

Inaugural Address of Hon'able Sardar Ayaz Sadiq
Speaker of the National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

December 24, 2017

Bismillah Irr Rehman Irr Raheem

Excellency Mr. Mamnoon Hussain,

President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and our chief guest for the inaugural session of this 1st Speakers Conference of Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey!

Honourable Mian Raza Rabbani,

Chairman of the Senate of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan!

Honourable Mr. Abdul Rauf Ibraheemi,

Speaker of the Wolisi Jirga of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan!

Honourable Dr. Ali Larejani,

Speaker of the Shoora-e-Islami of the Islamic Republic of Iran!

Honourable Mr. Volodin Vyacheslav Viktorovich,

Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation!

Honourable Mr. Ismail Kehrman,

Speaker of the Grand Turkish Assembly!

Honourable Mr. Zhang Ping,

Vice Chairman of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China!

Distinguished delegates of the 1st Speakers Conference, parliamentarians, Excellencies, friends from media, guests, ladies and gentlemen!

Assalam-o-Alikum and a very good morning to all of you.

On behalf of the entire Parliament and the people of Pakistan, it is my distinct honour and privilege to welcome you all at the inaugural session of our Conference.

----- It is a historic occasion that the parliamentary heads of our six nations gather for the first time in Islamabad to reaffirm their commitment to shared peace and prosperity and to forge new grounds of mutual cooperation.

---- It is a defining moment when we, the chosen representatives, take a giant step to meet the aspirations of our people to live side by side in respect, trust and friendship.

----And it is a new turning in the dictums of multilateralism when parliamentary diplomacy leads the Executive towards a new regional alliance for collectively addressing the common challenges.

I, therefore, congratulate my brothers from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia and Turkey for seizing the opportunity and accepting my invitation to this Conference.

Khush-Amdeed and Welcome to Pakistan!

Excellencies! Ladies and Gentlemen!

Mother nature has tied our six nations into a beautiful string of geographical connectivity and our history has weaved a fine tapestry of shared ancestry, similar cultures and time-tested bonds of commerce and trade.

For centuries, our forefathers have travelled each-others' lands through the historic Silk Route, exchanging goods, creeds and ideas.

This age-old linkage has not only given a natural convergence and complimenting factor to our respective economies but it has also gelled our people. We are natural allies of one another.

The chosen representatives of the six countries, assembled in this Hall, represent a quarter of the total humanity on this planet and 30% of its total workforce.

--- Three countries among us, namely China, Russian Federation and Iran, rank among the top 6 nations with the largest deposits of natural resources in the world.

--- China and Pakistan alone provide half of the world's cotton.

--- The untapped resources of Afghanistan could make it the richest mining region on earth while its mastery in infrastructural construction industry has brought Turkey to the top rankings in the world.

There is, therefore, all the more reason for us to hold each-others' hands in support and companionship.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

There is little gainsaying the fact that the post cold-war world has proved to be more dangerous and more insecure than the bi-polar era.

On one side, the rise of unipolarism has given way to unilateralism and global hegemony.

While on the other, the ideals of respect for international borders and nations' sovereignty are in danger with the introduction of the phenomenon of non-state actors.

The seemingly unending spate of terrorist attacks during the last ten years has rocked every corner of the world, claiming over two hundred thousand lives.

Almost half of these unfortunate victims were from our Region.

In fact, most of our respective countries have faced the maximum brunt either through the Al-Qaida, the Taliban, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement and now the eminent threat of the DAAISH.

Innocent men, women and children across continents have been displaced and forced to leave their lands. Of the five top countries in the world, hosting largest number of refugees, three are represented here; namely Turkey, Pakistan and Iran.

The colossal damage to global economy can be gauged from the fact that since 9/11, Pakistan, alone, has suffered a loss of over 119 billion US Dollars to its economy because of such cowardly attacks.

The problem has further been aggravated by the corresponding rise in the illicit drug trade, which has largely remained unchecked and throbbled as the major source of terror financing.

Why has the global collation against terrorism consistently failed to control and destroy the booming poppy cultivation, the increased production facilities and the expanding drug trade is a question that many fail to answer.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Although, religious fanaticism has been often cited as the main cause of global terrorism, let us not forget that that rise of the Populist Right and the sanctioning of oppression have also added fuel to the mayhem.

From the burning fields of the Middle East to the denial of fundamental right of self-determination in Kashmir, the world has failed to address the root-causes of extremism.

