women to move ahead in every field of national endeavor, make their mark and serve the nation. Due to her leadership more women got appointed at higher levels of PPP and consequently the party has played historical role in empowering women. She always advised us to concentrate on the issues affecting women, minorities and the weaker sections of society. While treading on the footsteps of her father and founder of PPP Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she infused same spirit in the party which is based on serving the people.

Today, the democratic government under the leadership of the President Asif Ali Zardari and the Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani is busy in pursuing the same legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto which is based on social justice, equality and equal economic opportunities to all the citizens of Pakistan. The first ever comprehensive social protection initiative of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is also a tribute to the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and an effort to materialize her vision of giving the poor and destitute of the society respect, honor and dignity.

I am grateful to the President Asif Ali Zardari and the Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani to bestow upon me the responsibility of running this auspicious programme which is the footprint of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's great journey in the way of social welfare and women empowerment. BISP can be termed as the practical manifestation of our great leader's vision highlighted in PPP's slogan of "Roti, Kapra aor Makan – Elm, Roshni, Sab ko kaam". Without any fear of contradiction, we can proudly

claim today that BISP is playing a vital role in improving the socio-economic conditions of underprivileged segment of the country.

To uplift the living standards of socially and economically deprived segments of society in accordance to the vision and guiding principles of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, BISP has launched various pro-poor initiatives like monthly cash grants, interest free micro-financing, vocational and technical training opportunities along with health facilities and life insurance for these under-privileged sections of society.

The recent measure of launching Waseela-e-Taleem is a landmark achievement in the pursuit of the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto as she was a staunch believer of the fact that education is instrumental tool to combat and eradicate poverty from the country. Despite all the odds and obstacles, the PPP led democratic government is deeply committed to advance the vision and mission of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and her Youm-e-Shahdat offers us an opportunity to reaffirm the resolve to make Pakistan a developed modern democratic state.