

ADDRESS TO THE JOINT SITTING OF THE PARLIAMENT

March 17, 2012

BISMILLAH-IR-RAHMAN-IR-RAHIM

Madam Speaker

Honorable Members of the Parliament

Assalam-o-Alekum !

I feel honored to address the Joint Sitting of the Parliament.

This is the first time in our history that an elected President is addressing the Joint sitting for the Fifth time.

The world can see that the march of democracy goes on.

That our institutions are working.

Together we are creating history.

While a lot more needs to be done, a strong beginning has been made.

We Pakistanis can be proud of our young democracy.

Madam Speaker

I congratulate the newly elected Senators and members of the National Assembly.

I congratulate the newly elected Chairman and Deputy Chairman Senate.

I particularly congratulate and welcome the Senators elected on the four seats reserved for the first time for our non Muslim brothers.

This is in accordance with the vision of the Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The fulfillment of this vision has been made possible by this Parliament.

Madam Speaker

I am grateful to Allah for His help and guidance.

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I want to thank the leadership of all the political parties for their support to the democratic process.

I appreciate the members of the Parliament for passing historic laws.

I wish to compliment the Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani for his able leadership in the House.

And I wish to recognize the then Chairman Senate, Senator Farooq Naek and you Madam Speaker, for your high standards and impartial conduct.

Madam Speaker

We are starting a new Parliamentary Year.

During this period, we will see free and fair elections.

Let us reflect on the journey we started together in 2008.

Four years back, when the people of Pakistan trusted us with the responsibility to govern the country we inherited:

- A country at war
- A divided nation
- The threat of terrorism and militancy
- A fragile and weakened Federation
- --Unclear roles and mandates of different institutions of the state
- An altered Constitution in violation of the 1973 Constitution.
- Disillusion in the smaller provinces and vulnerable groups
- Energy shortages due to past neglect of the sector, and
- A serious economic and balance of payments crisis

To add to the problems we have also had the Great floods of 2010, the extraordinary rains of 2011 and a sharp increase in the price of imported oil.

Madam Speaker,

We have been dealing with these enormous challenges. We have tried to meet the aspirations of our people. We have tried to transform our country. Our Government was driven by the vision of Shaheed Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto, who said and I quote:

“It is time for new ideas. It is time for bold commitments. And it is time for honesty among people and between people. There has been enough pain. It is time for reconciliation.” (Unquote)

We have pursued the politics of reconciliation and harmony.

We have worked hard to generate consensus.

We have tried to reach out.

We have taken everyone along.

And we have formed coalition governments to deepen democracy.

Madam Speaker,

We all worked together to restore the 1973 Constitution.

The rule of law has been established.

The supremacy of the Parliament has been assured.

As President I surrendered my powers.

And [today](#), the Prime Minister, the Chief Executive, enjoys full authority as required by law.

This was a shining moment for our parliament.

History will remember this achievement.

Just as the nation remembers Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the architects of the 1973 Constitution.

Madam Speaker,

We moved with speed and determination to strengthen the federation by redressing the imbalance between the powers of the center and the provinces.

We abolished the Concurrent List.

We transferred eighteen ministries to the provinces.

We enhanced provincial autonomy.

We have made the Council of Common Interests fully functional.

This great transformation was achieved with complete agreement of all the stakeholders.

This shows complete unity of our nation in adopting legislation to make our country strong and democracy more inclusive.

Madam Speaker,

To accompany the greater transfer of authority we took historic decisions to also provide more finances to the provinces.

After a gap of 13 years, the federal and all provincial governments agreed on a new NFC Award.

In the new Award the share of the provinces has been increased.

Now nearly 70 percent of the resources are being transferred to the provinces.

This means there is more money for education, health, drinking water, municipal services and law and order.

In the last two years alone, over 800 billion rupees have additionally been transferred to the provinces.

If utilized correctly, these resources can help transform the lives of our people.

Madam Speaker,

Our country has been faced with the threat of militancy and extremism.

Our forces and police and civilians have been attacked and martyred.

