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**FAFEN Preliminary Report on 15th Session of the National Assembly**

**Introduction of 17 Legislations, 8 Protests Mark 15th NA Session**

* Prime Minister attends two sittings, Points of Order Consume 33% of Session Time

ISLAMABAD, November 7, 2014: The 15th session of the National Assembly was marked by the introduction of 17 new bills, 3-day debate on the Indian aggression on the Line of Control, eight protests and low attendance of members, says the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its preliminary session report based on the direct observation of the Assembly proceedings.

The introduced legislations include 12 amendment bills, two new legislations and three ordinances with private members presenting 14 bills in the House. The government did not introduce any new bill except for tabling three ordinances aimed at amending the Electoral Rolls Act 1974 to bring local government elections within the jurisdiction of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and empowering it to carry out delimitation of constituencies to hold local bodies’ elections.

The bills propose amendments to certain articles of the Constitution (5 bills), criminal laws (3 bills), civil service laws (2 bills) and a bill to amend the existing election laws. The Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2014 (Amendment in Article 1) that sought the creation of new provinces was rejected by the House. Additionally, the Protection of Journalists Bill 2014, the Islamabad Rent Restriction (Amendment) Bill 2014, the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Bill 2014 and the Torture, Custodial Death and Custodial Rape (Punishment and Prevention) Bill 2014 were presented in the House. Ten reports including several on periodic performance of government bodies, standing committees and legislative scrutiny were also laid before the House.

On a PML-N sponsored motion under Rule 259, the members debated the indiscriminate and unprovoked firing and shelling on the Line of Control (LoC) by the Indian forces resulting in deaths and injuries to several Pakistanis. The motion was debated in three sittings for two hours and 17 minutes by 17 members including eight female and nine male. The members raised 435 points of order (POs) on different issues consuming 33% time (435 minutes) of the proceedings.

The assembly business was disrupted on eight occasions due to five walkouts, two boycotts and a protest consuming 5% of the proceedings’ time. The opposition staged three protests – two over a police assault on the workers of the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) and its planned privatization and one over the Interior Minister’s attitude. An independent member and the parliamentary leaders of QWP and BNP also staged separate walkouts over the privatization of OGDCL. Disgruntled over the remarks of the Opposition Leader in the National Assembly regarding the Muhajir Community, the MQM members staged a walkout while an independent member protested for not being allowed to speak on a point of order.

The House adopted five of the 14 resolutions appearing on the agenda. Most of the adopted resolutions (4) were sponsored by the government such as congratulating Malala Yousafzai on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, reiterating continued support to the struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, condemning the recent ceasefire violations by the Indian forces on the LoC and the Working Boundary and a terrorist attack on a JUI-F rally in Quetta. The House also adopted a resolution for upgrading the federally-administered hospitals.

The 15th session met for 9 sittings commencing from October 20 to 31, 2014, with an average sitting time of two hours and 25 minutes. Each sitting, on average, was delayed by 33 minutes behind the schedule. Low attendance marked the session as on average, 50 members (15%) were present at the outset and 63 (19%) at the adjournment of a sitting. On average, six out of ten minority members attended each sitting.

Among key members, the Leader of the House was present in two sittings and attended 5% of the total session time while the Leader of Opposition was present in eight sittings – 36% of session time. The Speaker attended six sittings presiding over 44% of the proceedings while the Deputy Speaker was present in eight sittings chairing 54% of the proceedings. The remaining time was consumed by a prayer break. The parliamentary leaders of JI and MQM remained most regular as they attended all sittings. The ANP leader was present in six sittings followed by PkMAP (4), JUI-F and PML-F leaders (one each). Among the single member parties, the APML and BNP leaders attended eight sittings each followed by QWP (6), PML-Z (4) and AMLP (3).

The government responded to 12 of 14 calling attention notices (CANs) on the agenda, of which, six were jointly tabled by the male and female members. These CANs were regarding health issues such as poor conditions of the Federal Government Services Hospital, Islamabad (Polyclinic), resurgence of polio virus, spread of breast cancer and Ebola virus in the country. Other CANs were about black-marketing of LPG, power outages and overbilling by power distribution companies. The House took up 49 out of 291 questions – 160 starred and 131 un-starred – while the members also asked 78 supplementary questions.

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