The recent controversy, created around the status of the Holy city of Jerusalem is not only a move to violate the International Law and the related UN resolutions but also a deliberate attempt to undermine the peace efforts. It is a move to divide the people of the world further and fan religious animosity.

The 18th December's fateful vote in the Security Council, where 14 countries could not convince one country to show respect to the plight of the Palestinian people further reminds us that the world needs a more just and equitable order, based on respect for principles and ethics.

These are the very challenges, which pose a direct threat to our respective nations; in fact the very existence of our countries. Our mosques, temples and churches, our schools and places of work and our homes are under attack.

Our very future is on stake.

As people's voices, we cannot, therefore, remain silent.

In our respective capacities as parliamentarians, we are trained to iron out differences and create accords out of discords.

This is also the beauty of parliamentary diplomacy through which the real representatives of the people can negotiate peaceful settlements of all outstanding disputes.

This should be the spirit of this Conference as well.

Any difference of opinion among our six sides must be listened, discussed and a solution be achieved.

As neighbours, we have to live with each other. And we must live in peace, trust and mutual respect.

We must realize that our differences must not hinder our progress.

We must understand that despite having enormous capacity, we have been failing to realize it.

The overall mutual trade volume of our respective six countries was just 366 Billion US Dollars for the year 2016, which is merely 2% percent of the entire global trade volume.

Despite sharing common borders, the intra-regional connectivity among our countries has remained at the lowest. We do not have reliable railway links while our respective airlines also do not fly frequently to each other. As a result, the tourism among our six countries does not paint an exciting picture.

Although we cherish cultural similarity, the people-to-people connectivity is also hindered because of the language barriers. There has been a little effort on respective state levels to promote regional language learning through our respective academic institutions.

In short, our six nations present a classic picture of lost opportunities and ignored potential.

We must turn it around. I am fully aware that the dark clouds of terrorism in the region hinder our path. But let us not forget that there are silver linings as well. By sharing our experiences on platforms like this Conference, we can collectively offer most viable solutions to contemporary problems.

During the last three years, I have been persistently following the course of events and I have witnessed that on all major global issues, the policies of our respective nations have largely converged on the same tangent.

--- All of us condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

--- We have repeatedly called for negotiated settlements of all disputes, which plague humanity.

--- We advocate home grown solutions to the regional problems.

This has convinced me that an alliance for progress is possible among our six nations. I am equally glad to report that in my numerous meetings, spread over three years, with my worth counterparts, I found a similarity of views. It was this encouragement that led me to propose the idea of this Conference, which met an overwhelming response last July when we all had met in Seoul, Korea on the side lines of 2nd Eurasian Conference.

I now propose that this forum should be given permanent footings and our Conference should become an annual feature. The National Assembly of Pakistan will be pleased to act as its Secretariat till a permanent secretariat and rules of the forum are jointly agreed.

I also propose that the concerned Committees on Security, Commerce and Trade in our respective parliaments should meet periodically to ensure a regular follow-up of our deliberations and continue to provide parliamentary wisdom to the Executives in our respective countries.

Our forum must patronize the academia and the think tanks of our respective countries to jointly focus on our issues and bring our people closer. On the part of my parliament, the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services will be readily available for such interaction.

I am pleased to report that Friendship Groups with all sister parliaments have been established in the National Assembly and the Senate of Pakistan. Such forums, if created in all regional parliaments, may be utilized for regular interaction, exchange of ideas and follow-ups.

In short, if each one of us takes a few steps in this direction, I have every reason to believe that we will be able to reach our shared destiny.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I have always believed in the power of dream.

Today, I am lucky that the dream that I cherished for three years has finally become a reality.

However, this is only a first step of the preverbal Chinese thousand miles journey.

Let me caution you in the words of Maxim Gorky, that in this journey, we must not sit in the carriages of past because these will not take us anywhere.

Instead, let us seek inspiration from Iqbal's pragmatism, where he reminds us that:

Jahaan-e-Taaza Kee Hai Afkaar-e-Taza Say Namood

"New world is created on the premise of new thoughts"

Let the thought of Rumi be our spiritual lesson:

"Listen with ears of tolerance! See through the eyes of compassion! Speak with the language of love."

And as I conclude and look around this Hall, Hafiz of Sheeraz keeps coming to my mind, telling me:

"Your heart and my heart are very very old friends."

I thank you all.