

Prime Minister's opening statement at luncheon with US Media on 12th April, 2010

I feel truly privileged and honoured today while speaking to such a distinguished gathering of senior journalists, opinion leaders and columnists. I am proud to introduce you to a new Pakistan today; a Pakistan which is different in ways more than one from what you have known for years. Today's Pakistan despite being a front line State against terrorism, is a dynamic and stable polity. It is in the process of finding its direction and reorienting its policy in line with the aspirations of the people of Pakistan. Our masses have always preferred democracy to other non-representative options when they were given a chance.

Upon taking over in March 2008, the democratic government started off with a heavy agenda encompassing internal and external challenges. We were clear in our mind that unless we fixed the institutional flaws and remedied the way our country has been functioning inwardly, we would not be able to realize the dream of a strong Pakistan. The comprehensive change we wanted to bring about required consensus across political divide over and above party lines. I reached out to all political parties and conveyed them my resolve that democracy has to succeed. I told them that the country and its people would be served in the earnest if institutions were made stronger than individuals.

Thus reconciliatory politics pursued by our government as a sacred mission became instrumental in forging consensus on vital issues of state such as unanimous adoption of National Finance Commission award, more provincial autonomy to the federating units, consolidation of economy, introduction of Benazir Income Support Programme, Women Protection Bill, and Reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan etc. The 18th Constitutional Amendment Bill was passed by the National Assembly with a thumping majority to reset the direction of Pakistan. The legislative measures would have long-term impact on future of democratic Pakistan. In attaining the impossible, all political parties, state institutions and other stakeholders have played their appreciable role.

The second issue, which I feel is of interest to you, relates to the eradication of terrorism. Our successful military operations in Swat, South Waziristan and elsewhere have surprised even our friends. The secret behind our performance is that the democratic government gave political ownership to this war to the people and their public representatives in the parliament. With that overwhelming support, our resolve to take on the perpetrators of doom and gloom grew stronger by the day. It is the result of our national determination and sacrifices of our valiant armed forces that terrorists are retreating. Their control and command structures and training camps have been destroyed. Our people have let it be known that they would not allow a handful of extremist bigots and terrorists to represent our peaceful way of life and our inclusive culture.

Our democratic government greatly values Pakistan long term strategic partnership with the US. We have always looked forward to strengthening our bilateral relations in the broad-based framework. We are satisfied with the outcome of recently concluded fourth round of Strategic Dialogue with the US. I however believe that there is still the need and space for improving upon the existing level of our engagement to make it more result oriented. Pakistan rightfully expects the US to adopt non-discrimination in terms of civil nuclear deal with Islamabad. Our country faces the worst ever energy crisis with serious implications for our national economy and consequent unbearable hardships for people who are having to brave 15 hours of power outages in over 45% centigrade temperature. Our energy needs are growing with every passing day and we are already running against time to explore viable options to meet the energy demands for our socio-economic development. The civil nuclear power generation hence is an essential requirement as our national energy security strategy. Besides, we need greater market access to the US for our exports through early passage of long delayed ROZ regulation and preferential arrangements to address the restive unemployment which is directly related to the phenomenon of militancy.

Pakistan has been a fervent supporter of non-proliferation. Its nuclear doctrine hinges on responsibility, restraint and deterrence. We have always supported efforts for creation of nuclear-free world. Islamabad has taken effective steps for nuclear safety, security and non-proliferation through extensive legislative, regulatory and

administrative framework. President Obama recently acknowledged this reality about Pakistan's nuclear assets being safe and secure. We welcome President Obama's initiative of Nuclear Summit to foster understanding about the need to make world a safer place for our future generations. However, we believe that the objectives of nuclear non-proliferation, safety and security would be better served if the policy of non-discrimination is adopted across the globe for peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The meeting with US President was very fruitful and constructive covering nuclear security summit and our strategic partnership issues. The meeting was held in a very cordial atmosphere opening avenues for future relationship.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for giving me a patient hearing. I assure you that Pakistan, as a responsible nuclear state and an emerging democracy, stands with the international community in its effort to make this world a better place to live in. We have already played our role to make this world terrorism-free and are ready to go to any limit to make this possible.