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

**Sindh Assembly: 14 Bills Passed, 10 Introduced Amid Protests, Low Attendance**

Islamabad, November 24, 2014: The Sindh Assembly passed 14 bills during its 15th session despite low attendance of legislators, says Free and Fair Election Network in its preliminary report based on direct observation.

The session started on October 20 and ended on November 19; consuming 45 hours and 18 minutes. On average, each sitting started 57 behind the schedule. The House took nine prayer breaks that took up 27 minutes (1%) of the proceedings.

The members’ attendance remained low throughout the session as more than half of the legislators were absent during the proceedings on average – 35 members (21%) were seen at the outset, 50 (30%) at the end and a maximum 80 (48%) at a point during a sitting. The missing quorum was pointed out only once by a PPPP member but was ignored by the Speaker.

The chief minister attended eight out of 11 sittings and remained on the floor of the House for 29% of the proceedings. On the other hand, the Leader of the Opposition was present in seven sittings, attending 56% of the session.

The Speaker was present in all the sittings and presided over 71% of the total time, while the deputy speaker presided over 28% of the House business in 10 sittings. The parliamentary leader of MQM attended nine sittings, while PML-N leader attended only two sittings. Meanwhile, the PTI and NPP leaders were absent during the entire session.

Despite the low attendance, the House passed 14 bills during the session, while another 10 were introduced in the House.

Among the prominent bills was the Sindh Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2014 that was passed in compliance with the Supreme Court’s directives on October 14. The bill empowers the Election Commission of Pakistan to carry out fresh delimitation of constituencies for local government elections in the province. Additionally, five bills related to the health sector were also passed in a single sitting.

The 10 bills introduced included three private members’ bills that mostly dealt with environmental protection, patrolling on highways, employees’ old age benefits, consumer protection and improving education standards. MQM and PML-F member staged a seven-minute protest over the hasty conduct of legislation during the session.

Overall, the session witnessed seven protests in the plenary, five of which were staged by MQM. The party staged individual protests over the discriminatory attitude of the provincial government; preferential treatment given to government bills and contention with Deputy Speaker. PML-F members held another protest over a PPPP lawmaker’s remark regarding the PML-F chief. Additionally, the lawmakers staged a 12-minute protest over alleged irregularities in appointments in the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and extrajudicial killings in Sindh.

As many as 17 resolutions were adopted during the session – including 12 that appeared on the supplementary agenda. The resolutions dealt with Indian aggression on the Line of Control; Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Malala Yousafzai; fair distribution of development funds; famine in Thar; establishment of breast cancer diagnostic centers in each district and PTI chief’s derogatory remarks against Sindhis.

The House did not take up a motion sponsored by an MQM member calling for removal of identical rules on quorum (Rule 5 and 228) from the Sindh Assembly’s Rules of Procedures. Similarly, all 11 private motions were left unaddressed. The members raised 119 points of order that consumed 193 minutes of the proceedings.

Five adjournment motions moved by PML-F (three) and MQM (two) were taken up for debate. The House debated the rates of diesel and petrol in the province; 421 cases of violence against women reported in three months; worsening law and order situation; prolonged drought in Thar and the deteriorating state of a vocational training center in Hyderabad. Two questions of personal privilege moved by male members of PPPP and MQM were taken up by the House, while one such motion was admitted for discussion.

The House took up 17 MQM-sponsored calling attention notices (CANs) appearing on the agenda that were related to issues of governance and water & power (four each); education (three); employment and development sector (two each) besides one CAN each on law and order and internally displaced persons. Forty-one out of 50 starred questions were taken up on the floor as members raised another 203 supplementary questions. As many as 41 (82%) questions were raised by women on reserved seats, while the remaining questions were submitted by elected male members.

***This report is based on direct observation of Sindh Assembly proceedings conducted by Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), a member organization of FAFEN***