

BISMILLAH IR RAHMAN-IR- RAHIM

Madam Speaker!

I submit myself before Allah, in all humility, to address the Parliament at the beginning of its Third Year.

It is a great honor for me, to share with this august House, the achievements of the government and the aspiration of our people.

I wish to thank you for the honor shown to me.

This is indeed a Benazir day, a Benazir moment.

It is a moment enshrine in her philosophy, in her idea for Pakistan.

Indeed, it is a milestone, in the struggle of the people.

There were anxious moments when some people feared that we had failed.

But collectively we were able to resolve differences.

Making History by restoring the 1973 Constitution, and more.

The Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment Bill has already been laid in the Parliament.

I pause to congratulate each one of you.

Because, today belongs to every Pakistani.

I congratulate each and every member of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms, the Parliament and indeed the whole nation, on the laying of this Bill.

I also congratulate all the political parties in the government and the opposition for displaying a true national spirit.

They have all risen above partisan politics, in an unprecedented show of national solidarity.

I wish to thank the Law Minister Dr Babar Awan, and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, for extending cooperation to the Parliamentary Committee, led by the honorable Raza Rabbani, adviser to the Prime Minister.

I am truly appreciative of the commitment and hard work put in by Mian Raza Rabbani and all members of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms.

Two years ago, standing here I had urged the Parliament, to revisit the 17th Amendment and do away with Article 58 (2) (b).

And last year, repeating the request, I also urged you Madam Speaker, to form an All Parties Committee for this purpose,

History will record, that it was achieved, when the first woman Speaker in the Muslim World, presided over this august House.

Congratulations Madam Speaker.

We have reasons to be proud.

It is the first major Constitutional reform in more than three decades.

Previously there were piecemeal constitutional amendments,

But most of these were brought about to legitimize unelected leaders.

And NOT for the cause of the people.

This indeed is a great achievement of the democratic process.

That has begun to take root.

The amendments will make the Constitution, truly democratic and federal in character, and restore provincial rights and Parliamentary sovereignty.

I need not repeat the salient features of the Constitution.

The Seventeenth Amendment has been repealed subject to amendments and the

provinces given autonomy as never before.

We have, therefore, honored our pledge to restore the supremacy of the Parliament.

Finally, the people of Pukhtoonkhwah will get their identity as their province is renamed as Khyber Pukhtoonkhwah.

Madam Speaker

We are witnessing the power of a democratic government in action.

A democracy, that some people think is fragile.

Fragile it may seem, but IRRESPONSIBLE it is not.

Indeed we could have achieved much more, only if the democratic process had not been repeatedly buried.

And, the Constitution not dismissed with contempt as "a mere 15 page document"

We all know, that the history of our Constitution is a history of subversion.

The repeated suspension of the Constitution by undemocratic forces gravely undermined the Federation.

It led to the tragic neglect of the provinces and disempowered the people.

Sad is the history of our Constitution being abrogated,

But sadder still, that the pillars of the state validated the subversion of the Constitution.

The nation can take pride that it has closed that sorry chapter.

Madam Speaker!

The first Constitution was given to the people in 1973 by the political leaders of the time, led by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Pakistan Peoples Party.

It was based on Parliamentary Democracy, Federalism and Islamic principles.

It had the support and backing of all provinces and major political parties.

In a short span of five years, the people of Pakistan made great progress in Freedom, Democracy and Constitutionalism.

- The nation was filled with energy, a sense of purpose and shared destiny.

- The country was buzzing with ideas and enterprise.

- People were given their universal right to a passport, and the economy grew, as money poured in from expatriates.

- The people got jobs and had opportunities in all sectors.

- Fundamental rights were introduced for the first time, and people felt protected.

- The emancipation of women began as they entered the Police Force, Foreign Service and Subordinate Judiciary.

- Azad Jammu and Kashmir got autonomy with its own President, Prime Minister and Judiciary.

- Balochistan got Provincial status, with Provincial Assembly and a High Court.

- The emancipation of the people in the tribal areas and Northern areas began.

- The Simla Accord of 1972 bought the longest peace between India and Pakistan, and brought back the Pakistani prisoners of war, with safety and honor.

- The first PPP government led the historic OIC summit and gave Pakistan its nuclear program.

