

# Visit of the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Bangladesh



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## Mohammad Nawaz Sharif Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

### A Profile

**M**OHAMMAD Nawaz Sharif at 47 is one of the most experienced and dynamic of the younger generation of Asia's leaders. Few others have covered as much ground as he has since his entry into public life at the age of 32 when he was invited to become the Finance Minister of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. More than his background in industry, it was his natural gift for separating the essential from the inessential that soon earned him his reputation as a quick and forthright decision-maker. He makes difficult and complicated decisions appear simple, and he has learnt not to lose sight of the wood for the trees. A result-oriented leader, he has always stayed clear of wasteful and self-defeating bureaucratic exercises. He has no patience with red tape.

Nawaz Sharif's early education was at Lahore where he went to the famous St. Anthony's School. It was there that he developed what became a lifelong interest in cricket. He, however, preferred studies to cricket and moved to Lahore's Government College, one of the sub-continent's most celebrated educational institutions. Four years later — by which time he had completed his graduation — he went to the Punjab University Law College where he took a degree in law two years later. If he had ambitions of becoming a lawyer, he did not pursue them. Instead, he joined the family business, Itefaq, which had played a pioneering role in the establishment of the iron and steel industry in Pakistan. Then dawned the fateful year of 1981 when this enterprising young man was called upon to join the Punjab Cabinet as Finance Minister. From that point on, politics became his life.

Nawaz Sharif has an inner calmness which has enabled him to weather out and survive the vicissitudes of politics. He is a man of quiet determination who never gives up, once his course is set and his mind is made up. These qualities have stood him in good stead through an eventful political career which has had more than its share of ups and downs. As Punjab's Finance Minister, he quickly attracted notice because of his progressive ideas and innovative approach. As a young leader of industry, he had learnt that success lay in adapting new ideas and reaching out for well-defined goals. His belief in the dynamics of change and his faith in the efficacy of individual enterprise was to help him formulate and implement new and bold economic policies, something that has become his hallmark. He was one of the first leaders in Asia to see



that the day of state monopoly and state capitalism was done and the age of private enterprise was upon us. He was to have many opportunities to test the validity of this idea.

Three years after his induction into public life, he was presented with his most important and challenging assignment, when at the age of 35, he became the Chief Minister of Punjab, the youngest man in history to have attained that position. He was able to more than justify the faith placed in his abilities as an economic planner and administrator. His first tenure as Punjab's chief executive was a popularly acknowledged success which was why in 1988, he was re-elected with a comfortable lead.

In the 1990 national elections, Nawaz Sharif moved on to the national political scene scoring a brilliant victory at the head of the Islamic Democratic Alliance, a grouping of nine political parties which had come together to take on the corrupt and high-handed Pakistan People's Party regime of Benazir Bhutto. His five-year term as Prime Minister, man-

dated by the electorate, was brought to an end only 30 months later through a conspiracy hatched by Benazir Bhutto in League with certain political pressure groups and lobbies. However, in the all too brief period in which he had been allowed to stay in office, Nawaz Sharif changed Pakistan and the thinking of its people forever. His term was marked by the opening up of the national economy and the flowering of private enterprise. Nawaz Sharif has always believed in less, rather than more government, which is what makes him different from every other Pakistani leader of the past. He demonstrated his faith in the entrepreneurial skills of the people by freeing the country's economy of stranglehold bureaucratic regulations. He announced to the world that Pakistan was open for business and he declared that he would make it one of the miracle economies of Asia. Ironically he was not allowed to complete his task.

Through an arbitrary and conspiratorial act, Nawaz Sharif's government was dismissed by the then President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, in April 1993 on a frivolous excuse. Once out of office, the Prime Minister, his family and his political followers were subjected to a witch hunt. His innovative economic projects, which had just begun to bear fruit, were either dismantled or made to atrophy. His family businesses were forced to close down. Over 150 cases were registered against him and his family and every unfair method was employed to break him and his spirit. However, Nawaz Sharif, the dogged fighter that he is, refused to give in. Meanwhile, much to the chagrin and helplessness of the persecuting Benazir Bhutto government, his popularity kept rising.

Nawaz Sharif's day finally came with the 1997 national elections when the Pakistan Muslim League which he had rejuvenated and turned into a mass party with popular support from one end of the country to the other, swept into power, making its leader the most overwhelmingly elected Prime Minister in Pakistan's 50-year history.

