

BISMILLAH- IR- RAHMAN-IR-RAHIM

Madam Speaker

May I at the outset, strongly condemn, on behalf of the people of Pakistan and on my own behalf the deliberate de-sec-ration of the Holy Quran by a fanatic in Florida.

We condemn this act in the strongest possible words

It is a serious set back, to the efforts at promoting harmony among civilized communities throughout the world.

I call upon this august House to adopt a RESOLUTION urging the UN We call upon the UN to address this issue for the sake of harmony and peace in the world.

Madam Speaker!

Honorable Members of the Parliament!

Assalam-o-Alaikum!

I am thankful to Allah for the honor, to address this august house at the beginning of its fourth year.

It is a great honor for me to share your achievements during the past years and the hopes and aspirations for the future.

Let me begin by paying tributes, to all our martyrs who have laid down their lives, in fighting militancy and extremism.

To our sons and daughters in the armed forces, the law enforcement agencies and the citizens, who have bravely stood up to forces of extremism and violence.

Madam Speaker

I wish to congratulate each and every member of the Parliament, and all the political parties ---those in the government and in the opposition--- for the unanimous passage, of the 18th and 19th Constitutional amendments.

The restoration of the Constitution, given by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had been a dream of our people.

We made the dream a reality.

Many in our history have talked change.

But we have not merely talked; we accomplished change.

Madam Speaker

Returning power from dictators to the people was the core of our promise.

Rarely in history has a leader abdicated power by his own free will.

My head bows in gratitude before Allah, for giving me the strength, to give up powers that had been usurped by dictators.

It is now our great responsibility, to use the powers wisely.

Madam Speaker

From our very first days in office, we inherited multiple problems.

These were problems of;

- An ailing economy,
- Rising militancy, and
- Growing extremism.

But three years is a long enough period to demonstrate progress.

We have brought the economy back on track; in our villages and in our cities, in our provinces, in FATA in Azad Kashmir and in Gilgit Baltistan.

We must create opportunities for our youth.

And give hope to the people.

Madam Speaker

When the present government took charge we were a food deficit country.

Rising inflation, power shortages, worldwide recession and falling remittances compounded the situation.

The fight against militancy and the unprecedented floods last year further worsened it.

According to the Damage and Needs Assessment, the overall damage to our economy, is nearly 10 billion dollars.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the flood victims.

The government has embarked upon a comprehensive plan, to address the economic challenges.

The plan includes:

- Reduction in non-development expenditure to cut expenses,
- Reforms in power sector,
- Restructuring of public sector enterprises,
- Incentivizing remittances and
- Special programs for poverty alleviation.

Making tough decisions is the responsibility of leadership, no doubt.

We are not afraid to lead; and we know the way.

The government reduced the cabinet size.

The subsidy regime has been rationalized.

Tax reforms have been introduced, to mobilize resources.

The tax net is being expanded, through introduction of the Reformed General Sales Tax.

For the first time a social safety net has been created, through the Benazir Income Support Program.

Madam Speaker

The 7th NFC award after a gap of 19 years has been a major achievement.

As a result, over 300 billion rupees of additional revenues have been transferred to the provinces.

The provinces have been given the right, to collect GST on Services.

Collection of direct and indirect taxes has increased, by eight percent and 12.5 percent, respectively.

In 2007 foreign remittances were 6.4 billion dollars.

These have increased and set to cross the 11 billion dollar mark this year--- a record for now.

Foreign Exchange reserves have reached 17.5 billion dollars- --also a record for now.

An allowance equal to 50% of basic pay has been given to every federal government employee.

Medical allowance for employees and pensioners has been increased from 15 to 25 percent.

The Pay and Judicial allowance of the superior Judiciary have also been considerably enhanced, to attract new talent

Madam Speaker

In the memory of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto the cause of women empowerment and poverty reduction is very dear to us.

Over 74 billion rupees have been dis-bursed to the poor beneficiaries, through the BISP.

Mobile Phone Banking has been launched, for the transparent transfer of benefits.

A scheme of soft loans, of up to 300,000 rupees for setting up of small businesses, has been launched.