Our bases, police stations, pipelines, railways, hotels, schools, have been targeted.

Even our mosques, churches and religious shrines have not been spared.

Our country's image has been negatively projected.

Our economy has had to bear extra burdens.

Even the good name of our great religion -- a religion of peace and harmony and love -- has been exploited.

To deal with the mind-set of a small minority, we have mobilized our society and tried to generate a national consensus.

Where necessary we have used force to ensure that the writ of the state is not challenged.

We will continue to show resolve on this issue.

I believe that our efforts have begun to pay off and the situation has improved.

I join the Parliament and the nation in recognizing the sacrifices of our Armed Forces, Civil Armed Forces, Police and all the innocent men and women who have suffered or embraced martyrdom.

I salute the courage and sacrifices of those who have laid down their lives to secure the future of our nation.

I also pray to Allah for them and their families.

Madam Speaker,

We have moved further to make our democracy more transparent and ensure that the elections are fair and free.

The 20th amendment ensures the independence of the Election Commission and the selection of an impartial Care Taker Government through a process of consultation in the parliament.

This extraordinary legislation will guarantee credible elections, increase confidence in democracy and enhance the image of our country in the world.

Madam Speaker,

It was also this government that chose the Leader of the Opposition as Chairman of the Public Account Committee.

The PAC is the nation's foremost body for keeping the government departments in check and ensuring accountability at the highest level.

It was a reflection of our faith in the Parliament.

There is perhaps no parallel to this measure of transparency in parliamentary democracies.

Madam Speaker,

In the last four years great strides have been taken to integrate, mainstream and develop the areas and regions that have been ignored in the past.

Let me share with you some of the important steps taken to uplift our citizens and provide for a more balanced development of the country.

- The Political Parties Act was extended to the Tribal Areas. This has given more political and economic power to our tribal citizens.
- We have also amended the Frontier Crimes Regulation in response to the aspirations of the people of tribal areas to give them a judicial system that meets minimum standards of justice delivery.
- The tribal area of Kala Dhaka has been converted into a settled area.
- In the same spirit, this government adopted a historic measure in 2009 to grant self-rule to our brothers and sisters in Gilgit-Baltistan. This will empower the people, accelerate the development and help realize the potential of hydro-power.
- The Government has taken special measures to develop Balochistan, end its sense of deprivation and bring it at par with other provinces. 11,500 jobs have been financed in the province by the federal government. Rs 120 billion for Gas Development Surcharge will be provided. This year the share of Balochistan in the new NFC has been more than doubled from Rs 43 billion to Rs 93 billion.

Madam Speaker,

Let me now turn to an important area: The economy.

Our Government inherited:

- -A fragile economic situation,
- -A balance of payment crisis and,
- -External shocks due to global recession and a huge fiscal imbalance.

Fiscal deficit was 7.6 percent.

Current account deficit had reached 8.4 percent.

Fiscal space provided by the rescheduling of over 12 billion dollars loans in 2002 had been lost.

Growth had lost momentum.

Reserves began to deplete as the rupee fell.

Inflation peaked at an unprecedented 25 percent.

Madam Speaker,

Over the last four years the elected government took difficult decisions to get out of a threatening situation, maintain economic stability and bring prosperity to our citizens.

In particular we gave relief to our vulnerable segments.

We have shown great discipline to reduce government expenditures.

We have mobilized domestic tax revenues to lessen our dependence on others and to give better services and projects to our people.

We have achieved historic performance in our external sector.

We have maintained stability.

And we are beginning to show stronger growth of the economy.

Madam Speaker,

Our efforts to achieve high growth and employment were hampered by the great floods and the monsoon rains.

The floods cost us over 2 percent of GDP growth, and damage of around 14 billion dollars.

We were also forced to cut other programs to look after our affected citizens.

