



President Asif Ali Zardari's
First Speech
to the Parliament
Promises, Commitments
and Actions

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Last time, the President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, addressed the joint sitting of Parliament on Saturday, September 20, 2008. Within two weeks after his election as President, it was his first speech in the first parliamentary year of the newly elected Parliament following the general elections in February 2008. It was a significant event in view of the fact that his predecessor, General Pervez Musharraf, had not addressed the previous Parliament in 4 out of 5 parliamentary years, despite that it was a constitutional requirement. After a long time, the nation and the Parliament were able to listen to a constitutionally elected civilian President, so their hopes were high in the face of severe challenges being faced by the country.

In a country where literacy rate is very low and very small numbers of people have command over the English language, he had preferred to speak in English like some of his predecessors. However, on the positive side, his speech had been attentively heard by all members in sharp contrast to the years of 1990s, when the opposition parties would raise slogans and stage walk-outs.

Let's have a look at the promises and commitments of our President and the steps that the government has taken since then to realize them. This comparison should be helpful for various stakeholders at the time when the President is scheduled to deliver his second address to the joint sitting of the Parliament on March 28, 2009.

S #	Promises and Commitments (In the words of President)	Actions
1	"I ... request the government to start a consensus building process on provincial autonomy and the apportionment of resources through a new formula that meets the need of a united	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No significant progress made in terms of provincial autonomy;• No new formula or Finance Commission Award has been announced yet for the distribution of resources between the Centre

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	federation."	and provinces as well as among provinces.
2	"Reforming the tribal areas and bringing them into the mainstream of national life can no longer be delayed. They must be treated at par with the rest of their Pakistani brethren."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reform in the legal or administrative structure has been carried out. Much criticized Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) remains in force without any change despite frequent promises. • In the in camera joint sitting of the Parliament, a resolution was unanimously passed to deal with the problem of terrorism and militancy. A special joint committee of Parliament on national Security was also constituted to review and monitor the implementation of the resolution.
3	"The people of the Northern Areas must also get their basic rights, representative rule and an independent judiciary."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific actions have been taken yet, although there have been reports that the relevant Ministry is working on a package.
4	"We believe in the independence of the judiciary and all matters concerning the judiciary shall be resolved in accordance with the constitution and law."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the deposed judges were re-appointed, which created the impression as if their sacking was lawful. • Deposed Chief Justice and some of his colleagues were restored on March 18, 2009; although only after the lawyers and some political parties started the 'long march. • Illegal actions of General Musharraf taken on November 3, 2007 regarding judiciary are yet to

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		<p>be fully reversed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCO judges continue to be the part of higher judiciary. • Commitments made in "Charter of Democracy" regarding judicial appointments have not yet been fulfilled. • A large number of judges were inducted in higher judiciary without following the provisions of Charter of Democracy (COD).
5	<p>"Another great responsibility is the removal of distortions in the Constitution, made by successive dictators to prolong their rule. As the democratically elected President of Pakistan I call upon the Parliament to form an all parties committee to revisit the Seventeenth Amendment and Article 58(2)b."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Government initiative in the Parliament yet. • No serious efforts to build multi-party consensus outside the Parliament. • A few relevant private member bills introduced e.g. by PML-Q in Senate and MQM in National assembly.
6	<p>To counter terrorism "Government has devised a comprehensive three-pronged strategy.</p> <p>First, to make peace with those who are willing to keep the peace and renounce violence;</p> <p>Second, to invest in the development and social uplift</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apparently 'successful' negotiations held with Taliban in Swat leading to implementation of Nizam-e-Adal in Swat/Malakand. • No significant government initiative for FATA development has been taken or announced; although there have been reports about USAID supported projects. • Military operation is going on in a

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	<p>of the local people and</p> <p>Third, to use force only as a last resort against those who refuse to surrender their arms, take the law into their hands, challenge the writ of the Government and attack security forces."</p>	<p>number of tribal agencies and troubled districts</p>
7	<p>"I will request the Government to hold a national security briefing for an in-camera joint session of Parliament."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special in camera session was held for briefing on security issues (8-22 October 2008). It was significant, as the previous government had failed to take any such initiative even for once.
8	<p>"I ask of the Government that it should be firm in its resolve to not allow the use of its soil for carrying out terrorist activities against any foreign country."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighboring countries continue to blame that Pakistan's territory is being used for terrorist activities. • Limited progress in ensuring effective control of law enforcement agencies in all border areas or tribal agencies..
9	<p>"We will not tolerate the violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity by any power in the name of combating terrorism."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The US forces in Afghanistan continued to launch drone attacks in Pakistan, despite repeated protests by the government. • Some media reports suggest that the US forces may even be planning to launch drone attacks in Baluchistan. • Foreign nations continue to meddle in our internal politics, as it was noticed during the days of long

