



Culture and Religious Affairs

A Cultural Message of Peace and Pluralism

The Pakistan Peoples Party believes in people's culture. It believes in the diversity of the Pakistani culture. Pakistan's lingual and cultural diversity is a strength of the People's Government that makes Pakistan a true Federation. The Government does not wish to brand a particular cultural expression as being Pakistani culture in exclusion to others that are different. Everything cultural being expressed by any province, city or village is entitled to be called as Pakistani culture in addition to their own name, e.g., Balochi, Kashmiri, Hunza, Chitrali, Gilgit, Balti, Punjabi, Pakhtun, Hazara, Seraiki, Thari, Sindhi, Makrani even Lahori, Pothohari, Mirpuri and a number of others.

The first popularly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, requested the internationally renowned revolutionary poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, to establish a National Council of Arts to promote cultural activity. The Government has again brought an artist at the helm of the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA). It has strongly asserted the inalienable right of the people of Pakistan to their cultural expression and provided facilities and arranged programs to reflect the diversity of Pakistani culture. Major projects have been designed to pro-actively promote the Pakistani culture during the next five years. It is for the first time that the development of the country's culture has been included in the Five Years Plan as an important component of the development strategy.

The PNCA and Institute of National Heritage have been regularly organizing festivals and exhibitions in which artisans from all over the country exhibit their works of art. Pakistan Television and Radio Pakistan have also been projecting the culture of different regions of

Pakistan. The Government has also sent a number of local artists to other countries as part of cultural exchange programs under a policy of participating in international cultural events. Two feature films, *Khuda Kay Laye* and *Ram Chand Pakistani*, were sent to a number of countries around the world, and they have won laurels in the film festivals across the globe.

The People's Government will continue to mobilize artists and artisans to spread their message of peace and tolerance. The Government is also preserving and documenting paintings in the possession of Government departments so that the public ownership of this manifestation of art could be established. The Government is working on a proposal to declare outstanding artists as national asset.

The Government has prepared a five-year plan under which the Department of Archeology will undertake scientific survey and documentation of all tangible cultural heritage and start working on an encyclopedia of tangible archeological heritage that is projected to be completed during the five-year period. The Department of Archeology and Museums has undertaken a prestigious project of restoration and conversion of the city of Multan on the pattern of the city of Fez of Morocco under a directive issued by the Prime Minister.

Tolerance through Religion

The People's Government is actively pursuing the mission of de-militarizing the society and spreading Islam's message of peace. The Government has organized a number of seminars, conferences and public meetings to take the sufi message of peace, love and tolerance to the people. Addressing an International Conference on Sufism and

Peace arranged by Pakistan Academy of Letters in Islamabad on March 15, 2010, President Zardari said sufism had a crucial role to play in mankind's struggle for a peaceful world.¹ Addressing 80 delegates from 30 countries and 250 from Pakistan, the President said the most important issue of the present era was peace — peace in the country as well as peace outside its borders.



Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani and Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, Syed Sumsam Ali Shah Bukhari laying the chaddar at shrine of renowned saint sufi Hazrat Syed Muhammad Ismaeel Shah Bukhari (Hazrat Karmanwala) during annual urs celebrations.

A unique gathering of four major sufi sects of Islam was held in January 2010 at the darbar of Karmanwala Shareef in District Okara where the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and other key members of the Federal Cabinet urged the devotees to defeat the ideology of hatred and *takfeer* by spreading universal love preached by the saints.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has achieved excellence in making smooth Hajj arrangements during 2008-2010. Following the successful and timely completion of Hajj-2009, many countries including China and India, inspired by Pakistan's expertise, have formally or informally contacted the Ministry to seek its guidance to ensure maximum facilities for their Hujjaj.

The Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Lou

Zhaohui, held a detailed meeting with Minister for Religious Affairs, Syed Hamid Saeed Kazmi, to discuss problems faced by Chinese Muslims in performing Hajj. The Chinese Ambassador invited the Minister to visit China as a state guest along with a delegation to educate and train the Chinese Muslims in performing Hajj. Mr. Zhaohui sought cooperation and suggestions from the Pakistani Government for making better Hajj arrangements for Muslims living in China. Similarly, India informally contacted the Pakistan Hajj Directorate in Makkah in Saudi Arabia with a request to share expertise to ensure smooth conduct of Hajj operation and extend maximum facilities to India's Muslim minority.