Madam Speaker,

Let me share with you some important facts:

- In spite of all the difficulties, the economy will grow by 4 percent in 2012.
- Exports crossed a historic benchmark of 25 billion dollars last year
- Remittances were 11.2 billion dollars last year, and will double over the 2008 levels this year
- Our foreign exchange reserves reached their highest level ever at over 18 billion dollars at the end of June.
- In spite of global increase in the price of oil and food our rate of inflation has been coming down. We have worked hard to bring inflation from its peak of 25 percent in 2008 to 11 percent now.

- We have taken steps to raise revenues. Our tax collections have doubled from one thousand billion to about two thousand billion rupees since 2008. This year the tax growth is the highest ever at 26 percent.
- The stock market has begun to improve. The index has crossed 13000, compared to around 7000 in 2009.
- Dependence on food imports has been reduced. We estimate our wheat crop to be 25 million tons and cotton crop will touch 13 million bales despite loss of 2 million bales in floods in Sindh.
- The government has adopted agricultural pricing policies so as to benefit the farmers and bring prosperity to the rural areas. In the last two years approximately Rs 800 billion additional income has been generated for the growers.
- During the last four years the Government spent 2200 billion rupees on development programs. More than 200 projects have been completed. These include: Chashma Nuclear Power 2, Mangla Raising, Mirani Dam, Islamabad Peshawar Motorway and Islamabad Muzaffarabad Expressway.
- New projects of national importance have been started. These include: Bhasha Dam Project, Neelum-Jhelum Hydro power, Tarbela Extension, Chashma Nuclear Power 3 and 4 and rebuilding of KKH and Indus Highway. We will soon start construction of Karachi-Hyderabad Motorway on BOT basis.
- I travelled several countries to promote trade. We have negotiated currency swap arrangements with China, Russia, Turkey and Jordan.

Madam Speaker,

We have tried to manage the economy with one primary focus: to ensure that the benefits reach the common man.

That ordinary Pakistanis are not left out and that everyone attains his or her potential.

Let me share with you some of the steps we have taken especially for the less privileged:

We gave cash transfer of 70 billion rupees to flood victims to rebuild their lives and prevent them from falling into poverty.

To reduce the burden of common man, the Government provided over 1000 billion rupees in the power sector alone.

To help the growers 110 billion rupees subsidy was given for fertilizers.

137 billion rupees subsidy was provided for food items and,

104 billion rupees subsidy provided for petroleum products during the last 4 years.

Our flagship program to fight poverty is the Benazir Income Support Program.

Under this program 6 million families living below the poverty line have been identified.

The program provides cash transfers, job training, insurance and business support.

The government has given 138 billion rupees in four years.

The principal beneficiaries are women head of the household.

The program is recognized for its coverage and transparency.

Additionally, 6 billion rupees were provided through Bait-ul-mal to deserving individuals.

Five billion rupees of Zakat funds have also been provided to the needy.

We took steps for the benefit of the employees. These include:

- -To provide sustainable jobs around 7000 wrongfully sacked employees were reinstated.
- -12000 contract employees were regularized.
- -Six hundred sixty thousand Pakistani workers were sent abroad for overseas jobs.

We introduced the Benazir Employees Stock Option Scheme to give 12 percent share of state-owned enterprises to the employees.

Shares worth many billions of rupees have been given to more than half a million employees and they have been made owners of national assets.

To employ youth, the Government provided internship to 100,000 holders of Masters degrees.

Salaries of all government employees were increased by more than 125 percent in the last four years.

Madam Speaker

I know that load shedding is a major problem especially when the water levels are down.

We are trying to get out of this situation. We are taking steps that the people should know about.

The steps involve dealing with issues of governance in the public sector organisations, better regulation, reducing dependence on expensive imported oil and bringing on line more megawatts.

Madam Speaker

The 1994 Power Policy initiated by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto added 7450 Mega Watts electricity including Ghazi Brotha Hydel Project.

Since 2008, the present government as added another 3300 Mega Watts.

Our long term policy to generate electricity is to move towards the power generation based on indigenous resources.

The Prime Minister has laid the Foundation Stone of Basha Dam project which will produce more electricity than combined production of Tarbela and Mangla Dams.

