

Speech for the China Cultural Heritage Foundation

Ceremony

- First of all let me express my profound thanks to Ms. Geng Ying, Chairman of the China Cultural Heritage Foundation for inviting us to China and for hosting us here in a very comfortable environment. We are deeply touched by this warm welcome and gracious hospitality.
- I am also thankful to the foundation for providing me this opportunity to discuss the flagship social protection initiative of the Government of Pakistan with this select gathering.
- I am here to learn from the Chinese experience in the field of social security and social protection and for establishing contact which could help us in long term cooperation and collaboration with the Chinese public as well as corporate sector.

Ladies & Gentlemen

- At the time when the present government took office in 2008, Pakistan's economy was affected by various factors.
- Consequently, Government of Pakistan had to face the challenges of rising inflation, increasing unemployment, and reducing opportunities. As a result, a considerable portion of population was living below the line of poverty.
- There was a fear that due to global economic recession and exceptional fuel and food inflation of 2008 the already vulnerable sections would not be able to sustain this shock.
- As the great Chinese leader Chairman Mao Zedong had said **“Our duty is to hold ourselves responsible to the people. Every word, every act and every policy must conform to the people's interests”**. The Government of Pakistan Peoples Party also took it as its responsibility to do something for the masses.

- Realizing the urgency of the need, government of Pakistan decided to establish an efficient, objective and transparent social safety programme with the name of Benazir Income Support Programme.
- As the programme meant to work for women empowerment and poverty alleviation so it was named after our great leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto who was the greatest supporter of women empowerment. It was in this very Beijing at the occasion of 4th World Conference on Women in 1995 that she said **“It is my firm conviction that a woman cannot ultimately control her own life and make her own choices unless she has financial independence.”**
- True to her convictions, BISP has worked day and night for the financial independence of the women of Pakistan. BISP aims at meeting the two most important targets set by the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

these targets are: eradication of extreme poverty and promotion of gender equality and women empowerment.

- Considering the provision of social services as basic human right, this initiative with the name of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) was launched as a means to provide financial assistance to the poorest of the poor.
- However, we are developing BISP in to a comprehensive social protection net. Apart from provision of Rs 1000 (\$12) monthly Cash Grant, BISP is also providing Vocational & Technical Training, Micro Finance for gainful self-employment and Life Insurance for the bread earner of the beneficiary's family.
- BISP, in a short span of less than three years, has reached out to more than 6 million families across the country; and by the end of September 2011 we are expected to enroll around 7 million under privileged families across the country. So far BISP has disbursed more than \$ 1 billion among the poor people of Pakistan.

- We believe that provision of social safety net facilities to each and every deserving citizen of Pakistan is not only the moral duty of the state but it is also an investment in the huge human resource of the country as through this approach we can enable the huge chunk of our population living below the line of poverty to start doing something for generation of resources for them and their families.
- Lack of resources and skills is the major hurdle in the way of development of the under-privileged segments of our society
- Realizing this, BISP is not only providing monthly cash grants to its beneficiaries but we are also providing them interest free financial assistance to start any small business of their choice.
- Along with this financial assistance we are also providing them counseling and training to start any viable business. Thus promoting small commercial activity in the national economy.

- Besides facilitating this commercial activity, BISP is also providing demand driven technical and vocational training to the one member of beneficiary's family thus enabling them to start any technical job or small business and become economically self sufficient.
- Moreover, BISP is about to launch two new initiatives. These are health insurance coverage for its beneficiaries' families; and the other is related with education.
- Under health insurance scheme, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, we will provide a health cover of Rs 25000 (around \$ 300) to our beneficiary families.
- Under the education initiative financial incentive will be given for the primary enrollment of the millions of school going age children of the BISP beneficiaries.

Ladies & Gentlemen

- In order to facilitate our beneficiaries BISP has opted for multiple payment mechanisms. One such mechanism is Benazir Smart Card. Beneficiary could take the card to any of the franchise shop of the bank and can get her payment. Presently, this facility is available in 4 districts but recently the President of Pakistan has instructed us to provide this facility in entire country; so by the end of this year smart card facility would be available to BISP beneficiaries all over the country.
- For ensuring smooth and transparent payments to its beneficiaries BISP has also launched, again for the first time in country, mobile phone banking. This facility is available in 8 districts. And almost 250,000 free of cost mobile sets are being distributed by BISP among its beneficiaries.
- Here I would like to share with you that almost in the entire world facilities like smart card and phone banking is considered as a right of the affluent and well off people only. But BISP has provided these services to the most down

trodden segments of our society, as we believe in financial inclusiveness of the masses and equality of rights for all.

Ladies & Gentlemen

- One of the major problem with any social protection initiative is that the non-poor benefit first and most from the better delivery of basic social services and the more deserving under privileged segments of the society remain at the far end of the line.
- Realizing this and in order to make the targeting more transparent, objective, with minimal inclusion or exclusion errors, and maximum coverage of the real deserving families we are doing a nationwide Poverty Scorecard Survey adopting internationally recognized Proxy Means Testing (PMT).
- Let me share with you that it is for the first time in whole South Asia that any social safety program has opted for a PMT based poverty survey of the entire population.

- I feel immense pride to tell you that BISP has completed 99% of the survey in less than 10 months time. We have surveyed around 25 million households in this short period and so far number of our beneficiaries has reached to 6 million families.
- But this figure is alarming as well, because this means BISP will be assisting more than 36 million individuals (almost 20% of the entire population), which will require huge amount of funds for their continued support.
- In view of our increased requirement due to increase in the number of beneficiaries, I have been given the task by the President of Pakistan, who is also the Chief Patron of the Programme, to enhance cooperation and collaboration with our brotherly nations so BISP could benefit from their experience.
- I choose China as my first destination for increased collaboration because China is our most trust worthy and all weather friend. Pakistan-China relations are close, time tested and unaffected by shifts in the global political environment.

And China has the experience of providing social security to a large number of people

Ladies & Gentlemen

- I am very glad that my first meeting in China was a success and China Foundation for Peace and Development has signed an MoU with BISP for assisting us in our vocational and training initiative.
- China Cultural Heritage Foundation is doing a very important work of protecting the culture and heritage of this great civilization. As it is said that no nation can progress in future without taking care of their past so the job performed by Heritage Foundation is very important one. I wish them great success and look forward to a continued and long term cooperation and collaboration between China Cultural and Heritage Foundation and BISP. I hope that the two MoUs signed today would go a long way in developing a long term collaboration between BISP and the corporate and public sector of China.

Thank you very much