

Title : Chairperson's Speech

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Honorable Mr Mamnoon Hussain President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Cabinet colleagues, Excellencies, Development Partners, Academics, Media, and those care about the biggest segment of Pakistani society the deserving, Asalamoileikom, good morning and welcome to BISP HQ.

Since my nearly two years at BISP we have been conscious of our duty to evaluate our program and share its findings with the world at large. We are accountable firstly to our people and so this practice is a sacred trust. Secondly it is also an important exercise for the social safety nets of the world, members of the UN who spend on the poor, because the impacts of South Asia's largest program are being shared for best practice with all. We must learn from each other's experience. Whilst BISP has learnt from the world in the previous government, in the PMLN government we are in the position to share our best practices with the world.

Since Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government took charge in 2013 the budgets for BISP have increased from Rs 30b to Rs115b. The PMLN has not only owned a previous government program but increased its scope and improved its productivity. This is due to two reasons: firstly, the program was conceived by the then Finance Minister who is the current PMLN Finance Minister and secondly the entire PMLN leadership from PM to the members of PMLN wished to see the strengthening of a social safety net in line with PMLN's commitment to an Islamic welfare state.

Mr President, we are grateful for your continued support as BISP patron in chief and for your constant advice and support. Whilst the technical highlights of the impact BISP has had have been adequately given through today's presentation, what I wish to emphasize is the personal side of the impact which I have had the great privilege of witnessing first hand.

I can never forget the confidence of Amman Grandmother Sakina in Dera Bugti when I had tea with her over Eid in how she would spend her stipend herself; nor the comment of her son on how stingy she was with the amount, nor how she chuckled with me whilst telling me that she would spend on her grandchildren mostly of her own free will and nobody could force a penny out of her.

How can I forget Fazli Bibi of Muzafargarh, one of millions of widows who have more respect in their houses because of the extra cash they bring versus the earlier burden to society they were seen to be.

The image of Nur Bano of Skurdu is fresh in mind when she tells me how she has used her stipend for medicines and for school expenditures of her children and for sending her children to school.

The brave mothers on the LoC AJK like Amina bibi speak volumes of how the extra cash in her hands has helped out with essential groceries, more flour, less malnutrition.

Let me also share the joy of how Grandmother Taj bibi of Tank used the money to spend on the extras of her whole family but firstly on khairat of sweet rice the minute the funds would arrive. The deserving have equal concept of sharing caring and khairaat in the name of Allah.

Nor can I forget how Bib Fattu of Thatta shared how she used the money to save for difficult days especially when hit with yearly floods and used the amount on food items so that there was enough to feed her family.

And finally how can I forget the smile of Bibi Palwasha in Mohmand agency when she grinned and said I get cash and I vote now too. Nobody can stop me from choosing my own representative for the assembly.

Mr President BISP is the largest social safety net of Pakistan and it has ensured women empowerment. We have started process for NSER resurvey in entire Pakistan to ensure we enter the new poor and exit the not so poor from the previous database, we are converting our payment systems from ATM to biometric to cut mafia and improve access points, but more than that Mr President we are giving voices to those women who earlier had no confidence. The cash has given them confidence, dignity, self respect in a patriarchal Pakistan.

I am grateful to your support, the support of the PM, the FM, BISP board, to the BISB management and the BISP officials.

However I leave you with these words. Let us not never underestimate or mock the assistance being given by the Islamic welfare government of PM Nawaz Sharif, because somewhere in the distant corners peripheries or even centres are millions who would be alone if BISP was not doing its Islamic duty. We remain humbled by this duty and remain committed for our deserving. We also remain hopeful that when the government's other poverty exit strategies like interest free loans, vocational trainings get strengthened and the economy continues to grow at the pace its growing one day our role will be minimized. But for now BISP is Pakistan's absolute and complete need.