

Pakistan's exports a big achievement

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Pakistan's exports of US\$19.38 billion in the outgoing financial year 2009-10 against the target of \$18.7 billion set by the government was an enormous and hallmark achievement, despite global recession and depression at the domestic front. The export target was in fact surpassed at a time of severe competition in the international market and at a time when no concessional treatment was being offered to Pakistani products in the markets of the USA and the EU. Federal Minister for Commerce, Makhdoom Amin Fahim congratulated exporters and the whole nation on such a hallmark achievement. He expressed the hope that export target for the current fiscal year 2010-11 would also be achieved with the active support from traders and exporters.

Pakistan's exports registered highest ever mark mainly due to surge in the export of rice, textile and non-traditional items like fruit, vegetables and jewellery. According to data compiled by Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, exports which have surpassed annual target of \$18.7 billion, can go up to \$19.5 billion when the final accounts are settled. Rice export jumped by 8 per cent to nearly \$2.3 billion, textile and clothing grew by 7 per cent to cross \$10 billion mark, fruit and vegetables doubled as compared with last fiscal year, and jewellery export crossed \$500 million mark. The export performance is also indicative of product diversification taking place within the country's export goods basket. Horticulture exports have made significant strides and grown by 68 per cent over last year's exports. Electric energy meters, PET bottle-grade resin, and glitter for use in fashion apparel, together now account for \$250 million worth of exports.

Besides product diversification, new markets are emerging, which portends a changed direction for Pakistan's exports. While the traditional markets of the US and EU have remained static or even slowed down, Pakistan's exports to Africa and Asia, as well as Russia, and the Commonwealth of Independent States CIS are showing a robust growth. Asia (including Russia) now has 44 per cent share in Pakistan's total exports compared to 21 per cent for US, 26 per cent for Europe, and 6.5 per cent for Africa. Industrialists and business community should explore non-traditional, innovative, value-added products, as well as non-traditional markets of Asia and Africa, instead of focusing on products in traditional markets. As Asia and Africa are showing high economic growth rates, there would be greater demand for Pakistani goods. Moreover, there are fewer non-tariff barriers faced by Pakistan's exports in Asia and Africa, as well as Russia and the CIS, as compared to exports to developed markets, where such issues as sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures and technical barriers of trade (TBT), make it difficult to make further inroads in those markets at current technology levels. Owing to increase in exports and decline in imports, Pakistan's trade deficit narrowed by 10.54 per cent during outgoing fiscal year 2009-10 as against the previous fiscal. The trade deficit during fiscal 2009-10 was recorded at \$15.327 billion against deficit of \$17.134 during the last year, according to figures released by Federal Bureau of Statistics FBS. Exports during the period were recorded at \$19.382 billion, showing an increase of 9.58 per cent against exports of \$17.688 billion during last fiscal. Imports witnessed negative growth of 0.32 per cent by falling from \$34.822 billion last year to \$34.709 billion during the year.

The performance of Pakistan People's Party-led government during the last two years at a particularly challenging time in the history of Pakistan has been a collective national effort of all democratic forces and political parties that want to steer the nation out of turmoil, and put it on a democratic path of peace, progress and prosperity. The collective effort is beginning to bear fruit. However, much more needs to be done before decades' old wounds of national polity are healed.

Democracy demands patience because it has no quick fixes. No country knows this better than Pakistan, which has achieved it through many sacrifices. And no political force knows this better than the PPP, which has sacrificed its greatest assets to this democratic struggle for freedom and rights for the people.

Despite numerous challenges at domestic, international, economic fronts, and terrorism figuring high, the government is implementing its prudent policies, dexterously worked on various fronts to extricate the nation. On assuming office after February 2008 elections, government had four critical challenges - democratization of the State, de-Talibanisation of society, restoring cohesion of the Federation and macroeconomic stabilization. The complex factors were martyrdom of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto and its impact on politics, authoritarian repression of the judiciary, media and human rights by General Pervez Musharraf, a severely fractured Federation, economic impasse and intensifying terrorism. It also inherited problems of poverty, load shedding, energy crisis and disfigured Constitution when authoritarian rule had yet again pushed Pakistan to the brink.

Democratic Policy Initiatives undertaken and accomplishments made by the People's Government during the last two years include macroeconomic stabilization, fight against terrorism, the 18th Constitution Amendment with consensus of all parties in the parliament, strengthening the Federation through 7th National Finance Commission Award 2009, Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment & Self-Governance Order 2009, legislative business, judicial reforms, democratic media policy, poverty alleviation through Benazir Income Support Programme and workers empowerment through Benazir Stock Options Scheme. People chose to restore democracy because of their firm belief that it can win a lost war, settle all disputes and make decisions with national consensus. Democracy alone can protect the Constitution; consolidate the Federation by empowering all provinces; uphold and promote cultural diversity, interfaith harmony, and fundamental human rights. The world acknowledged how, in the last two years, Pakistan's new democracy delivered all these dividends. The successful military operation against the militants in Swat and Malakand resulted in the restoration of peace, law and order in that northwest region by August 2009. The confidence of the people of Swat and Malakand in this demonstrated capacity and will of People's Government and state institutions to provide them security and care became a critical factor in turning the tide against terrorists. The government hoisted Pakistan flag in valleys which had been lost to extremist terror challenging writ of the State.

Historically, Balochistan was treated by non-representative forces with a 'charity' and 'relief' perspective, by doling out sporadic handouts to its people. But government has shifted the paradigm. Aghaz-e-Haqooq-Balochistan is a good beginning to achieve desired institutional sustainability for an equitable Federation - where right is not relief, but it is enforceable. Under Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment & Self-Governance Order, 2009, the identity of the region was restored by changing its name from Northern Areas to Gilgit-Baltistan. As part of its administrative and legislative decentralization, the offices of Governor, Chief Minister and ministers have been created, and Legislative Assembly empowered to legislate on 61 subjects of public interests.

The government is doubling price of farmers produce so that they can also afford education for their children, protecting women at their homes, outside, and at places of work; empowering them to take control of their family's resources, restoring workers rights, bringing back those who were thrown out of work, ensuring continuation of work for others, giving freedom of expression, while also respecting and patiently tolerating dissent. Gender bias and women's vulnerability in our society safety network has led to creation of the BISP to dispense cash assistance directly and regularly to needy women and their families. Pursuing its policy agenda of promoting economic liberalization that also gives social equity to the underprivileged, it introduced BESOS to make workers stakeholders in their organisation's growth and development. Democracy is delivering all of this and more because it knows that giving due rights is not a favour. The consolidation of the Federation and its progress lies in principled will of a democratic government to give due rights to all who live within its folds.

Democracy works with all and for everyone. The government is open to suggestions for welfare of public to further improve its performance. However, it does not believe in only relying on its laurels, and is making earnest efforts to bring peace and prosperity in the country.