

Mohtarma Shaheed: Leader of Destitute

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June 21, 1953 was the glorious day when Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed was born. Like father like daughter, she was a born leader, destined to lead millions of people of Pakistan and become a symbol of hope and struggle. Today, while celebrating her 58th birthday, I am recalling the days of her uncompromising struggle, her visionary and future oriented policies along with her love for the poor and helpless people of the country as well as the precious moments I was privileged to spend with my great leader.

The name of Mohtarma Shaheed will always remain a symbol of struggle for the democracy loving people of Pakistan. Her vision based on national reconciliation and forgiveness is still a driving force during these testing times when the political heirs of Shaheed are fighting against the dark forces who are working on agenda to make Pakistan a failed state.

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed lived for the people of Pakistan, sacrificed her life to save Pakistan and to restore democracy in Pakistan. We all know that our great leader was aware of the grave threat to her life. 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, it would weaken the party, which would eventually weaken the people of Pakistan and endanger the security and integrity of the country.

Treading on the footsteps of her great father, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the heart of Mohtarma Shaheed was full of sympathy for the poor and marginalized segments of society. She emerged on national political scene as a ray of hope for the downtrodden. She gave the masses an assurance that they are the real inheritors of the country and they will have a secure economic future.

Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, as the leader of masses, took upon herself the arduous challenge of advancing the mission of her Shaheed father. The mission was transforming Pakistan into a modern state with a vibrant democracy where equal rights of all its citizens are guaranteed irrespective of religion, caste, creed or color as was dreamt by the father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohamamd Ali Jinnah.

Here I would quote the golden words of Mohtarma Shaheed about the future of Pakistan. She said "I am confident about the future of Pakistan. I believe that a nation that is inspired by democracy, human rights and economic opportunity will turn its back decisively against extremism. Indeed, I look forward to the day that a truly democratic Pakistan, unhindered by extremists and military rule, takes its place on the world stage". These words are the best depiction of the vision of Mohtarma Shaheed regarding Pakistan.

The present democratic government is determined to fulfill the mission of making Pakistan a modern, progressive democratic nation as it was envisioned by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), the initiative of democratic government is based on the same vision. The programme has been chalked out aiming at complete social rehabilitation of the poor and downtrodden of society.

As a comprehensive social safety net, BISP has introduced schemes to uplift the living standards of the poor segments of society besides providing them monthly cash grant as an immediate relief. In this regard, provision of demand driven vocational training is one of the instrumental steps. Under the scheme (Waseela-e-Rozgar), demand driven training is being imparted to beneficiary families 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. Keeping in view the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the vocational/skills training under Waseela-e-Rozgar initiative of BISP, is 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.

Likewise, BISP encourages 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 because the 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 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.

As a result of transparent and effective mechanisms adopted by BISP, it has become 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 successfully conducted a country wide door-to-door Poverty Survey to identify the deserving poor families.

As far as payment mechanism is concerned, BISP has also introduced state of the art technology i.e. Benazir Smart Cards and Mobile Phone Banking. These steps would not only strengthen the delivery system further but would 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.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that the measures taken by BISP are resulting as relief to people in need, especially, the poorest of the poor of society. Today, the Birth anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma is an occasion for us to reaffirm our commitment with the poor masses of Pakistan that they would not be left alone and they will be provided equal economic opportunities as well as a bright future as it was dreamt and wished by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto.

****Especially written in connection with the 58th Birth Day of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto.***