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**FAFEN’s Report on the 21st Session of the National Assembly**

**NA Session Marked by Low Attendance, Multiple Walkouts**

* **Prime Minister remains absent throughout the session**
* **POs consume 32% of proceedings’ time**

ISLAMABAD, April 30, 2015: The 21st session of the National Assembly was marked by thin attendance of lawmakers as the House witnessed multiple protests/walkouts and the introduction of four private bills, says the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN).

The session, comprising seven sittings, started on April 20 and concluded on April 29, 2015. On average, each sitting started 26 minutes behind the schedule and lasted two hours and 37 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, including the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, Speaker and Deputy Speaker, on the floor of the House.

The lawmakers’ attendance remained low throughout the session – with an average of 44 (13%) members present at the start and 54 (16%) at the end of each sitting. The Prime Minister remained absent throughout the session, while the Opposition Leader attended five out of seven sittings for a total of 260 minutes (24% of the session). Two sittings (third and fourth) were adjourned due to missing quorum pointed out by an independent member and a PPPP lawmaker respectively.

Nearly 35% of the session was chaired by the Speaker, who was present in six out of seven sittings. The Deputy Speaker was present in all the sittings and presided over 49% of the session. The remaining time was chaired by members of the Panel of Chairpersons. In addition, the House observed three breaks that consumed 11% of the proceedings’ time.

Fifteen bills – seven sponsored by the government and eight by private members – appeared on the list of business. Of these, only the Securities Bill 2015 (sponsored by the government) was passed by the House. Another six government bills, along with four private bills, were introduced and sent to the relevant standing committees. These included the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2015, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child Bill 2015, the National University of Medical Sciences Bill 2015, the National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Bill 2015, the Gas (Theft Control and Recovery) Bill 2014, the Corporate Restructuring Companies Bill 2015, the Law Reforms (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Privatization Commission (Second Amendment) Bill 2015, the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill 2015 and the Anti-Rape Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment Bill) 2015.

On the other hand, the House rejected the Indus River Authority (Amendment) Bill 2015 sponsored by a private member after it was opposed by the State Minister for Water and Power. Additionally, three other private bills – the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2015 (Insertion of Section 296 A), the Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Bill 2015 (Amendment of Section 161) and the Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Bill 2015 - were not taken up.

Moreover, the session witnessed six ordinances being presented on the floor of the House. These included the Safeguard Measures (Amendment) Ordinance 2015, the Countervailing Duties Ordinance 2015, the Anti-dumping Duties Ordinance 2015, the National Tariff Commission Ordinance 2015, the General Election 2013 Inquiry Commission Ordinance 2015 and the Publication of Laws of Pakistan (Regulation) Ordinance 2015.

The House unanimously adopted two resolutions during the session. One of the resolutions was passed to express solidarity with families who lost their loved ones in a cyclone in Peshawar, while the House mourned the demise of thousands of people due to a massive earthquake in Nepal through another resolution. In addition, the House debated another resolution regarding electricity pilferage for 27-minute. Meanwhile, 10 other resolutions appearing on the agenda were not taken up during the session.

A total of eight amendments to the National Assembly’s Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business [seeking revision of rules 48, 69, 73, 91, 112, 250 and sub-rule (1) of rule 200] were taken up and referred to the relevant standing committee. Additionally, five periodic reports of various standing committees and two reports regarding the Constitution (Twenty-second Amendment) Bill 2014 and the Constitution (Twenty-fourth Amendment) Bill 2014 were presented. The House also passed a motion to constitute a standing committee for the Climate Change Ministry and took up nine out of 11 calling attention notices addressed to the various ministries/departments.

The House took up only one motion under Rule 259 for a debate on petrol shortage and the ongoing energy crisis in the country. On the other hand, several crucial issues such as problems faced by patients due to shortage of female doctors in federal hospitals, difficulties faced by Pakistanis abroad, increase in advance house-building payments for government employees, pensions of government servants, increase in smuggling, reforms in Islamabad police, import of LNG, policies of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council and lack of training given to Khuddam-ul-Hujjaj were left unaddressed.

The lawmakers raised a total of 212 questions during the session, of which only 50 (24%) were taken up and responded by the relevant ministries/departments. The MNAs also raised 64 supplementary questions to gain further clarity of the government’s responses.

Nearly 32% of the proceedings’ time was consumed by points of orders (POs) raised by the lawmakers. However, none of the 130 POs were able to attract a formal ruling from the Chair. Unless the Chair gives a formal ruling on a PO, it does not lead to any assembly output.

The session witnessed six protests/boycotts/walkouts over several issues. The third sitting saw two such walkouts against ministers’ absence and load-shedding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The fourth sitting also witnessed a walkout by opposition members against unsatisfactory response to a question directed to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority. In addition, women parliamentarians, along with opposition members, staged multiple walkouts against obstructions in release of development funds during the last three sittings. The seventh sitting also witnessed the entire opposition’s boycott against ministerial absence and the privatization of Heavy Mechanical Complex in Taxila.

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