

23 March and Dream of Social Welfare State

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March 23 is remembered as Pakistan Day and rightly marked as a day of rejoicing because it was the same day when the basis of our beloved homeland were laid down with a clarity of vision and a vivid line of action to achieve it. It was the day when the Pakistan Resolution was approved by the prominent Muslim leaders from across sub-continent. This vision was inspired by the dream of Allama Iqbal who, almost a decade ago, had envisioned a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent, where they can live their lives in accordance with their religious, social and cultural ideologies. This vision of Iqbal was evidently reflected in the resolution tabled by Maulvi Fazal e Haq, another prominent supporter and leader of Muslim identity, on 23rd March 1940.

This resolution was not only based on a roadmap to acquire a new country but also comprised of an agenda of economic, social and religious freedom, for the Muslims of the subcontinents who were marginalized and discriminated against, in every field of life, due to their fewer numbers. This resolution promised a life of economic prosperity, social equality, cultural identity and religious freedom for all the inhabitants of the region irrespective of their religion, caste, color or creed.

It was the occasion when this dream for building a new nation, dreamt by Iqbal and put into words by Maulvi Fazal e Haq, was set as a goal under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Indeed, this struggle led an economically and socially weak community towards creation of a nation; hence, allowing them to write their own destiny freely.

While celebrating this historic day, we must not forget that the Father of the Nation never abandoned the dream of empowering people and providing them an enabling and conducive environment where they could have avail equal opportunities and make Pakistan a prosperous nation. Therefore, it was persuasion of the same dream when the great founding father of the nation termed the provision of better economic opportunity to people as his number one priority.

The architect of Pakistan conceived Pakistan as a modern progressive state established on foundations of social justice and wellbeing of the people. During a speech few months before the creation of Pakistan, our great Quaid declared it in a very clear terms that “It will be a people’s government.” The same fact clearly reflects from his first policy speech on August 11, 1947 when the Father of the Nation explained his vision about the newly emerging nation by saying that “if we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor.”

Thus, it can be said that Pakistan was envisioned as a country which ensures equal opportunities as well as a just distribution of resources, for all the citizens, especially for poor masses so that to enable them to live a life free of economic woes and hardships.

Later, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto initiated his struggle to give the people of Pakistan their rights. The economic agenda of Shaheed ZAB for the country was inspired and perfectly in line with the vision of Quaid-e-Azam. Shaheed ZAB formulated numerous policies based on his dreams for uplifting the lives of poor masses of the country.

It is an undeniable fact of the history that Shaheed ZAB sacrificed his life in his struggle to give people of Pakistan their fundamental rights as well as equal opportunities and means to live a dignified life. It is an irony of the history that the forces who do not want to give people of Pakistan their rights later deprived people of Pakistan from another courageous leader, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto who also laid her life during her momentous struggle to revive democracy and to protect and safeguard the rights of the people of Pakistan

Today, the political heirs of ‘Bhuttos’ are advancing the same legacy while dealing with unprecedented challenges and crisis on national and international fronts. The present democratic government has shown tremendous commitment with this vision and economic wellbeing of the people thanks to unwavering determination and firm support from President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani.

The democratic government right after its inception constituted Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) to alleviate the sufferings of downtrodden segments of society and to combat with growing poverty effectively. The pro poor vision of PPP led democratic government dictates that poverty in Pakistan is a complex phenomenon and needs to be tackled by applying innovative measures.

Therefore, a comprehensive strategy was adopted through BISP besides taking steps aiming at immediate relief i.e. monthly cash grant to beneficiary families. Initially, BISP was formed to provide cash grants to poor families that were in dire need to get immediate support. However, the horizon of the programme has been expanded gradually since that to turn it into an initiative inline with the vision of Quaid-e-Azam as well as the economic and social agenda of 'Bhuttos'.

BISP is also contributing significantly for the cause of women empowerment and emancipation in the society, which was another important dream of Quaid-e-Azam for the state of Pakistan. As a comprehensive social safety net, the programme has not only revived hopes of the poor in Pakistan but it has laid foundation for a sustainable and developed Pakistan by its new initiative i.e. Waseela-e-Taleem, aims at promoting education among the children from poor families in the country.

Today, 72 after the endorsement of Pakistan Resolution, we are ensuing and advancing the agenda of empowering people of Pakistan which was the primary and foremost important objective of the creation of Pakistan. The formulation of BISP is contributing significantly in materializing the dreams of making Pakistan a truly social welfare state. March 23 provides us an opportunity to reaffirm our strong commitment of uplifting the lives of poor and marginalized segments of society and to make Pakistan a country full of opportunities for every Pakistani without any discrimination.

Especially written article in connection with Pakistan Day