As many as 159,647 and 164,647 Hujjaj from Pakistan performed the most cherished religious obligation under private and Government schemes in 2008 and 2009, respectively. In 2009, more than 160,000 pilgrims performed the pilgrimage, out of which 80,000 were sent through Hajj Group Organizers (HGOs). Around 589 registered HGOs were allocated quota as per directions of the Saudi authorities and no new induction of HGOs had taken place since then.

It was for the first time that the Ministry completed the pre- and post-Hajj flight operations in accordance with the given schedule. Pre-Hajj flight operation program was conducted from October 21, 2009 to November 21, 2009. PIA and Saudi Airlines operated about 356 flights to complete the first phase, while the post-Hajj operation continued from December 2, 2009 to January 2, 2010.

The accommodation committee made vigorous efforts to select and acquire the best possible residential buildings in Makkah-tul-Mukarramah and Madinah-tul-Munawwarah to ensure the most comfortable arrangements for pilgrims. Accommodation arrangements were made for a record

¹Dawn, March 16, 2010.

number of Hujjaj during Hajj 2008 and Hajj 2009. Besides, the Ministry made countrywide extensive Hajj training programs to facilitate the intending pilgrims to perform Hajj rituals in Saudi Arabia during the period.

At the centers, training was imparted with the help of models, charts, maps, sketches, lectures, VCRs and television. Moreover, the centers taught how to wear *ahram* and observe sanctity of the holy places while performing rituals at Madina and manners of offering prayers at Masjid-e-Nabvi and *salam* at Roza-e-Rasool (P.B.U.H.). Informative booklets namely Anwar-e-Haramain and Aamal-e-Hajj (for Shia pilgrims) along with Hajj literature were distributed among Hujjaj free of cost, while video cassettes were also provided to teach how to perform the Hajj. *Ahram* and ladies' gowns were provided to all pilgrims on a complimentary basis.

In 2009, the Ministry provided medicines worth Rs.18 million at medical centers established in Saudi Arabia to facilitate Pakistani Hujjaj during the grand religious congregation. A Hajj Medical Mission, consisting of 260 members, was deputed in Saudi Arabia to provide medical cover to Hujjaj. The Mission set up a 50-bed main hospital at Makkah Mukarramah and eight dispensaries in each administrative sector in Makkah-tul-Mukarramah. In Madinah-tul-Munawwarah one main hospital and three dispensaries were set up, which remained active round-the-clock throughout the Hajj season.

A draft of the next Hajj policy is being finalized by the Ministry in consultation with all the stakeholders and would soon be sent to the Federal Cabinet for approval. In connection with the new Hajj policy, a delegation from the Ministry of Religious Affairs led by Minister Syed Hamid Saeed Kazmi visited Saudi Arabia in the first week of March 2010 to hold discussions with the concerned authorities for arrangements for Hajj 2010.

In a welcome development, the Saudi authorities have exempted Pakistani HGOs from mandatory registration with International Air Traffic Organization for an initial term of two years.

The Dawah and Ziarat wing of the Ministry of Religious Affairs sent a number of Pakistani delegations to visit shrines of eminent Muslim saints and Sufia Karam in India under an agreement concluded between Pakistan and India in 1974. Pakistani pilgrims visited such shrines at five Indian cities, Sirhand, Kalyar, Ajmer and New Delhi on the occasion of urs of the saints celebrated in accordance with the lunar calendar.

The Ministry carried out its scheduled program of offering financial assistance and distribution of the copies of the Holy Quran with translations in different languages across the world. It also provided other useful books on Islamic literature to different foreign institutions, mosques and *deeni madaris* (religious seminaries) around the globe for the purpose of spreading the teachings and message of Islam, focusing on love and peace, throughout the world. Two models of Faisal Mosque, Islamabad, and Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, were also sent to Malaysia for placement in its National Art Museum.

The Ministry organized the annual National Mehfil-e-Shabina on the nights of 27th, 28th and 29th Ramadan-ul-Mubarak at Faisal Mosque, Islamabad. National Hifz-o-Qira't competition is held annually in May at the Hajj Directorate, Islamabad, and it was organized in 2009 as well.