Other Hydel projects under construction will yield another 1740 Mega Watts.

Chinese Companies have made BOT offer to generate 5000 Mega Watts at Dassu and Munda.

Unfortunately, development of Thar Coal for electricity generation was halted during the previous Governments.

Multinationals and Pakistani joint ventures are now undertaking projects to produce electricity at Thar.

We are expecting construction of 11 Wind Power Projects and 14 Baggasse based projects to begin shortly.

We have ensured that tariff for 8 million power consumers are not enhanced during the last 4 years.

Madam Speaker

The Government is committed to work towards empowering women, their access to capital, building their skills and support the rise of women leaders.

Towards this end, the Parliament made significant inroads in enacting laws for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Harassment, end Anti-Women Practices and crimes of defacing human body.

National Commission on the Status of Women is yet another step forward in this direction.

Women are increasingly occupying key positions.

Madam Speaker,

We share the agonies of the people of Balochistan.

We apologized for the wrongs done to them in the past.

Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan is under implementation to mitigate feelings of being left out.

But we recognize that much more needs to be done to heal the wounds of the past.

We are willing to go extra mile to engage in dialogue with our Baloch brothers.

We are seeking to reach common understanding on the development of Balochistan and bring it at par with other provinces.

Towards this end, we have already created 11,500 jobs financed by the federal government.

The government is disbursing arrears of 120 billion rupees on account of Gas Development Surcharge and doubling its share under the NFC.

The steps taken by the Government provides solid basis for moving towards a settlement of the grievances of the people of Balochistan.

Special attention has been paid to less developed areas in addition to transfer of huge resources.

Federal Government is taking care of all vertical programs in health sector.

It is supplementing efforts to equip law enforcement agencies wherever needed to improve security situation.

Madam Speaker,

I realize that many in Balochistan feel neglected and even deprived.

We have tried to redress the situation.

I apologized personally for the mistakes of the past.

The government has taken steps on both the political and economic fronts.

I have already talked about some of the steps to transfer resources, generate employment and increase economic activity in Balochistan.

Let me also say that the political reconciliation initiated in Balochistan should continue and be stepped up.

Healing wounds of the past is a lengthy process.

But we are determined to respond to the aspirations of our brothers and sisters in Balochistan.

Madam Speaker

Parliamentary oversight and democratic accountability is a new and important facet of foreign policy.

We are committed to maintain our bilateral relations with all on the principles of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality.

We fully support an Afghan owned and Afghan led peace process in Afghanistan.

The government has signed the Pak-Afghan transit trade agreement which will open up our trade with central Asian countries with whom we have historical ties.

Important steps have been taken to open up trade between India and Pakistan.

But we must also address difficult issues including that of Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

Pakistan and China have a unique relationship which is deeply rooted and mutually beneficial.

My eight visits to China are a manifestation of taking this relationship to new heights.

Pakistan-United States relations are multi-dimensional and important.

2011 was a challenging year.

We seek to engage meaningfully with the US on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect.

We are looking forward to your recommendations for re-engaging with the United States.

Our relations with the European Union have expanded and deepened.

We are grateful for the EU initiative on the tariff concession.

Pakistan attaches importance to its relations with the Russian federation.

The Prime Minister and I have undertaken several visits to Russia to inject new dynamism to our relationship.

Pakistan enjoys close and fraternal relations with all brotherly Islamic Countries.

We also seek to deepen our engagement with East Asia, Africa and Latin America.

As active member of the international community we uphold the principles of United Nations.

It is a measure of our standing in international community that Pakistan was elected as member of the United Nations Security Council last year.

Madam Speaker,

The Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani deserves our unqualified appreciation for his political wisdom in handling various challenges with courage and perseverance.

I would also like to recognize and appreciate the contributions made by our coalition partners PML (Q), MQM, ANP, FATA legislators, PML (F), BNP (Awami) and other parties for their strong support.

I also acknowledge the role of the leader of the Opposition and members of the opposition parties for playing their role in the Parliament.

Pakistan Zindabad