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		march.
10	To improve the relationship with India, as a new initiative "we will start a cross-LoC trade as a pioneering CBM in Kashmir."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No real and sustained improvement, rather tensions increased and more forces were deployed across the border with India after the Bombay attacks.
11	"We also propose a more liberal visa regime to further expand people-to-people contacts and friendly exchanges, and establish new facilities for the visiting Sikh and Hindu pilgrims."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa policy continues to be strict as both countries put unnecessary restrictions on people to people contacts and travel. • Since Bombay attacks, the travel between the two countries has become even more difficult.
12	"... I would urge the Parliament to form a bipartisan caucus for the purpose of resolving outstanding disputes relating to Kashmir and the Indus Water head works."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No progress reported.
13	<p>"The immediate and most urgent task before the Government is to provide food security to the common man burdened with the rising prices of food items."</p> <p>"To provide immediate relief to the poorest of the poor, the government has introduced welfare schemes across the board, with no political strings attached, like the Benazir Income Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflation rate remains very high. • Punjab government started "Sasta Tandoor" to provide 2 Rupee roti for poor people, but its scope was limited and its continuation is uncertain. • Benazir Income Support Scheme has been started to help the poor families; although its scope is also limited and identification of deserving families is likely to remain a challenge.

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	Scheme for which a budgetary allocation of RS. 34 billion has been made in the current Financial Year."	
14	"The ban on trade unions has been removed and the minimum wage of an unskilled worker has been increased."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban on trade unions lifted. • Minimum wages for laborers increased to RS. 6000/-. • Minimum pension increased to RS. 2000/- per month.
15	Talking about the energy crisis in the country, President stated, "We cannot take Pakistan out of darkness in one month, but we can certainly do it by the end of the next year."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It seems that the government is working on creating new generation capacity. But the problem is that, while about 6 months have passed since his speech, even the existing generation capacity remains under-utilized due to the persistence of the problem of circular debt. • No significant attention being given to reducing very high line losses.
16	"... agriculture needs to be placed at the top of the agenda for ensuring food security on a long term basis, generating jobs and income for a vast majority of people living in the rural areas of the country."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There seems to be a policy shift having greater focus on the agricultural sector but the results are yet to be seen.
17	"For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the government is looking at crop-insurance schemes."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has taken some measures to insure wheat and cotton crop.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bank of Khyber (BoK) has formally launched the Crop Insurance Scheme for agricultural loans after signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with (NIC) National Insurance Corporation. • Under this scheme, insurance coverage will also be available for farm machinery, equipment, tube-wells, tractors and livestock.
18	"I will request the Government to do its utmost to not just provide protection to women, but to empower them at every step of the long road to their just entitlements as full citizens of this state."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% quota reserved for women in all jobs, including central superior services. • No new legislation to address discrimination against women. • Girls' schools in Swat were closed as a result of threats by Taliban. • Development budget for education projects significantly slashed.
19	"For the first time ever, all state allotments, both in income support or land, will be made in the name of the women of this country."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't know whether any special directives have been given in this regard.
20	About minorities he said, "We will further draw them into the mainstream of national life and make full use of their potential."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% quota announced in all government jobs. • 11 August has been declared as minorities' day.
21	"We will soon be bringing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apparently, the Ministry of

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	<p>other fundamental laws, such as the Freedom of Information Bill, and work with stakeholders toward an open atmosphere of self regulation with no interference from the state."</p>	<p>Information has been working on a Bill, but it has not been tabled in the Parliament yet, despite frequent announcements that it would be done soon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PM had also made a commitment in his first speech in the House that a new Freedom of Information Law would be enacted. More than a year has passed since that speech. • A private member bill on Freedom of Information was submitted in National Assembly but withdrawn after the government promised to introduce its own.
22	<p>"I have recommended to the Government that they change the name of the NWFP to Pukhtunkhwa, in response to a long-standing demand of the people of that Province."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No progress in terms of building consensus or changing the name.

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