

**Address of Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani
To the Participants of
4TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY SAFMA (November 6, 2010)

Mr. Imtiaz Alam, Secretary General, South Asia Free Media Association

Mr. Nusrat Javed, President of SAFMA Pakistan Chapter

Distinguished delegates,

Respected guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalam-o-Alaikum!

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to address the participants of the 4th National Conference organized by South Asia Free Media Association. I congratulate the organizers for holding this Conference. Welcoming the proposal by SAFMA to hold 3rd Indo-Pak Parliamentary Conference in Islamabad in the near future, my government assures you of our cooperation. By proposing the process to initiate dialogue on national issues, I appreciate the stand taken by SAFMA and Citizens for Democracy to oppose any undemocratic and unconstitutional change. We will look forward to the findings of your national conference on what you think should be the national agenda.

I am of the considered opinion that such constructive interactions between political leadership, journalistic community, and civil society organizations are acutely needed for building bridges and exploring commonalities for durable peace in South Asia, a region which has, unfortunately, been condemned to poverty, conflict and backwardness. At a time when I speak to you today, the world has undergone tremendous changes. Resultantly numerous challenges have cropped up warranting an urgent and holistic response. In order to successfully cope with these daunting challenges, we need to equip ourselves with 'out of box' ideas and fresh insights.

Ladies and Gentlemen

These are not the normal times we are living in. As a people of this region, it is our moment of truth. There are two paths open to us. One, either we allow ourselves to be defeated by the forces of change that are fast sweeping through all walks of national and international life or we can take on these formidable challenges in a way that represents a fresh beginning, a new dawn as they say.

You would agree with me that governance has become a very complex phenomenon. This is precisely because of the fast-paced changes and evolutionary processes that have come to characterize the functioning of a modern nation-state. The emergence of new centres of power such as robust private sector, media and civil society organizations has given birth to new imperatives of governance. To cap it all, globalisation has served to make nations interdependent requiring corresponding policy response and effective governance tools for mutual benefit. Globalisation can both be a plus and minus depending upon how we respond to it. Enhanced access to information coupled with common man's desire for economic and social empowerment has rendered the old methods of governance obsolete. Moreover, governance is a shared responsibility and the goal of good governance cannot be achieved as long as all organs of the state at all levels do not duly contribute their share to making it possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We live in a multi-faceted society where its core components have diversified background, languages, local cultures and traditions. The efforts to impose a uniform system without being alive to these realities have failed miserably in the past. It resulted in the isolation of common man thereby rendering the whole system non-functional.

Pakistan being a federal state demands a system of governance which caters to the aspirations of its federating units. Such a system should be aimed at creating harmony and fostering unity within the diverse elements of national power.

Dear participants

Let me mention that all the milestones achieved by the government owe themselves to the visionary policy of reconciliation espoused by our Shaheed leader Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto. The parameters of the proposal of the national agenda given by Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif would be discussed when its details are shared with us. However, it might require taking all the stakeholders on board to develop consensus on the ideas and policies in the larger interest of the people of Pakistan.

You would be glad to know that upon taking over, the present government embarked on a tough agenda of structural reforms within the system to make it compatible with the challenges of time. The most important of these reforms relates to the historic passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the adoption of the 7th consensus-based National Finance Commission Award. The political, administrative and economic empowerment of provinces would go a long way in eliminating the feelings of deprivations and isolation thereby strengthening the federation. Under the 7th NFC Award, Federal government has

cut down its share from 52.5% to 44% of the divisible pool, which gave an increase of 8.5% in the share of the provinces.

By the time the process of political devolution is complete under the 18th Amendment, Pakistan would be ready for a take-off on a path to progress and prosperity.

The government is aware of the fact that without comprehensive economic reforms, neither can economic growth be achieved nor poverty and unemployment can be cut down.

In the interest of country and for benefit of the people, the elected government's reforms include political ownership to war on terror, creation of national consensus against terrorism and militancy, empowerment of parliament, Aagaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment & Self-Governance Act and Benazir Income Support Programme. All of these initiatives of the present government constitute a beginning, which need to be built on through sustained policy commitment and engagement.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have a firm belief that given the diversified nature of our federation, remedy to our national ills lies in democracy. Democracy would stand strengthened if it is considered as a process. Our impatience with democratic dispensations proved very destructive in the past with long-term implications for our state and society. Let us not repeat our mistakes. Let us chart our way forward towards a modern, democratic and welfare Pakistan, which reflects the aspirations of its people. Look what democracy has achieved in two and half years. All may not be well but we have made a good beginning by fixing the structural problems of governance, which eluded solution for decades on end.

I recall a quote of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali wherein he said and I quote, "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.

Distinguished delegates

Our government believes in free and independent media and regards it as fourth pillar of the state. A free media is also important for successful functioning of democracy and ensuring good governance. Media enjoys great freedom during the tenure of my government. In playing its role of a watchdog, media should make sure that it does not undermine democratic system and national institutions.

The primary and basic role of the media is to provide news and information to the people in a fair and objective manner. Its professionalism gets hugely compromised when it resorts to speculations that create fear and panic among the public. It should not try to become a creator of news and act as a judge.

People are the best and ultimate judge who have the requisite credentials and qualities to pass a final verdict and hold any individual, party and government accountable for their actions. The trend of being the kingmaker, which is manifestly present in a section of press, should end.

All of us need to learn and respect each other's defined responsibilities. This is how institutions grow through evolution. We should give democracy chance to develop into a sustainable system capable of addressing people's problems. Speculations and self-styled analyses impact negatively upon economy by creating an impression of political instability. Does the cause of democracy and institution-building gets advanced when a section of press becomes a party and keeps giving deadline about the ouster of government? It is about time we rise above our parochial agendas and think in larger national interest.

Distinguished audience

Pakistan stands for peaceful coexistence and friendly relations with the countries of South Asian region as well as the entire world. My government is for normalizing relations with India. We believe that terrorism and extremism constitute the major challenge for not only Pakistan and India but also all peoples of South Asia. We want the resumption of the composite dialogue process with India who must reciprocate our good intentions. I call upon India to appreciate our efforts in curbing terrorism that poses the biggest internal threat to our national interests, ethos and values. Pakistan and India should resolve their disputes especially on Kashmir through peaceful means and productive dialogue. We should de-link peace process from incidents of terrorism to make composite dialogue a sustainable proposition. Benefitting from our geo-strategic location Pakistan is keen in reviving our traditional trade routes to the benefit of the people of the adjoining regions. We will continue to strengthen SAARC and are ready to take measures on mutually beneficial basis.

The entire South Asian region is blessed with rare gifts of nature. Let us resolve to use our natural resources to overcome the sufferings of our teeming millions. Let us not allow despair to defeat hope.

I thank Secretary General SAFMA, Imtiaz Alam, and SAFMA Pakistan President, Nusrat Javed, and all other journalist friends for inviting me to this interaction and giving me an opportunity to share with you my thoughts.

In the end, I would conclude my speech by recalling the words of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which he said in his address 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 that is DEMOCRACY?"

I wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Pakistan Piandabad!