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**FAFEN’s Preliminary Report on the 20th Session of the National Assembly**

**NA Session: Six Bills Passed, 16 Introduced amid Low Attendance**

* **Prime Minister attends one out of nine sittings**
* **15% lawmakers present at the start, 13% at the end of each sitting**

ISLAMABAD, March 30, 2015: The 20th session of the National Assembly was marked by the passage of six government bills as the House witnessed low attendance of lawmakers and excessive use of points of order, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN).

The session, comprising nine sittings, started on March 16 and concluded on March 27. On average, each sitting started 30 minutes behind the schedule and lasted two hours and 32 minutes.

Since the National Assembly Secretariat does not share the attendance of lawmakers with the public, FAFEN conducts a headcount of members at the start and end of each sitting and documents the actual time spent by the legislators on the floor of the House.

Lawmakers’ attendance remained low throughout the session, with an average of 52 (15%) members present at the start and 44 (13%) at the end of each sitting. The Prime Minister attended only one sitting, while the Opposition Leader was present in seven out of nine sittings.

The Speaker, who was present in all the sittings, presided over 76% of the session. The Deputy Speaker was present in seven sittings and chaired 15% of the proceedings. The remaining time was chaired by the members of the Panel of Chairpersons.

Six government bills – namely the Seed (Amendment) Bill 2014, the Credit Bureaus Bill 2015, the Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils (Amendment) Bill 2014, the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Bill 2014, the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (First Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (Second Amendment) Bill 2013 – were passed during the session.

In addition, 16 bills (including 11 private members’ bills) were introduced and sent to the relevant standing committees while another nine (including three private bills) were not taken up by the House.

The Seed (Amendment) Bill 2014 seeks to regulate the private seed industry by establishing terms and conditions for production on the basis of certification from relevant authorities. It also imposes penalties for not following the prescribed procedure. Similarly, the Credit Bureaus Bill 2015 regulates private credit bureaus, while the Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils (Amendment) Bill 2014 proposes amendments to the Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Act 1973 (XXXV of 1973) in order to regulate disciplinary proceedings besides prescribing a period for complaints’ disposal.

The Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Bill 2014 defines the composition of the local government for the federal capital, prescribes its functions and establishes a mechanism for revenue generation. The bill specifies a minimum representation of 33% for women, 5% each for peasants/workers, non-Muslims and youth and 2% for technocrats in the metropolitan corporation. Apart from that, it suggests holding the local body elections on a non-party basis.

The Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (First Amendment) Bill 2013 seeks to define an age limit for fringe benefits – such as marriage grants, funeral expense coverage and education scholarships offered to federal employees. On the other hand, the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (Second Amendment) Bill 2013 proposes changes in the composition of the Federal Employees Benevolent and Group Insurance Fund’s Board of Trustees.

The House adopted one out of nine resolutions that sought to establish a women varsity in Swat. Another resolution calling for action against electricity theft was also debated during the session.

Ten out of 13 calling attention notices addressed to the various ministries/departments were taken up during the session. In addition, two standing committee reports on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2014, one regarding the Credit Bureaus Bill 2014 and one each regarding the state of economy and audit of Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan were presented.

The House took up only one out of six motions under Rule 259 to debate the issues being faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the wake of an ongoing operation in North Waziristan. On the other hand, motions dealing with religious freedom, performance of Pakistan Steel Mills and the Federal Board of Revenue, the recent petrol crisis and difficulties being faced by people at the Excise and Taxation Office in Islamabad were left unaddressed.

The House took up 67 out of 258 (26%) starred questions appearing on the agenda, while the lawmakers raised 79 supplementary questions during the session. In addition, the members raised a total of 102 points of orders that consumed 33% of the session.

Three amendments to the National Assembly’s Rules of Procedure were taken up and referred to the relevant standing committee. One of the amendments proposes an addition of a new definition to deal with all sorts of assembly business that takes place in the House (except bills and adjournment motions), while another seeks to correct the spelling of the word “holy” in the Rules of Procedure. The third amendment proposes to replace the term “Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs” with “Parliamentary Affairs” in the entire document.

The session witnessed two walkouts and a protest that consumed 8% of the session. The entire opposition except MQM and PkMAP walked out of the House during the second sitting against the government’s failure to convene a meeting of the Council of Common Interest during the past nine months.

Similarly, MQM members held a 15-minute protest against the Chair for not allowing them to speak on points of order during the fifth sitting. They staged another walkout during the eighth sitting to condemn the PTI chief’s “derogatory” remarks against their party leader. Similarly, PPPP members also walked out of the House during the eighth sitting against the baton-charge on farmers protesting against the government’s policies in Lahore.

*This publication has been prepared with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAFEN and in no way reflect the views of the European Union. This session report is based on direct observation of the National Assembly proceedings conducted by Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) – a member organization of FAFEN. Errors and omissions are excepted.*