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BB Shaheed: an icon of struggle for the People

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Indeed, it was the most tragic and dreadful evening in the history of Pakistan. Three years ago, it was the horrible evening of 27th December when few cowards who were afraid of democratic struggle of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto and her resolve to serve the people of Pakistan, brutally assassinated her at Liaquat Bagh Rawalpindi soon after her historic speech to a massive public rally.

Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was assassinated because she was a forceful advocate of the democratic and human rights of the poor. Her assassins actually wanted to murder the hopes and aspirations of the downtrodden of getting rid of the clutches of vicious circle of poverty and undemocratic oppressive regimes. Hence, the murder of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was indeed a conspiracy to keep the people deprived of their fundamental rights and dreams of a better future.



When she decided to end her exile and come back to Pakistan and lead the party at a crucial juncture of history, she 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, 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 courageous leader deemed it imperative to come back to Pakistan without any consideration of her personal safety.

As a true depiction of the brilliance of a fearless and brave leader, despite earlier attempts on her life, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto kept striding on the courageous path of democracy. She was indeed a portrayal of countless virtues. She possessed a kind heart and had a dynamic, sympathetic and affectionate personality. Her heart was full of sympathy for the poor and under privileged people of the country. It was an expression of the people's love for her that entire country was engulfed in a deep sense of grief on her Shahadat; every eye in Pakistan was full of tears and every heart was bleeding with deep sorrow.

While on the most dreadful journey of my life, heading towards Naudero from Rawalpindi with the BB's coffin, I was overwhelmed with deep sorrow and agony and every single moment spent with my great leader was flashing back from the cavalcade of my most cherished memories. All those long years of democratic struggle under the direct guidance of her were running before my eyes like a motion picture in fast-forward mode. It was only a few months back when I was lucky to be with BB Shaheed celebrating her 53rd birthday in Dubai; never realizing that this would be her last birthday celebration with us. Back on the plane, I was recalling the marathon struggle for revival of genuine democracy in the country and all the golden moments I had spent with her over the years. I was honored to be with her in all the rallies held in various parts of the Punjab as pre-election campaign after her return from exile.

Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was a ray of hope for the poor people of this country. She gave the masses of Pakistan confidence that they are the real inheritors of the country and was perceived as a symbol of the

bright future for this poverty struck people. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto especially inspired many women like me; she 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, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto wanted social justice and equal opportunities for all. She infused the same spirit of serving the people and the country, which is advancing her legacy of working for the masses in the present government.

First ever comprehensive social protection initiative of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is nothing but a tribute to the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. We are all aware of the fact that in 2008 both exogenous as well as indigenous factors affected Pakistan's economy severely. International financial, fuel, and food crisis along with ongoing 'war on terror' adversely affected the already unstable socio-economic structure of Pakistan. These factors 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. To confront these challenge, and inspired by the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, present government launched Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). According to the aspirations of BB Shaheed to serve the downtrodden segments of society, BISP has introduced various initiatives like: monthly cash grants, long-term interest free financial assistance and offering the vocational and technical training opportunities to the under-privileged sections of society. These initiatives are highly significant to break the myth that people belonging to these helpless strata are not capable enough to initiate and run their business or to acquire the skills to change their fate.

Shaheed Mohtarma always emphasized on the importance of transparency and objectivity. Resultantly, BISP is the first ever such initiative in the social sector of the country which has gained support and trust of various prestigious international organizations as transparency and impartiality have been the hallmark of this programme. To improve the procedure further and establish utmost transparency, BISP has recently started a country wide door-to-door Poverty Survey aiming to enroll maximum number of deserving families without any consideration of political affiliations, geographical location, or religious orientation.

The present democratic government would keep fulfilling its commitments made in the party's manifesto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's contribution to uplift the lives of masses of the country would continue with the passage of time. As we are marking the 3rd Youm-e-Shahdat of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, it's time to reiterate our resolve to follow her vision which would surely be instrumental in putting the country on the path of progress and prosperity.