
President calls for reconciliation to end political polarisation

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ISLAMABAD:

President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday called for turning a new page and making a fresh start, emphasising meaningful dialogue, parliamentary consensus, and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation to overcome polarisation and address the challenges facing the country. "In my considered view, it is time to turn a new page... The challenges we face are not impossible to overcome. They simply require the fundamentals of meaningful dialogue and parliamentary consensus... We can effectively tackle our challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation," the president said while addressing the joint session of the Parliament. Chaired by National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the joint sitting was attended by members of the National Assembly and Senate while in the galleries were

provincial chief ministers and parliamentarians, diplomats, and representatives from political parties. The president's address was in pursuance of Article 56 (3) of the Constitution which marked the beginning of the first parliamentary year, following the general elections. The address encompassed all of the major national and international matters and challenges from the economy, poverty, social welfare, women empowerment and foreign policy to Kashmir and Palestine as well as climate change. Zardari said that having given away his powers to the Parliament, his role was as a unifying symbol of a joint, robust federation, where all people and provinces should be treated as equal before the law. As a new beginning, he said that the country needed to build its strengths by investing in people, focusing on public needs, and harnessing its resources to create pathways to inclusive growth. "We have little time to waste. The country needs us to move on from the polarisation so common now to contemporary politics," he remarked and sought the joint house's role in rebuilding public confidence in the parliamentary process.

Calling for resetting the political atmosphere and reflecting "more light than heat", he emphasised reforms, to promote good governance and turn challenges into opportunities. President Zardari said that by embracing the visions of the great leaders Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, "we can effectively tackle challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political

reconciliation”. The president emphasised that in order to align the country with the requirements of the 21st century, it was imperative to move forward on reforms with good governance for the provision of optimal social entitlements to the citizens. He said that besides working on economic reforms, spurring jobs, reducing inflation, and expanding the tax net, the federal government should also promote positive working relationships and effective coordination, within the constitutional framework, with the provinces. “This is absolutely essential for promoting an inclusive national development agenda and rolling out policies that execute tangible action on the ground.” Zardari stressed the government to intensify its efforts for attracting foreign direct investment, implementing comprehensive ease-of-doing-business reforms, and simplifying the existing regulations to provide an enabling environment to both foreign and domestic investors. At the same time, he also emphasised diversifying exports, enhancing the competitiveness of domestic products in global markets, introducing value addition, and venturing into new international markets. Similarly, the huge untapped potential in the agriculture, marine life, information technology, and textile sectors should also be exploited to earn foreign exchange, he added. Commending the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), he said it was a step forward in the right direction as it was aimed at attracting and facilitating investments in key sectors. About the impacts of climate change, the

president said that Pakistan had been serially devastated by different impacts of climate change, especially in the shape of catastrophic floods in 2022.