

## **Hilal-e-Imtiaz Conferred on Madame Farzana Raja Chairperson, BISP on her Struggle, Service and Success**

### **Personal Profile**

Ms. Farzana Raja, Member National Assembly of Pakistan is the Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). Ms. Raja is Vice President of the Young Parliamentarians Forum of the 13th National Assembly of Pakistan. She is also an active member of the Women Parliamentary Caucus of the National Assembly of Pakistan; working beyond party lines for the uplift of Pakistani women.

Ms. Farzana Raja has a long time affiliation with the Pakistan Peoples Party and has been at the forefront for the Party's struggle for democracy and rights of the underprivileged sections of society. Ms. Raja remained member of the provincial assembly (MPA), Punjab from 2002 to 2007. She has also been Secretary Information of Pakistan People's Party, Punjab. She has always been actively participating in the policy formulation work of the Party, especially in the areas of women empowerment, foreign policy and media relations. She has also lived in the United States and was member of the Party's Central Executive Committee in USA.

Ms. Raja is a famous print and media commentator and commands great respect in the journalists' society of Pakistan. She is also an eloquent speaker and has spoken at various conferences / seminars organized by national and international institutions. She also has a special interest in writing articles / columns on diverse topics and has contributed for the last 10 years in leading English and Urdu newspapers of Pakistan.

Madame Raja is married to Dr. Ammar Turabi, who is the founder and the President of Think-Tank International. With a Ph.D. degree in Government Administration, Dr. Turabi is a Certified Foreign and Domestic Diplomatic Policy Consultant. He is specialized and expert in USA-Pakistan relations, serves as Regional Consultant for United Press

International, Regional Research Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC.

### **Professional Career**

In view of her long-lasting commitment to the poor and vulnerable sections of society and her desire to work for their betterment, she was appointed as Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Program in 2008. It was the time both exogenous as well as indigenous factors had affected Pakistan's economy severely. Consequently, nascent democratic government of Pakistan had to face the challenges of rising inflation, mounting unemployment, and diminishing opportunities for the major sections of society resulting in a major section of population living below the line of poverty. Providing immediate relief to the common man was the biggest challenge facing the government.

It was under these trying circumstances that Ms Farzana Raja took over as the Chairperson of the BISP. In a span of about three years, she has transformed BISP into the largest and most credible ever social protection initiative of the country. It is her devotion to the cause of ameliorating the lot of the teeming millions that BISP has managed to reach out to more than 4 million families within a short span of less than three years; a feat, which was achieved by other countries like Brazil & Mexico in almost a decade. Through her commitment to the cause, relentless pursuit of perfection and strong work ethic, Ms Raja has instilled a culture of transparency in the disbursement of cash grants and has made colossal efforts to reach out to the marginalized and underprivileged sections of Pakistani Society. BISP owes its unprecedented success to Ms Raja's inimitable dynamic and inspirational leadership qualities.

The Programme's main objective is to provide immediate financial cushion to extremely poor families with a particular focus on empowering poor women. Besides monthly cash grants, BISP is providing micro financing, life & health insurance and vocational and technical training to its beneficiaries. Moreover, BISP is also conducting South Asia's first ever and the largest poverty scorecard survey throughout the country. Ms Farzana Raja has been personally visiting all corners of the country, from small villages and

refugee camps to the big cities to ensure that the truly deserving people are getting the benefits of the Programme.

BISP has reached more than 4 million destitute, marginalized and under-privileged families; means its effects have reached to almost 20 million poorest of the poor of this country. Lives of these 20 million people, living well below the line of poverty, have been touched by a soft and kind hand, an affectionate smile and a warm hug. This touch, this smile and this reassuring embrace is of Benazir Income Support Programme; telling them that they have not been left alone in this harsh world of competition, not only thinking about how to make their lives better but also working day in and day out to pull them out of their misery, to enhance their self respect, to improve their self-image, and to enable them to live a dignified life, which is the basic right of every human being.

This success and recognition earned by the BISP in such a short time was not possible without the dynamic leadership and relentless efforts of the chairperson BISP, Ms Farzana Raja. This commitment, dedication and resolve of Ms. Raja has won accolades for BISP world wide. BISP is, in the words of, UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon “a model for the other countries”. It is her untiring work and astute leadership which has earned acknowledgement from, among others, the World Bank President, US Secretary of State and UN Assistant Secretary General and Assistant Administrator of UNDP for its transparency, objectivity and technology based operations.

In recognition of these meritorious services for the nation in general and for the underprivileged in particular and in recognition of unprecedented success of BISP the Government of Pakistan, on the occasion of 64<sup>th</sup> Independence Day of Pakistan, has conferred on the Chairperson, BISP Ms. Farzana Raja the honor of *Hilal-e-Imtiaz* (the second highest civilian award given in recognition of “especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of Pakistan, world peace, cultural or other significant public endeavors”

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