Asif Ali Zardari’s profile

ISLAMABAD, Sep 9 (APP): Following is the profile of President Asif Ali Zardari as officially issued by the President House.

Profile of Asif Ali Zardari:

PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari was born on July 26, 1955 in a prominent Baloch family from Sindh. He is the son of veteran politician Mr. Hakim Ali Zardari.

On his maternal side he is the great-grandson of Khan Bahadur Hassan Ali Effendi, the founder of the first educational institution for Muslims in Sindh. The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was among the prominent students to graduate from the Sindh Madrasa.

Mr Zardari received his primary education at Karachi Grammar School and secondary education at Cadet College Petaro.

He pursued his further education in London where he studied Business.

He was married to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto in 1987 and was widowed on December 27, 2007 when Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a terrorist attack in Rawalpindi.

Butto was PPP Chairperson from 1979 until her assassination and was twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan. They have three children, Bilawal, born in 1988, Bakhtawar, born in 1990 and Aseefa, born in 1993.

Mr Zardari served as a Member of the National Assembly twice (1990-93 and 1993-96), as Federal Minister for the Environment (1993-1996) and as Federal Minister for Investment (1995-96).

He was the principal architect of the Benazir Bhutto government’s efforts to transform Pakistan’s energy power sector by encouraging major investment opportunities in power generation. He was also the initiator of the Iran-Pakistan natural gas pipeline project.

Mr Zardari was elected Senator in 1997 and served in that capacity until the dissolution of the Senate following the military coup of 1999.

He was elected Co-Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party in January 2008 following the assassination of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Mr. Zardari’s political career spans two decades spent working closely with Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. During this period he helped formulate policies that expanded the freedom of the media, revolutionized telecommunications and opened Pakistan for foreign direct investment.

During Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s first term in office CNN and BBC were allowed broadcasting rights in Pakistan and mobile telephone services introduced at Mr Zardari’s initiative. During her second term in office, in addition to the independent power producers (IPPs) being allowed in, Mr Zardari encouraged the introduction of FM radio in the private sector.

Mr Zardari was targeted by anti-democratic forces for vilification and persecution and bore the hardship with fortitude. He spent eleven and a half years in prison in conditions often unacceptable by human rights standards, without any charge ever being proven against him. He won election as MNA and as senator while in prison.

Despite many offers from the government of the time to leave Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) or to go abroad under a negotiated political exit, he remained committed to Party goals and continued his fight for justice and the return of a democratically elected civilian leadership.

Mr. Zardari was asked by the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Pakistan Peoples Party to serve as Chairman of the Party after the assassination of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Although he was elected unopposed, he nominated his son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for that role and instead accepted the job of Co-Chairman of the PPP.

After Ms. Bhutto’s death he has remained in the frontlines of shaping a national consensus at the federal level on the politics of reconciliation initiated by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

Under Mr. Zardari’s leadership of the Party, the PPP’s candidate for Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan unopposed. This was a singular and unprecedented event in Pakistan’s political history.

Mr. Zardari also spearheaded the appointment of Dr. Fehmida Mirza as the first female Speaker of Pakistan’s National Assembly, and continues to support the empowerment of women and minorities in all government policy making.

Today, the PPP government has coalition governments in all of Pakistan’s four provinces.

Most recently the PPP, under Mr. Zardari’s leadership, removed General (retd) Pervez Musharraf, the unconstitutional President of Pakistan, from office in a historic move, through a series of complex negotiations and political diplomacy. Mr. Zardari united Pakistan’s major political parties and this unprecedented act was accomplished without any violence.

Mr. Zardari was elected President of Pakistan with an overwhelming majority in the presidential election held on September 6, 2008.