

President General Musharraf's Address to the Nation

29 April 2002, Islamabad

My dear countrymen,
Assalam-o- Alikum

Tomorrow is the day of referendum. So I thought today I should talk to you about it. In the past twenty days, I visited about 23 places all over Pakistan. I addressed public rallies and meetings and met over seventy delegations from all walks of life and exchanged views with them on all issues of national importance. I also met representatives of the local governments i.e. Councillors, Nazims, Naib Nazims etc. I was very happy to see their enthusiasm and sentiments. They are the wealth of the nation and they are the ones who would provide strength to democracy in the country. I also met a number of political leaders and their workers and I was pleased to find all of them to be supportive of the reforms introduced by my government. They made this referendum campaign a success by co-operating with the representatives of the local government. I am grateful to them.

I also met numerous women delegations and was encouraged by their support. I am also grateful to them. I met a number of Ulema and Mashaikh and I was encouraged by their support. I want to assure the Ulema and Mashaikh that no amendments will be introduced in the constitution against the spirit of Islam and democracy will be established according to the Islamic values. I also met labour leaders I invited their delegations to Islamabad. I am proud for their co-operation. I had detailed political discussions with all representatives of different places. I appreciate their views. I had frank and open discussion with the business community as well. I respect their views regarding the country's economy. Everywhere I went I met the representatives of transporters and was impressed by their sentiments and their decision to provide free transportation to the public to come to these rallies and also to cast votes in the referendum tomorrow. I am grateful to their sentiments and respect their feelings.

During my visit to various places I met delegations of youth--- girls' guide and boys scouts-- and told them how previous governments had been mortgaging their future by taking foreign and domestic loans worth billions of dollars and wasting them and now the coming generations were forced to repay them. This government would ensure a better future for the young generation. I want to tell the young voters that since the voting age has been reduced to eighteen years, their responsibilities have increased in this regard.

In the October elections, too, the voters' age would remain eighteen years. I hope a new political era would dawn with the introduction of these constitutional amendments. I have been greatly encouraged by their zeal and fervour.

I also met representatives of the minorities. They assured their full support to me. I am grateful to them. I have met a number of representatives of expatriate Pakistanis but could not have comprehensive meetings with them. They are the country's ambassadors abroad. I greatly appreciate their interest, fervour and their participation in national affairs.

The most important of all are the masses; common man, peasants, labourers whom I met everywhere in the rallies. I have repeatedly said during my addresses that people are the real power. They are the source of strength. Despite hot weather hundreds and thousands of people came to attend my rallies. I was encouraged by their love and enthusiasm. I am grateful to all the people, common people of Pakistan, and want to say that I will Inshallah live to serve them and live to work for their welfare.

Now I would like to say a few words about the referendum. The Supreme Court has declared holding of the referendum as legal and in accordance to the spirit of the constitution. I would not go into the details of why the holding of this referendum is necessary. All I will say is that it is not in my personal interest. This is on an issue. Pakistan is at a critical juncture. Today's

decision will have far-reaching impact in the future. Hence the referendum is necessary for Pakistan's future.

My brothers and sisters

I want to assure you that this referendum will be free, fair and transparent. Many foreign observers and institutions have contacted us to monitor the referendum. We welcome everyone who-so-ever wants to come. Let them come and see for themselves how the referendum is being conducted.

There has been a lot of talk on the expenditure being incurred on the referendum. Now let me ask you what the most important issue is facing us today. In my view, today the major issue of the country is continuity of reforms, my role for the country and the establishment of stable democracy in Pakistan. Supreme Court has already given its judgment on the referendum. It is a democratic exercise to seek the opinion of people. The expenditure this exercise will incur is part of a democratic process. But I assure you that this expenditure will be as minimum as possible. The money is not being spent on my person, this is on an issue. People can vote in my favour or vice versa. So this is not for me but on the issue which needs to be decided by the people of Pakistan. In my view, spending money on this democratic process is justified.

I want to tell you that the elections for the National Assembly, Provincial Assemblies and the Senate will be held in October. Secondly, to usher in sustainable democracy, minimum number of essential constitutional amendments will be introduced. But before they are promulgated they will be opened for public debate. The decision will be taken only after taking the opinions of the people. I assure the Ulema and Mashaikh that Pakistan an Islamic Republic and its status will remain the same and democracy will take its roots on the progressive ideas and principles of Islam in Pakistan Inshallah.

My dear countrymen,

Tomorrow is the day of decision. I need your support to move forward. Whether you accept me or you do not accept me I will take your decision final in the referendum. I am confident your decision will be well thought out.

The country is yours, the future is yours and the decision is also yours.

Pakistan Paindabad.