**Bilawal Bhutto Breaking Barriers, Bridging Nations**

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The Foreign Minister of a country is a key figure in its diplomacy and international relations. They play an important role in representing the country on the global stage, promoting its interests, and maintaining peaceful and constructive relationships with other nations. The way a Foreign Minister frames and articulates an issue largely determines how that issue will be globally acknowledged and understood.

Currently, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is the Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Over the last 15 months, since 27th April 2022 when he took oath as Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has not only aced the role of Foreign Minister but also showcased his exceptional talents and sharp intellect.

At the young age of 34 yrs, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has defied all expectations, rising to the challenge of the Foreign Minister’s role with remarkable success. With unwavering determination and a fresh perspective, he has breathed new life into the ministry, restoring Pakistan’s Foreign Policy on the global stage. As with any young leader assuming a prominent role, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has faced criticism for being young and inexperienced as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan. He has been frequently criticised and questioned for his readiness for the complex and sensitive role of Foreign Minister, citing his relatively young age and limited experience in foreign affairs and diplomacy. He has been subjected to criticism regarding his leadership maturity and decision-making capabilities.

It is essential to note that criticism faced by young leaders is not uncommon, and many successful young leaders have proven themselves capable and effective in their roles over time. Young leaders are capable of bringing innovative ideas, and their performance should be judged based on their actions, decisions, and achievements in office as throughout history, there have been numerous successful young leaders and politicians who have left a lasting impact on the world. Such as, Alexander the Great ascending the throne at the age of 20, and Queen Elizabeth I became the Queen of England at the age of 25, her reign is known as the “Elizabethan Era,” when England rose as a major world power, Theodore Roosevelt became the 26th President of the United States at the age of 42, Sir Winston Churchill was appointed as First Lord of the Admiralty in his early 30s, his leadership during World War II as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was instrumental in securing victory for the Allies. The first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru’s visionary leadership laid the foundation for a modern, democratic, and secular India, John F. Kennedy was elected as the 35th President of the United States at the age of 43 and inspired a generation at his vision of a “New Frontier” and efforts to advance civil rights. Lastly, FM Bilawal Bhutto’s mother Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto became the first woman to lead a Muslim-majority country, serving as Prime Minister of Pakistan and advocating for women’s rights and democracy at the age of 35. She is known as the symbol of democracy, freedom and bravery worldwide. Moreover, Benazir Bhutto is the first-ever Pakistani leader to get a wax figure at Madame Tussaud Museum. This recognition paid tribute to her significant contributions as the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan and her global impact as a prominent political figure. The wax statue immortalized her legacy and showcased her enduring influence. Hence, these leaders and politicians prove that age is not a barrier to making a significant impact on the world stage. Their achievements and contributions continue to inspire generations, highlighting the power of youthful leadership in shaping the course of history.

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During Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s tenure as Foreign Minister of Pakistan, he has focused on several key aspects of foreign policy and international relations. Notably, he addressed the issue of Islamophobia, raising concerns about its prevalence worldwide and advocating for the rights of Muslims. He also brought attention to the alleged human rights violations and persecution of Muslims in Indian-held Kashmir. Notably, he had discussions with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, participating in a UN meeting on food security, and reaffirming joint goals for bilateral partnerships on economic stability, climate, and health.

Under his leadership, Pakistan has achieved a major victory by exiting the FATF grey list. This accomplishment is a testament to the country’s improved financial credibility and strengthened efforts in combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

Thanks to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s efforts Pakistani students were able to go back to China for on-campus studies, following his direct requests and meetings with Chinese officials. During his tenure as Foreign Minister, he engaged in discussions with foreign ministers from various countries, including Turkey, Germany, Russia, Iran, Singapore, Canada, and France. Their talks covered important matters such as trade, investments, climate change, and global affairs, aiming to strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari represented Pakistan in various international forums, including the United Nations General Assembly, the ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting, and the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, expressing Pakistan’s perspective on significant regional and global matters.

He also advocated for climate justice from developed nations, highlighting Pakistan’s relatively low carbon footprint despite its vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Regarding the Kashmir dispute, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized the importance of its peaceful resolution in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law. After the most-talked-about visit of Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to India in May 2023, for the SCO summit, there has been no denying the fact that he has infused life in the otherwise dull Foreign Ministry of Pakistan. The way he represented Pakistan at SCO in Goa, highlighted the importance of regional cooperation for common prosperity and stressed the need to combat common threats of extremism & terrorism without politicization in the region, is commendable.

He not only talked about peace but also diplomatically defeated India at their home ground by exposing their hypocrisy on terrorism, be it in an interview, a press conference or a speech at an SCO forum, he rattled his Indian Counterpart, Mr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in a very calm and composed manner. He also made a bold and remarkable move by recording a protest against India at the SCO platform for its “unilateral and illegal” measures in Indian Occupied Kashmir in violation of international law, sitting on Indian soil, despite the fact that a bounty was already placed on his head by BJP leaders.

FM Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had been the first Foreign Minister from Pakistan to visit India in 12 years. He went to the SCO meeting of the foreign ministers of the forum’s eight members and four observer countries. SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is a political and security bloc consisting of Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Asia.

In a befitting response to his Indian counterpart Mr Jaishankar’s statement in which the latter warned about the damaging consequences of terrorism in an apparent reference to Kashmir, FM Bhutto said, “Terrorism continues to threaten global security,” “Let’s not get caught up in weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring”.

The FM also took up the matter of Afghanistan, which is one of the SCO observer nations and called upon the international community to “meaningfully engage” with the Taliban government to ensure and strengthen peace in the region. In July 2023, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s visit to Japan was also marked by productive bilateral talks with Japan’s Foreign Minister and a meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Discussions covered a range of areas, including trade, defence, education, and science & technology. Both sides expressed their commitment to enhancing cooperation and identified targeted programs for high-impact projects, such as solarisation and water purification. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized Pakistan’s vision of regional connectivity and economic cooperation during his address at the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI). He also encouraged Japanese businesses to invest in Pakistan, highlighting the vast trade and investment potential between the two countries.

It’s a positive notion that FM Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is being lauded and admired at the global level for constructive engagement with his counterparts from other nations and calculated and logical counterarguments in interviews with local and International Journalists, but, there’s one political party in Pakistan which is actively undermining the series of his success as Foreign Minister. They are hell-bent on discrediting and defaming his efforts for the restoration of diplomatic ties with India and peace across the region.

It’s only been a year since FM Bilawal assumed the charge as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, the nation is already singing praises of his outstanding performance and achievements. He’s being regarded as the best Foreign Minister Pakistan has had so far in the past few decades, even though, the Former ones have been twice his age and experience, having a longer political career than him.

If we draw an analogy between the Ex – Foreign Minister of Pakistan and FM Bilawal Bhutto, it wouldn’t be wrong to say that the Former FM remained more focused on the image building of the Chairman of the party he belonged to, also he was always cautious of his statements and actions irrespective of our national interests, while FM Bilawal Bhutto’s focus remains more on Pakistan’s National, Diplomatic as well as Humanitarian issues. FM Bhutto’s public speaking skills are also more refined, as he has been a more vocal politician in the media, and has been speaking on various public platforms since a young age.

FM has successfully turned down the unnuanced “terrorism” narrative springing from India and other parts of the world against Pakistan that has Islamophobic undertones, reflecting his deep understanding of international relations and articulating Pakistan’s position on terror combat.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, being a young leader, has been active, eloquent and convincing in his discourse as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan and we hope that his efforts bring peace and stability to this region, which has suffered a lot during the past many decades.

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