But, just as people had begun to feel a sense of relevance, on the fateful day of fifth of July 1977, the Constitution was subverted.

The hopes and dreams of a people were shattered,

A process of national decay set in.

Without learning from history, the Constitution was further distorted by yet another intervention in 1999.

Madam Speaker!

The Pakistan Peoples Party and its allies had promised the nation, that distortions to the 1973 Constitution would be removed.

That the powers of the Parliament would be restored.

I am happy that Allah gave us the opportunity to rise to the expectations of the people.

It shows that given political will, Parliament can deliver.

That if we keep aside our prejudices and egos, we can move mountains.

Strengthening Parliament has been the cornerstone of our political philosophy.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto refused to weaken democracy by rejecting offers made to her to boycott Parliament, when her Party had only 17 members in the National Assembly.

In line with her philosophy in November last year, I gave up the National Command Authority, and placed it under the Parliament through the Prime Minister,

Although I was neither asked nor required to do so.

We are all answerable to history.

I have said before that I have walked from the gallows to the Presidency.

Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had declared that he would prefer to die at the hands of dictator rather than at the hands of history.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto will remain alive in history for standing up to the militants, despite threats and warnings, not only from ordinary people but also from heads of governments.

As the custodian of their legacy I have my eyes on history.

By standing in their shadows today and empowering the Parliament, I hope to walk into the annals of history, Inshallah.

Madam Speaker!

Let us pledge that we will uphold the supremacy of the Constitution.

This requires that each pillar of the state work in its constitutional limits, and does not trample on the domain of others.

For stability and development, each organ of the state must work within the parameters of the Constitution.

We believe in reconciliation, and not confrontation.

I recall that after the martyrdom of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto some had advised confrontation.

We were advised to boycott elections.

And confront dictatorship in the streets.

But we said that democracy was the best revenge.

Today I hope they will admit that our stand has been vindicated to some extent.

In the words of our great leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

I Quote, "We did not come this far, we did not sacrifice this much, to fail. Together we will find a tomorrow better than any of the yesterdays we have ever known"(Unquote)

I want to take this opportunity to say, that the Constitutional Reforms Package is not a favor to anyone.

It is a national duty, our duty to the people of Pakistan.

Let there be no doubt about it.

Madam Speaker!

May I remind you, that from the first day our government inherited:

- An ailing economy compounded by the neglect of power sector, circular debt and global recession,
- Rising militancy and extremism; and
- A crisis of confidence.

Indeed, time and history has placed a great responsibility, on our shoulders.
We cannot abandon our duty. We have to give solutions and move on.
I realize the economic burden on our nation.
We are aware that prices have risen, and incomes are squeezed.
Notwithstanding the boom in rural economy I realize the economic hardships faced by men, women and children.
But I am confident that we will overcome the challenges left to us by the previous regimes.
To stabilize the economy, the government had to take some very difficult decisions, even at the cost of its popularity, which no political government likes to do.
As a result of those difficult decisions we hope to put the economy on road to recovery.
The foreign exchange reserves have increased and the Karachi Stock Exchange has made impressive gains, without any artificial inducements.
Remittances have increased by nearly 25% a year, due to new incentives.
For the first time, remittances in one month, exceeded 800 million dollars, last September.
A new policy of public-private partnership has been adopted.
International credit rating agencies have upgraded Pakistan.
The government has achieved, international financial respectability, despite all the obstacles.
The crisis of confidence has been one of our most serious political challenges.
That is why we apologized to the people of Balochistan, for the excesses done to them in the past.
But we have done much more than tendering apology.
The government has taken a number of significant measures.
After long years, the NFC Award was finalized with consensus.
I congratulate the government for once again making history.
I had the honor of addressing the Parliament twice in one year.
In my second address to Parliament, I had urged the setting up of a Committee on Balochistan.
The Agahaz i Huqooq Balochistan has been announced.
The government has set up a Commission on Missing Persons.
Indeed once again, Madam Speaker, the honor is also shared with you.
Political reforms have been launched, in Gilgit Baltistan.
A woman has been appointed Governor Gilgit-Baltistan in the name of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.
The Council of Common Interests has been reconstituted.
A lot more needs to be done
It can be done. It will be done.
MAANA KEH NA ZAMEEN KO GULZAR KAR SAKAI
KUCH KHAAR KAM TO KAR GAI GUZRAI JIDHER SAI HUM

Madam Speaker!

