

## A Tribute To Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

On the forty fifth anniversary of his judicial murder, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is remembered as one of Pakistan's foremost visionaries and a democratic leader par excellence. His commitment to civilian rule and empowering ordinary Pakistanis has no parallel.

Shazia Nizamani  
(<https://thefridaytimes.com/contributor/shazia-nizamani>)

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Pakistan's first democratically elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a charismatic leader of international stature, will be forever remembered for introducing the first-ever Constitution that had the consensus of all the nation's political parties. Bhutto was executed at the age of just fifty, during Dictator Zia-ul-Haq's martial law regime, on April 4, 1979. Bhutto's passing also served to crush hope for downtrodden people in Pakistan, and plunged the country into a decade of tyranny and terror.

It was Bhutto who gave a political voice and a sense of dignity to the poor, marginalized and deprived masses, by making them realize that "*taqat ka sarchashma awam hai*" (all power rests with the people).

Bhutto's politics centered around the promotion of social democracy, equality, and social justice, which is one reason he is remembered as Quaid-e-Awam, or Leader of the People.

On April 4, a black day in the history of Pakistan, we present a red salute to Shaheed Zulfikar Bhutto and remember him for his great services to the people of this country. During his tenure from 1973 to 1977, he introduced historical reforms for the people and managed a successful foreign policy that we still benefit from to this day.

The article highlights some of the key achievements and socialist reforms of Bhutto for the poor and deprived classes, and his efforts to curb inequality and feudalism. His slogan 'Roti, kapra aur Makan' is still as relevant as it was in 1970s.

It was Shaheed Z.A. Bhutto's successful foreign policy and diplomacy which brought 93,000 Pakistani soldiers home who had been taken as prisoners of war in India after the signing of the Shimla Agreement in 1972. It was his conviction that led to strong relations with the Islamic countries, manifesting in the Islamic Summit Conference at Lahore in February 1974, and the fostering of friendly relations with communist China and Soviet Union. Critically, Bhutto also laid the foundation of Pakistan's nuclear program.

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Bhutto introduced Land Reforms in 1972 that restricted individual holdings to 150 acres of irrigated and 300 acres of unirrigated land. In the second land reforms in 1977, the ceiling on land holdings was reduced to 100 acres for irrigated land and 200 acres for unirrigated land. During the reforms of 1972, land was distributed to 76,000 peasants. Bhutto reformed the land revenue system for effective implementation of the 1977 regulation.

The land reforms were challenged in the Federal Shariat Court for review, with the FSC arbitrating whether the Land Reform Act was in accordance with Islamic edicts during dictator Zia's regime.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto enacted a series of labor welfare laws and the Labor Policy of 1972. The labor policy and laws were historical development which were designed to improve the lives of laborers in the industrial and other formal sectors. Crucial issues such as educational facilities for children, medical care, housing, worker welfare funds, cost-of-living adjustments, and old-age pensions, establishment of labour courts etc were included in these reforms.

Along with welfare and assurance of greater security of service, the social status of workers, their freedom of association, dignity and representation was also guaranteed, for instance "servant" was replaced with "domestic worker," and the provision of dignified and safe working environments was also guaranteed.

Bhutto's education reforms included provisions for universal and free education up to the matriculation level. Between 1972 and 1974, several new medical and engineering, technical colleges, universities were opened throughout the country and area studies centers were established at some leading universities.

Institutions of higher education were upgraded to a university status. Both NED Engineering College, Karachi, and the Sind University Engineering College, Jamshoro, were raised to university status. The University Grants Commission was established in 1973. Some universities were identified as centers of excellence; the People's Open University, later named Allama Iqbal Open University, was established in 1974.

In the health sector, Bhutto introduced Rural Health Centres and Basic Health Units to provide healthcare facilities in rural and urban areas. Hospitals and training colleges for doctors and nurses were established.

Bhutto introduced legal reforms, he separated the judiciary from the executive, civil and criminal litigation, and other legal procedures were simplified for easy access for the people.

Bhutto granted the right of getting a passport to every citizen of Pakistan; earlier only certain privileged classes could get a passport. It became possible thus, for common people to get passports and travel abroad. As a result, millions of skilled and non-skilled workers travelled to the Gulf countries. Bhutto facilitated thousands of workers to work in Gulf countries through a series of bilateral agreements.

When it comes to women empowerment, the Bhutto government had one of the most progressive approach towards women in Pakistan's history. Gender equality through women's legal, political, civil and economic rights was guaranteed by making it a part of the Constitution of 1973: it included that "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone," that "all citizens are equal under the law and are entitled to equal protection of law," protection of marriage, family, the mother and the child as well as encouraging "full participation of women in all spheres of national life" was made a priority.

It is important to mention that the Bhutto government ensured the participation of women in drafting the 1973 Constitution. Six women took part in the drafting of the Constitution: four members were from Pakistan Peoples' Party which included Begum Nasim Jahan, Nargis Naim Sindhu, Begum Zahida Sultana, and Dr. Ashraf Abbasi Jennifer Jehanzeba Qazi from NAP and Shireen Wahab from Muslim League – Qayyum.

**The Supreme Court, in its opinion on the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto reference case, observed that the trial under the 1979 judgment that sent former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to the gallows did not meet the requirements of a "fair trial and due process."**

The Bhutto government opened opportunities for women in all government and armed forces, and consequently, many women joined the civil service. 10% of the seats in the National Assembly and 5% in the provincial assemblies were reserved for women representatives, and the first commission on the status of women was created.

The Bhutto government encouraged women's participation in leadership roles, in this regard, Begum Ashraf Abbasi of PPP was made the first woman deputy speaker of the National Assembly in 1973, Ms. Kaneez Yousaf was appointed as Vice Chancellor of the Quaid-e-Azam University and Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan appointed as the Governor of Sindh.

Forty five years ago, during the rule of a military dictator, when Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was sentenced to death, justice and a fair trial was not granted in accordance with the Constitution. The Supreme Court, in its opinion on the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto reference case, observed that the trial under the 1979 judgment that sent former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to the gallows did not meet the requirements of a "[fair trial and due process](https://www.dawn.com/news/1432222). ([/23-Feb-2024/trial-of-zulfikar-ali-bhutto-a-grave-miscarriage-of-justice](https://www.dawn.com/news/1432222))" There can be no doubt that Bhutto's execution was a judicial murder and the former Prime Minister did not receive a fair trial according to the law.

The National Assembly, Senate and all three provincial assemblies, except KP where the PTI is in power, have passed resolutions declaring Bhutto a 'national democratic hero and martyr' and an award called the Nishan-e-Zulfikar has been instituted, to be given to political workers and activists who have "fought and sacrificed their lives for democracy."

This resolution should be implemented as it will serve as a constant reminder of grave injustice to Z.A Bhutto, political workers, and supremacy of civilian rule.



**Shazia Nizamani**  
(<https://thefridaytimes.com/contributor/shazia-nizamani>)

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [✉\(mailto:nizshaz29@gmail.com\)](mailto:nizshaz29@gmail.com) [📞](#) [🌐](#)

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