The Pakistan Madrassah Education Board made a number of proposals on reforms of seminaries in line with its responsibility of imparting modern education in *madaris* and also a premier security agency to implement the Government's initiative for *madrassah* reforms in the light of modern education.

Keeping in view the hardships and problems

of needy segments of the society, the Ministry of Zakat and Ushr during the last two years took several measures to mitigate their sufferings. The annual Zakat grant for hospitals and health institutions witnessed a record upsurge as it was enhanced from Rs. 24.600 million to Rs. 50.600 million.

The Central Zakat Council (CZC) of the Ministry increased the relief grant for District Headquarters Hospital, Rawalpindi from Rs.4 million to Rs.5 million. The grant for Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi was enhanced from the existing Rs. 4.400 million to Rs.6.600 million.

The grant for Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital was also doubled as it was increased from Rs.6 million to Rs.12 million. The share of Layton Rahmatullah Benevolent Trust, Karachi was increased from Rs.6 million to Rs.12 million, while for Jinnah Post-Graduate Medical Centre, Karachi from Rs.4,200 million to Rs.15 million. The Central Zakat Council annually allocates an appropriate amount for treatment of deserving patients in the national level hospitals.

As part of its efforts to lessen the sufferings of affectees of natural calamities and to eradicate poverty and unemployment from the country, the Ministry earmarks every year hefty amounts besides providing stipends to needy students in various vocational and educational institutions. The Ministry also releases annual Zakat funds in the shape of relief grants to poor and deserving patients.

Minister for Zakat and Ushr, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri has stated that the Government is mulling to spend 50% amount of the allocated Zakat fund on vocational training during 2009-2010.

The ceiling for free medical treatment is Rs.2,000 for indoor and Rs.1,000 for outdoor patients. The CZC has enlisted 194 hospitals

of national level throughout the country. As many as 66,952 deserving patients were treated in various hospitals.

Sixty percent of the budget for regular Zakat programs was allocated for Guzara Allowance scheme under which Rs.500 are being disbursed to each *mustahiq* (deserving), including widows, disabled, unemployed and one who is not a habitual beggar. At least 241,011 deserving families are benefitting from the Guzara Allowance scheme. The Federal Government has allocated Rs.7914.536 million for this scheme to be executed in all the four provinces, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad in 2009-2010 budget.

The Ministry allocated eight percent of the budget under the Marriage Assistance Program in which Rs.10,000 are granted to a *mustahiq* unmarried woman as one-time grant by the Local Zakat Committee. As many as 5,986 deserving unmarried women have so far been granted this financial assistance.

Zakat funds are being distributed among the provinces on population basis; under the formula, Punjab gets 55% of the funds; Sindh 23%; Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 13%; Balochistan 4.9%; and FATA around 2%.

The CZC also grants funds to the provinces for disbursement of Zakat among the needy and deserving, stipends to religious institutions, Eid grants, and maintenance allowance for leprosy patients. The provinces submit their reports to CZC, Ministry of Zakat and Ushr about the disbursement of Zakat funds being provided to them.

The Ministry is considering a proposal of health insurance aimed at providing all necessary medical care to deserving and destitute people at their door-step. The Takaful Pakistan Limited, an Islamic Insurance Company, has recently offered its services to Ministry of Zakat and Ushr in the

health insurance sector. Under the insurance policy, deserving people would be able to get better medical treatment from the hospitals of their choice by showing health cards.

The Ministry runs regular as well as some non-regular schemes for the benefit of deserving persons, and in this regard it allocated Rs.3,709.047 for the year 2009-2010.

The last authoritarian regime had failed to utilize about Rs.6,736 million out of the total Rs.13,072.319 million allocated for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. But the People's Government has made elaborate arrangements to ensure 100% utilization of the Zakat. It is also being ensured that the local Zakat committees throughout the country are activated to facilitate the needy. To redress the grievances of the needy, the Ministry has decided to set up a Complaint Cell.

The Zakat systems in Muslim countries like Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam and Egypt are also being studied with an aim to make the Zakat collection and disbursement system more effective. Moreover, conferences and seminars are regularly organized to highlight the significance of Zakat system in Islam.