

**FAFEN’s Report on the 12th Session of the Punjab Assembly**

**Punjab Assembly Passes 16 Bills, Adopts 10 Resolutions**

* **Chief Minister, Opposition Leader absent during entire session**
* **Only 6% members present at the start, 15% at the end of each sitting**

ISLAMABAD, March 13, 2015: The Punjab Assembly passed 16 bills and adopted 10 resolutions as low attendance of lawmakers prevailed during the 12th session, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its session report based on direct observation of the assembly proceedings.

The session – comprising 16 sittings – started on February 10 and ended on March 9, 2015. On average, each sitting started 72 minutes behind the schedule with 24 members (6%) present at the outset and 56 (15%) at the time of adjournment. The quorum was pointed out 17 times during the session, resulting in adjournment of five sittings (fourth, sixth, seventh, 13th and 16th) and suspension of proceedings for an hour during the fifth sitting.

The Deputy Speaker presided over 87% of the session in the absence of the Speaker, who is currently acting as the Governor of Punjab. Nearly 7% of session was chaired by a member of the Panel of Chairpersons, while the remaining 6% of the time was consumed in breaks.

The Chief Minister, the Opposition Leader and the parliamentary leaders of all political parties (except JI and PPPP) were absent during the entire session. The JI leader attended 12 out of 16 sittings, while the PPPP leader was present in 10 sittings.

The House passed 16 bills – all of which were sponsored by the government. These included the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Parks and Horticulture Authority (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Strategic Coordination (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board Bill 2015, the NUR International University Lahore Bill 2015, the Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Bill 2015, the Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Partition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Family Courts (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Security of Vulnerable Establishments Bill 2015, the Punjab Arms (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Criminal Prosecution Service (Constitution, Functions and Powers)(Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Sound Systems (Regulation) Bill 2015 and the Punjab Prohibition of Expressing Matters on Walls (Amendment) Bill 2015. A private bill related to child marriages was also introduced during the session, in addition to the Punjab Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation)(Amendment) Bill 2015 introduced by the government. Meanwhile, the House did not take up the University of Jhang Bill 2015.

As many as 18 resolutions were tabled during the session, of which 10 were adopted by the House. The resolutions called for banning the use of pesticides on vegetable crops, taxing private education institutions according to their annual audits, action against education institutes increasing tuition fee in the garb of security measures, mandatory blood test for pregnant women, appointment of female labour inspectors in industrial zones, imposition of fines for road accidents and restricting import of duty-free agricultural products from India. In addition, they condemned the publication of blasphemous caricatures by a French magazine, expressed grief over the demise of Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and urged bureaucrats and parliamentarians to educate their children in public institutions.

The House took up eleven calling attention notices (CANs), all of which were related to law and order. Ten CANs were moved by male lawmakers, while one was sponsored by a female member of PML. All of the CANs were disposed of by the House.

As many as 150 out of 521 starred questions were taken up during the session, while the members raised 327 supplementary questions on the floor of the House. Sixteen members tabled a total of 49 adjournment motions (AMs), of which 38 were disposed of by the House. Nine AMs were not taken up; one was referred to Standing Committee on Education, while another was ruled out for being identical to another motion. Thirty-one AMs were related to governance, followed by education (nine), health (seven) and water issues (two).

The lawmakers also raised 134 points of order that consumed 74 minutes (3%) of the session. In addition, 11 privilege motions were moved by the lawmakers, of which nine were referred to the relevant standing committee while the rest remained pending.

The House discussed the grievances of sugarcane growers and issues pertaining to the agriculture sector during the 11th sitting. Twenty-five PML-N lawmakers participated in the debates for 190 minutes (8% of the session time).

As many as 28 reports were presented during the session. Twelve reports were related to legislative bills, while seven audit reports came from the Public Account Committees. In addition, two special committee reports, a standing committee report on a starred question, another report on a privilege motion, the annual reports of Faisalabad, Multan, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi development authorities and the annual report of the Parks and Horticultural Authority Lahore were also presented during the session. On the other hand, a special audit report of livestock experimental session in Punjab was not presented. Furthermore, the House passed seven motions to extend the presentation period of outstanding reports.

The session witnessed five walkouts and a protest that consumed 69 minutes. The 15th sitting witnessed a two-minute protest followed by a 42-minute walkout by PPPP and PML lawmakers for passing women-related legislations without referring them to the standing committees. Similarly, independent members along with PPPP and PML lawmakers walked out of the 13th sitting for not being allowed to introduce an amendment to the Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Bill 2015. Three other walkouts were witnessed against unsatisfactory response to questions and the Chair’s refusal to allow a lawmaker to speak on the floor of the House.

*This session report is based on direct observation of the Punjab Assembly proceedings conducted by PATTAN Development Organization – a member organization of FAFEN. Errors and omissions are excepted*