BISP has provided relief to over 4 million poor families, including IDPs, flood victims and the victims of bomb blasts.

More than 90% of adult population, has been issued ID cards.

It is a leap forward towards documentation.

Fair and free elections lie at the root of genuine transfer of power, to the elected representatives of the people.

Credible, accurate and complete voters' list is the foremost require-ment, for free and fair elections.

I commend the maturity, with which all political parties have agreed to address this issue, and remove once and for all, the stigma of rigged elections, through bogus votes.

A Bill to make ID cards mandatory for voters registration and polling has been introduced.

This along with Electronic Voting Machines will bring transparency in electoral process.

Madam Speaker

Under the leadership of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, polio was almost eliminated.

Unfortunately, it has once again spread across our land.

The Prime Minister has launched, an emergency Anti- Polio plan, to eliminate this deadly disease by the end of 2012.

This is a national effort.

I wish to commend the Prime Minister, the political leadership of all parties, in all provinces for their efforts.

Madam Speaker

Through the 18th Constitutional Amendment, education and health have been devolved, to the provinces.

A historic amendment has been made to the Constitution, to promote education, as never before.

Education has been declared, as a basic and enforce-able right, for children aged 5 to 16 years.

Not a privilege, but a basic right.

Education is now a moral obligation of the state.

Not just for the children of the rich, but for all the sons and daughters of Pakistan.

2011 has been declared as the ‘Year of Education’.

This is not just symbolic, nor mere rhetoric.

Madam Speaker

Pakistan's economy has historically been hit by power shortages.

A major reason for it is, the absence of continuity in policies.

Energy sector has suffered, because policies were thoughtlessly reversed.

I call upon the business community, to give ownership to the economic policies, regardless of which government gives the policy.

Urgent steps have been taken to meet the energy challenge.

More than 1,800 MW of power has been added to the national grid during the last two years.

Alternate energy sources including wind power are being exploited..

To exploit vast Thar reserves, work on a pilot project has started.

Work on 970 MW Neelum Jhelum Hydro project is in progress.

Next month will take place, the ground breaking of the 4500 MW Basha hydel project.

The up-gradation of Tarbela will be completed, by end of this year.

Despite floods, agriculture has registered progress.

From wheat importing, Pakistan has become wheat exporting country.

Six lac tons of wheat has been exported thus far this year.

We expect to achieve target of 15 million bales of cotton during 2010-11

Rural economy has greatly benefited.

Our exports are expected to exceed 24 billion dollars this year- again a record for now.

Madam Speaker

The government has taken steps, to restore dignity and honor to labor.

After restoring over 7,000 sacked employees, it decided to regularize contract employees.

Minimum wages of un-skilled workers has been increased, from 4,600 to Rs. 7,000 per month.

Now the workers have the right to seek legal remedies against dismissal.

A worker can no longer be dismissed from service without cause, as was the practice in the past.

In the name of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, an Employees Stock Option Scheme has been introduced, transferring 12% shares to workers, in state run enterprises.

It will benefit 500,000 families.

Workers will also be given representation, on the Board of Directors.

They will have a say, in the management of their enterprises.

Madam Speaker

Under the privatization policy of the coalition government, the outright sale of national assets and institutions, will not be allowed.

Our policy is based on, Public-Private partnership.

Shares will be offered for sale, through stock exchanges.

The year will go down as exceptional, in the history of the Parliament.

It will be remembered as the year when the democratic Constitution was restored.

It will also be remembered for passing important legislation, for the protection of women, children and the needy.

Twenty Acts of Parliament were passed during the last year.

The Prime Minister attended the sessions of National Assembly for 99 days--- a record for now.

A caucus of women Parliamentarians on Peace and Reconciliation was held.

I wish to congratulate the Prime Minister, you Madam Speaker and every Member of Parliament for this performance.

Madam Speaker

We believe in transparent, and across the board accountability of all.

A draft Bill is already in the Senate.

Reforms in FATA, and amendments to the FCR, have been finalized.

Recently major political parties joined hands, to endorse the reforms, and demand their immediate implementation.

