**Awami Long March**

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“Pakistan’s future viability, stability and security lie in empowering its people and building political institutions. My goal is to prove that the fundamental battle for the hearts and minds of a generation can be accomplished only under democracy.” –Benazir Bhutto

On February 27, 2022, Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari started a new political mission of leading hundreds and thousands of people, who have united under his leadership to march against the incompetence of the incumbent government. Titled as the “Awami March,” this demonstration is set to pass through approximately 23 districts and 37 cities, before reaching the federal capital. It is said to be “the longest-ever long march led by a political leader.”

What emotionally ties the common PPP worker with this “Awami March” is the fact that Chairman Bilawal who is accompanied by his sister Aseefa Bhutto Zardari is using the same truck as their mode of transportation, as was used by their mother Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, on her historic return to Pakistan on October 18, 2007.

“Bibi Tera Qafla, Ruka Nahi, Thama Nahi”

Just as Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto came back to the country for the people, amidst many dangers, the purpose behind the “Awami March” is to protect the rights of the common people, which are being trampled on by the incumbent government. Chairman Bilawal has kept his mother’s promise and mission of serving the people through this long march to strengthen democratic values and protect peoples’ fundamental rights.

It is no secret that the current PTI-government led by PM Khan has failed to deliver any relief to the common people. Ever since it came into power in 2018, Pakistan has failed to improve its rankings in any of the human development indicators. Currency devaluation is at its highest in the history of the country, inflation is soaring, the dollar conversion rate is out of control, unemployment is sky high, and there seems to be no respite in sight for the common man.

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Fiscal policies are being dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For the first time in the history of the country, the autonomy of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) is at stake. IMF guided policies are being announced for the SBP under the guise of “economic reforms.” The announcement of multiple financial budgets in a single fiscal year has made the life of citizens hard who are struggling to cope up with ever-rising inflation and other living costs.

Pakistan Peoples Party has always been a flagbearer of people’s rights and has given voice to the downtrodden. Former Prime Minister and Chairman Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was the first one who made the people recognize their own power, and gave them the slogan of “roti, kapra aur makaan.” Similarly, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has taken up this herculean task to carry out a long march from Karachi to Islamabad covering a distance of approximately 1600 kilometres, in just 10 days, to protest and express outrage against the incumbent government’s anti-people policies.

Before beginning the “Awami March,” PPP released “a 38-point charter of demands, seeking social development programme, electoral reforms, the effective justice system, sustainable economic policy, and a strong foreign policy aimed at connecting Pakistan with the rest of the world instead of the steps that were isolating the country with the international community.”

What is interesting to note is that the PPP led long march was considered successful just after a day it began, when it was still in Hyderabad. The humongous popular support for the “Awami March” shook Banigala and forced Prime Minister Khan to address the nation and broadcast relief measures, hurriedly. The reduction in oil prices by Rupees 10 among other announcements can be best described as a kneejerk reaction in a bid to try and take the attention away from PPP’s long march.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the “Awami March” is a political masterstroke by Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Former President Asif Ali Zardari. It is a great way to connect with the masses from Karachi to Islamabad, and an effective way to show its strength to all the relevant power galleries. This demonstration will also help in mobilizing the party workers across the country before the forthcoming elections. In addition, the announcement by Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to support this long march is also a testament to the political vision and prowess of Former President Asif Ali Zardari, who managed to win the support of their rival political parties despite differences and bridged the gap between PPP and PDM.

The “Awami March” is also a test of sorts for Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari who has undertaken such a humongous political mission. Even though it has already been deemed as a success because some relief measures have been announced by the government albeit under pressure, much still needs to be done. The mobilization of both PPP voters and workers especially in Punjab province is heartwarming. This will play an important role in the next general elections. There is no doubt that with the success of this long march, Chairman Bilawal will prove his mettle as a leader by following the footsteps of his father, mother and grandfather.

One thing is for certain that the love and support being expressed by the masses towards Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Aseefa Bhutto Zardari in this “Awami March” has further cemented PPP’s status as a national party. It has shown that the people’s love towards the Bhutto family is still intact. Moreover, once again Chairman Bilawal’s status as a national leader has been proven owing to the massive support which the masses have shown to him and the PPP.

Pakistan needed a young dynamic leader who understood the history and the ethos of the nation. One who can navigate the upcoming challenges as well as can keep up with the ever-evolving international landscape. One who has ample support among the masses and can prioritize national interests. And in Chairman Bilawal, they have found the one. May Allah guide, protect and bless him with success.

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