Poverty has chained the creative potential of our people.

The government introduced The Benazir Income Support Program, to break the cycle of poverty.

Digital Smart Cards have been introduced for transparency.

The Smart Cards will entitle the poor families to accident and health insurance, and many other social benefits.

Interest free loan of Rs 300,000 named Waseela-e-Haq, is given to the female head of the family.

This has been done to empower our mothers and sisters.

These are ground breaking steps towards a welfare state.

I am aware that a crippling power shortage has slowed economic and industrial growth.

We inherited a shortfall of thousands of MW, but will not offer any excuses.

We realize the suffering that load shedding causes to our people.

We are painfully aware of the darkness it spreads, how children study by candlelight, and how the wheels of industry often stop.

We will not dwell on the past, as to how the independent power projects launched by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, were made controversial.

The government is addressing the problem with the help of the private sector, although some have tried to make the Rental Projects controversial.

Construction of the Neelum Power Project in Azad Kashmir has started.

The Basha Dam has been launched.

It will generate 4500 MW of power, and store over 6.5 million acre feet of water.

The Thar Coal Project has been revived.

The government is mindful of the water issue.

For the first time, a Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Water has been appointed.

We have raised the issue with India.

It was the first thing I raised with Indian leadership in my first contact and I have raised it on every occasion we have met.

We will continue to raise it at every international forum, within the terms of the Indus Waters Treaty.

The government is also addressing water issues between the provinces.

The issues will be resolved through available constitutional and legal mechanisms.

Thirty two small and medium dams will be built in the country.

Work on three of the dams has already started.

For the first time, state land in their command areas will be irrigated and distributed free, among the women of that area.

For the first time in over four decades, agriculture is being revolutionized, through hybrid seed, improved technology and high intensity cultivation.

Madam Speaker!

Women and minorities are the most vulnerable groups.

The government enacted legislation against the harassment of women at the workplace.

We will pursue the pledges made by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto at the Beijing Conference, and in the document on CEDAW.

Women have been made beneficiaries, of the Benazir Income Support Program.

The job quota for women has been increased.

Madam Speaker!

The second parliamentary year witnessed an exceptionally dynamic Parliament.

It passed a record number of bills.

The Prime Minister personally attended the Parliament session 96 times. It is a record.

Congratulations Mr. Prime Minister.

Laws have been passed, to protect the weak and the vulnerable, and undo the wrongs done by dictators.

The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace, is one such landmark piece of legislation.

It was our obligation to the women of Pakistan, in the name of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

I wish to compliment the Parliament on its performance.

The Government believes in transparent accountability of all.

That is across the board, and NOT selective.

Let everyone be judged by the same yardstick.

Let there be no different laws for different people.

I am happy to state that after consultations with the stake holders, reforms in FATA and amendments to the FCR have been finalized.

These reforms will soon be implemented.

The UN Commission of Inquiry in the assassination of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, will be submitting its report very soon.

We are also mindful of our obligation to carry out a national investigation.

Madam Speaker!

I can assure you that, health and education and population planning will receive far greater attention and resources than ever before.

We need to work collectively to combat hunger and disease.

For Labour also, the PPP manifesto has guided our action.

After restoring the sacked employees, the government also regularized contract employees.

Now a worker can no longer be dismissed from service for no reason, as was the practice in the past.

The workers have been given the right to seek legal remedies against dismissal.

Trade union activities have been restored

The Benazir Employees Stock Option Scheme has been introduced.

It offers 12% stock shares to workers in state run enterprises.

It benefits 5 hundred thousand families.

For the first time, workers have been made part of the national productive process, through ownership.

Madam Speaker!

Militancy and extremism have been the greatest threat to our national security in recent times.

I assure you we will fight militancy to the finish.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto said, and I quote,

“We are prepared to risk our lives. But we are not prepared to surrender this great nation to militants”. (UNQUOTE)

The nation has risen to her call.

We will make peace with those, willing to give up violence.

But use force against those, who challenge the writ of the state.

The Government will not allow the use of its soil, for terrorist activities against any other country.