Nawaz Sharif's mandate is without precedent. It symbolises the faith which the people of Pakistan have placed in his leadership and the promise of a greater more just and more equitable Pakistan where there will be no overlords and no underdogs. It is befitting that Pakistan has celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its independence with Nawaz Sharif in office as its Prime Minister. It is also befitting that it is he who will lead his country into the 21st century.

There can be no greater honour, and no greater evidence, of a people's faith in a leader.

**T**HE Pakistan Muslim League led by Mohammad Nawaz Sharif won a scintillating victory in the February 1997 general elections with 135 seats in the National Assembly and representation from all four provinces, including the federal capital area of Islamabad.

Sharif was sworn in as the country's 19th Prime Minister on 17 February 1997, the second time the people of Pakistan had reposed their confidence in him.

He identified Pakistan's large foreign debt as the most serious and immediate problem and called upon the nation, including the country's large expatriate community, to lend a hand in helping the government balance its books.

Nawaz Sharif put industrial rejuvenation as another important objective of his government and while providing the investors with new incentives, he made it possible for workers to become shareholders up to five percent of the total holding in their company. He also gave Pakistanis living abroad the right to vote in elections at home.

The first national budget unveiled by the Muslim League government was free of any taxes, a step without precedent in Pakistan's history. It was popularly hailed with commentators agreeing that it was the best possible budget to grapple with the worst economic crisis ever faced by country. The principal beneficiaries of the new measures were the least advantaged sections of society.

Sharif announced far-reaching social reforms aimed at encouraging thrift, discouraging wasteful expenditure on traditional observances, establishment of the merit principle in public service, new laws to deal with heinous and dehumanising crimes against women such as rape, simplicity in official lifestyles and transparency of government operations. He also took steps to make it exceedingly difficult to divert public funds to unauthorised, ill-advised or personalised use.

The Prime Minister also ordered all government expenditure to be reduced to the minimum. He forewent his own salary and vowed that he would use official transport only if the purpose was official. He also drastically cut foreign tours, including his own and reduced the size of his official entourage when he travelled abroad to a "bare bones" level.

Under a new Social Action Programme, the Muslim League government decided to set up primary schools everywhere and asked that mosques should be used for teaching purposes as well. To help the children of working people go to school, Nawaz Sharif ordered the establishment of a large number of higher secondary schools. The Prime Minister vowed to take all necessary steps to protect the rights of all religious minorities and to give them the opportunity to grow and prosper.

A special fund was set up by the Prime Minister for the uplift of youth so that it could play its naturally ordained role in the development and progress of the country. To mark half a century of Pakistan's establishment, he announced a five-year remission in the prison terms of those serving life sentences. Others were also accorded the facility depending on the period of their incarceration.

To curb sectarian and factional violence, an anti-terrorism law was passed in August which enabled the government to set up special courts for speedy justice. The new legislation also contained a provision for the deployment of the country's armed forces if a provincial government apprehended an outbreak of sectarian violence and requested the federal government to come to its aid.

Nawaz Sharif must also take credit — though by temperament, he is not given to seeking any — for bringing an end to what had derisively come to be called "VIP culture". He abolished special facilities accorded to certain select citizens at airports and other public places. He also put an end to all symbols of official ostentation such as flag cars for cabinet ministers. These steps were enthusiastically welcomed by the people who had for long demanded them, though until Nawaz Sharif came along, without success.

On the foreign policy front, Nawaz Sharif moved quickly, declaring normal and friendly relations with neighbouring countries, India being on top of the list, as his first priority. He also called for peaceful settle-

ment of all outstanding disputes, including Kashmir which he called the core issue since it involved the exercise of the right of self-determination by the Kashmiri people. He said the foreign policy of Pakistan would be based on the father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah's famous precept: friendship with all, enmity with none.

In May 1997, the Prime Minister, in Male, Maldives, to attend the 9th summit of the South Asian Alliance for Regional Cooperation (ASARCO), held discussions with I K Gujral, his Indian counterpart. Since normalisation of relations with India was part of the Pakistan Muslim League's election manifesto, he took the first opportunity to get down to this daunting but crucial task. The two sides agreed to form working groups to deal with all outstanding issues, led by Kashmir.

It was agreed that the Foreign Secretaries of the two states would meet and a hotline established between the two Prime Ministers. The first meeting of the two officials took place in June in New Delhi and the second one in Islamabad in September. The two leaders agreed to implement confidence-building measures, talk about the Siachen glacier and other such disputes, cooperate in order to control and eliminate drugs trafficking, step up economic and trade exchanges and to take measures to deal with all contentious mat-

ters in a spirit of compromise and mutual accommodation.