I congratulate the political parties on this consensus.

I assure you that the reforms announced on August 14, 2009 will soon be implemented.

The status of Kala Dakka in Pukhtoonkhwah, has already been changed, from PATA to settled area.

The UN Commission of Inquiry in the assassination of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto has submitted its report.

Subsequent to this, a new challan has been submitted, before the trial court.

The family of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan Peoples Party do not believe in revenge.

While the individuals involved will certainly not escape punishment, we aim at defeating the mindset, that was behind her assassination.

As she herself so famously said, “Democracy is the best revenge.”

We condemn the murders of Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti.

We will avenge the martyrdom of heroes of democracy by defeating the mindset that preaches violence and hatred.

We must be true to our principles, and we must be strong.

Being strong means, denouncing what is wrong.

And violence, hatred, extremism and intolerance are wrong.

We are committed to protecting the rights of the minorities.

The government is earnestly addressing the issue of missing persons.

A Commission has been set up, which has also finalized its report.

I wish to commend the Shaheed Benazir Democracy Institute and all those whose efforts have contributed to it.

Madam Speaker

Pakistan's foreign policy is aimed at,

-Advancing our national security,

-Promoting peace and economic agenda, while

-Safeguarding national dignity, sovereignty and independence.

We seek trade, not aid.

We have revived trans-regional energy projects.

Cargo train service between Pakistan and Turkey --
-called Gul Train--- is being upgraded.

With the United States, we remain committed, to
building a long-term partnership, based on mutual
respect, mutual interest and sovereign equality.

Our strategic cooperation with China continues to
grow from strength to strength.

Relations with Afghanistan have undergone a sea
change.

For the first time Pakistan has engaged with the European Union at the Summit level.

Two Pakistan-EU Summits have been held so far.

Long term cooperation with the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain has helped advance our economic agenda.

Full spectrum dialogue process has been resumed with India.

We seek a just settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions while respecting the aspirations of the people of Kashmir.

Negotiations are underway for a Pakistan-GCC Free Trade Agreement.

Pakistan's relations with Iran too, have improved.

We have upgraded our relations with Japan, to a comprehensive partnership, for peace and development.

We are profoundly saddened over the tragedy unleashed by natural disaster in Japan.

I wish to express the great sympathy of the people of Pakistan, to Japan in their hour of grief.

The tragedy has also brought into focus, environmental issues connected with nuclear energy.

Madam Speaker

We will fight the militants to the finish. We will not back down.

We will ensure a modern and moderate Pakistan, the Pakistan of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

We cannot permit the use of our soil, for terrorist activities, against any other country. We will not.

The fight against militancy may be long and bitter.

But we have no other option except to win.

Win we will. And soon Insha'Allah.

Madam Speaker!

We will uphold, the supremacy of the Constitution and the Parliament.

We will not permit any one, to usurp the powers, that rightly belong to the Parliament.

We believe that all state organs, should work within their parameters, as laid down in the Constitution.

The restoration of the Constitution shows, that if we rise above politicking, we can deliver.

Let us strive to keep our egos aside.

Let political forces stop challenging each other, merely for political point scoring.

It only weakens democracy in the long run.

The task of the leadership is to unite; not divide

We believe in reconciliation, and not confrontation.

I commend the Prime Minister, for pursuing the policy of reconciliation and consensus, given by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

We have achieved consensus on constitutional reforms.

Now we need to build consensus on resolving issues like,

-Energy shortage,

-Circular debt;

-Taxation reforms;

-Restructuring of public sector entities, and

-Documenting the economy.

Madam Speaker

These are the problems which the future generations will inherit, if not addressed through collective wisdom now.

We need to build a national consensus on these issues.

Tough decisions must be taken together.

I invite all political parties for a national dialogue; sooner rather than later.

As Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto wrote in her last book, just days before her assassination:

Quote “It is time for new ideas. It is time for creativity; It is time for bold commitment. There has been enough pain. It is time for reconciliation.”
Unquote

May Allah help us all in our mission.

Pakistan Zindabad.