We will also not allow anyone to violate our sovereignty.

I assure you that the sovereignty of Pakistan has been protected and solemnly pledge that it will be safeguarded at all costs.

The nation is proud of the sacrifices made by the members of the Armed Forces, Paramilitary forces, Police and specially the citizens in fighting militancy.

Their sacrifices will not go in vain.

I also commend the Ministry of Interior led by Mr. Rahman Malik for their courage in confronting militancy.

Madam Speaker!

Our brothers and sisters working abroad are a source of great strength.

They need to be recognized and honored.

Last year the Prime Minister had announced, to give the right to vote to the Pakistanis abroad.

The modalities of giving the right to vote will soon be finalized.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that, 87% of the population has been issued computerized national identity cards.

Compared with only 44 % of what we inherited.

It is a great leap forward towards documentation.

In this regard I appreciate the performance of NADRA.

We are committed to upholding the freedom of media.

The government plans to work with all stake holders, to create an atmosphere of self regulation without state interference.

We respect the majesty of the law.

The government has enhanced the pay scales, allowances and perks of members of judiciary.

We hope to provide easy access to justice, for every one.

Madam Speaker!

Pakistan seeks a stable regional environment.

We believe in investing in relationships.

Our relationship with China remains the bedrock of our foreign policy.

Measures have been taken to promote peace and stability in brotherly Afghanistan.

We strongly support an Afghan-led reconciliation and reconstruction process.

We have improved relations with all countries in the region.

For durable peace we consider it essential to normalize relations with India.

We want an honorable and peaceful settlement of all outstanding disputes, including the water issue, and the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir, in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

We do not want an arms race in the region.

However, a disproportionate increase in military budget by the largest democracy, does not help the cause of arms reduction.

We believe that dialogue alone can ensure peace and understanding.

We can fight militancy better, through dialogue and cooperation instead of doubting each other.

We will continue to strengthen cooperation within the SAARC framework.

We greatly value our relations with all Muslim countries, and will continue to strive for enhanced ties with them.

Partnerships with the United States and Europe have strengthened over the past year.

For the first time the Pakistan- EU Summit was held which was addressed by the head of state.

This is in sharp contrast to the isolation we inherited.

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom wrote to the heads of the European Union requesting them to address urgently our concerns about market access.

I thank Prime Minister Gordon Brown for this.

The strategic dialogue with the United States is aimed at addressing core issues of Pakistan.

I welcome President Obama's new initiatives toward Pakistan.

Our focus has been, and will remain,

- Trade and NOT Aid,

The international community is increasingly realizing the importance of Pakistan, and our commitment, in fighting militancy and strengthening democracy.

Madam Speaker!

This is not the end of the road.

Our journey has only just begun.

It is with a sense of purpose that I look ahead.

I call upon the Parliament to pass the Eighteenth constitutional amendment Bill without delay.

The people of Pakistan are keenly watching and waiting for this crucial reforms Bill to pass.

This initiative must lead to new beginnings.

As representatives of the people, let us make common cause to address urgent needs of our people.

The benefits of democracy must translate into a tangible dividend that is visible in people's lives.

As we move on, let us also learn from our mistakes.

The year 2010 should be the year of building of national consensus, on holding elections to local bodies.

It should be the year to mobilize the youth, and draw them into the mainstream of national life.

We need to protect them from sliding into militancy.

We will continue efforts for a Marshall Plan for rebuilding Pakistan and the region.

We will invest in modern technology for better governance and mass out reach.

Pakistan faces serious issues of poverty, water shortages and energy deficits as well as tax collection.

We urgently need to create jobs, increase exports and invest in infrastructure.

I am confident that Inshallah by the end of our term the democratic government will deliver on many more promises.

Madam Speaker!

Allow me to recall the words of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which he said in his address to the Nation on April 14, 1972.

He said, and I quote,

“History beckons us, and our people are ready to march forward. Do we, the members of this distinguished Assembly, have the courage and wisdom to lead our people towards their cherished goal, DEMOCRACY?

“As Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said, democracy is in our blood. It is in our marrow. When the fruit of democracy is within our reach, shall we now fail to grasp it?”

Unquote.

Thank You

Pakistan Paindabad