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**FAFEN Session Report on 15th Session of the Punjab Assembly**

**Punjab Assembly: 64% Lawmakers inactive During Budget Debate**

* **10 Bills Passed, Nine Resolutions Adopted**
* **CM attends session after 12 months**

ISLAMABAD, July 3, 2015: Nearly two-third of the lawmakers did not contribute in the budget debate during Punjab Assembly’s 15th session, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its session report.

Of the 11 bills that appeared on the Orders of the Day during the session, the House passed ten government bills including the University of Jhang Bill 2015, the University of Sahiwal Bill 2015, the Punjab Motor Vehicle Transaction Licenses Bill 2015, the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Second Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Finance Bill 2015, the Punjab Infrastructure Development Cess Bill 2015, the Stamp (Amendment) Bill 2015, the Punjab Mass Transit Authority Bill 2015, the Ghazi University Dera Ghazi Khan (Amendment) Bill 2015 and the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2015.

One of the bill – the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Bill 2015 – was held for further consultation after introduction while the House witnessed presentation of the Punjab Institute of Qura’n and Seerat Studies (Amendment) Ordinance 2015.

A total of nine resolutions were tabled during the session, all of which were adopted by the House. The adopted resolutions condemned the killings of PML-N lawmaker Rana Shamshad and his son, massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and Indian Prime Minister’s statement against Pakistan. The resolutions also demanded establishment of an authority for development of a hill station at Marri Gorchani in Rajanpur and extension in the period of the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Ordinance 2015, Punjab Mass-transit Authority Ordinance 2015 and the Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan (Amendment) Ordinance 2015. In addition, a resolution each was adopted to mourn the death of hundreds of people in Karachi and to commend the efforts of the federal government to minimize load shedding in the country and investigate allegations against MQM in a report published by BBC.

Lawmakers performed treasury’s oversight through 35 starred and five un-starred questions. In addition, 32 supplementary questions were also asked. Out of the 35 starred questions, only 14 (40%) were taken up.

As many as two questions of privilege (QoPs) were submitted by the members and both were referred to the relevant committee. The Opposition Leader in the House submitted a joint privilege motion against alleged highhandedness of sub-inspector of police with lawmakers outside the assembly building who stopped them from entering into the House. Another privilege motion of PML-N lawmaker was against DCO Toba Tek Singh for illegally occupying his land.

The House admitted an adjournment motion moved by the Opposition Leader against the printing of Hazara and Saraikistan provinces on Pakistan’s map in Grade 8 geography textbooks. The House took up four calling attention notices (CANs) during the second sitting which were sponsored by one lawmaker each from PTI, PPPP, PML-N and JI. Members raised 40 points of order, consuming 1% (30 minutes) of total session time.

PTI lawmakers pointed out the quorum thrice; it was found complete upon counting on two occasions but at one occasion, the sitting had to be suspended for 40 minutes. An Independent lawmaker also pointed out the quorum once but it was found complete upon counting.

The House witnessed ten individual or joint walkouts and one protest by entire Opposition. The entire opposition protested for 63 minutes on floor of the House during Budget speech of the Finance Minister. The entire Opposition staged walkouts on five occasions against the remarks of Minister for Zakat and Ushr, unscheduled load-shedding, reservations on running House business, cut motions and supplementary demands for grants.

JI lawmaker staged a walkout against increase in electricity tariff by NEPRA. Similarly, PTI legislator walked out over dissatisfaction upon quorum while a PML lawmaker walked out for not getting sufficient time to speak on cut motion. Further, member hailing from PPPP left the House to protest the fund allocation for development schemes in South Punjab and PML-N lawmaker for not following the list submitted for budget debate.

The House witnessed low interest of lawmakers in Budget debate as 235 out of 368 legislators did not contribute in the debate. Of the 133 members who took part in the budget debate, 95 were male and 38 female. However, the female lawmakers were found to be more active as compared to their male counterparts, as 50% (38 out of 76) of them expressed their views on the budgetary proposals while only 33% (95 out of 292) males contributed to the general discussion.

The female lawmakers consumed four hours and 44 minutes while their male counterparts took 18 hours and 36 minutes to deliberate over the provincial budget. Out of 38 participating female MPs, 30 were from PML-N, six were from PTI and one each from PML and PPPP. Likewise, 76 of the 95 male members debating the budget were from PML-N, followed by PTI (10), PML (three), PPPP and PML-Z (two each), JI (one) and an Independent lawmaker.

Among the non-participating lawmakers, 204 were from PML-N followed by PTI (14), PPPP (five), PML and Independent lawmakers (four each), PNML (two), BNAP and PML-Z (one each).

The House witnessed presentation the schedule of authorized expenditure for the year 2015-2016 and the supplementary schedule of authorized expenditure for the year 2014-2015.

The Finance Minister presented the annual budget 2015-2016 during the third sitting and took 62 minutes to present it. The Leader of the Opposition expressed his views about budget in his 11-minute speech during the 4th sitting. The House adopted 43 demands for grants for the year 2015-16 as well as 40 supplementary demands for grants for the year 2014-15. A total of six cut motions on demands for grants for the year 2015-16 and four cut motions on supplementary demands for grants 2014-15 were rejected by the House.

The 15th session of the Punjab Assembly had 13 sittings that started with an average delay of an hour and seven minutes, while each sitting lasted for three hours and 15 minutes, on average. Forty-eight members, on average, were present at the outset of the sitting and 72 lawmakers were present at the time of adjournment. A maximum of 122 members were found to be present at one point of the sitting while four minority members attended each sitting, on average.

The Chief Minister attended two sittings for 3% of the proceedings’ time. His presence marked his return to the House after a complete year. He last attended the first sitting of 9th session (Budget Session) last year.

The Leader of the Opposition attended 11 sittings for 35% of the proceedings’ time while the Finance Minister was present in 11 sittings for 79% of the total time. The Speaker chaired 67% of the session; the Deputy Speaker presided over 31% of the time while the remaining time (2%) was consumed in a break. Among parliamentary leaders, the JI leader attended the ten sittings followed by PPPP (nine) and PML-Z (two). BNAP, PML and PNML leaders did not attend any sittings.

*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.*