Nawaz Sharif visited Iran in May — he had earlier gone to Turkey to attend a meeting of the D-8 Group containing some countries of South and South-east Asia, Africa and the Middle East — where he signed an agreement marking the limits of territorial waters in the Gulf of Oman. During his visit to Russia in July, the two countries signed mutual cooperation agreements covering culture, science, education and narcotics trafficking. He also went to Turkmenistan to attend a meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).

Another important visit the Prime Minister made was to Malaysia in the course of which, the two countries found common ground in many areas, including Malaysia's need for skilled labour from Pakistan and Pakistan's quest for investment capital. A memorandum of understanding on investment and defence was signed by the two Prime Ministers.

Agriculture being the mainstay of Pakistan's economy, the Prime Minister set into motion a number of steps designed to modernise and improve this crucial sector with the emphasis placed on an increase in output and all necessary assistance to the farmer. Support price of wheat and rice, the staple crops, the latter being one of the prime export commodities, was increased to assist the

farmer, as was that of edible oil seeds. The duty on import of fertiliser ingredients was slashed and the power supply charges for farmers were brought down appreciably. Agricultural credit was made both abundant and easier. Small farmers were given special concessions. Irrigation and drainage were improved and a crash programme launched to desilt water courses. To provide a safety net to landless farm workers, animals such as milch cows and sheep were provided to them through a special scheme. Steps were taken to increase livestock production and measures were initiated to protect animal health. Research in animal husbandry was stepped up and funds made available.

As part of the general economic programme, the general sales tax was cut by nearly one-third, with the retail trade exempted from any levy. Personal income tax was reduced and salaried classes given a tax break. Tax on companies, both public and private, was rationalised and steps taken to bring untaxed wealth under the tax net. Import duty on machinery required by export industries was slashed to 10 per cent and all duty removed from raw materials used by exporters. Major industrial materials were freed from procedural bottlenecks that had hindered their import and availability.

The Prime Minister also set up a committee to recommend how government could be

downsized. The review was also intended to include semi-government and autonomous organisations. An Implementation Commission was ordered to be established to put the reforms in place once the Committee had completed its work.

Nawaz Sharif who is committed to a strong and forward-looking Pakistan as the 21st century looms on the horizon, set up a "Pakistan 2010" programme which envisioned a completely industrialised country by the end of the first decade of the next century.

On the political front, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif moved quickly, part-repealing the 8th constitutional amendment — a legacy of military rule — which had made it possible for the removal of an elected government through executive decree. No single step taken since the birth of Pakistan 50 years ago has done more to consolidate democracy than this one.

Another vital decision taken by the Pakistan Muslim League government was to hold a national census in October 1997.

To fight the menace of the drugs trade, Nawaz Sharif took decisive measures, making it punishable with death or transportation for life. The administrative and legal machinery was geared up to deal with the growth of what had popularly come to be known as "Kalashnikov culture".

There can be no question that in six months, Mohammad Nawaz Sharif has got Pakistan well on its way to the next millennium, just as he had promised.

(Abridged)

*We Warmly Welcome  
The August Visit of  
The Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan  
We Felicitate His Excellency's Participation  
At the Historic  
Round Table Business Conference, Dhaka*



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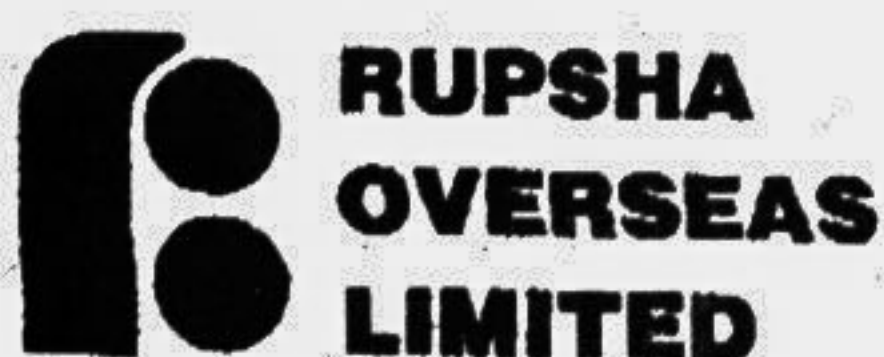
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**MR. NAWAZ SHARIF ON HIS VISIT  
TO ROUND TABLE BUSINESS  
CONFERENCE AMONG PAKISTAN,  
INDIA AND BANGLADESH.**

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