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**FAFEN’s Session Report on the Senate’s 115th Session**

**115th Senate Session: Marked Increase in Sittings’ Time Observed**

ISLAMABAD, May 25, 2015: The 115th Senate session witnessed a marked increase in sittings’ time and a considerable decrease in lawmakers’ attendance as the House passed three government bills and adopted 13 private resolutions, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN).

The session, comprising 13 sittings, started on May 4 and ended on May 20, 2015. All the sittings started at their scheduled time, except for the last sitting that started 15 minutes late. On average, each sitting lasted three hours and 54 minutes, compared to three hours and 10 minutes during the previous session. However, there was a considerable decrease in senators’ attendance.

Since the Senate 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 lawmakers on the floor of the House. FAFEN’s observation shows an average of 17 senators (16% of the total membership) present at the start of each sitting (compared to 21 during the previous session) and 35 at the time of adjournment (compared to 45 in the last session).

The prime minister was absent during the entire session. The Chairman, however, attended all the sittings and presided over 89% of the session. The Deputy Chairman attended seven sittings and chaired 4% of the proceedings, while 3% of the time was presided over by a member of the Panel of Chairpersons. The House took three breaks during its longest sittings that consumed 4% of the total time. The Leader of the House attended 86% of the session in 12 sittings, while the Opposition Leader was present in nine sittings and attended 51% of the proceedings.

The House passed three government bills – namely the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (First Amendment) Bill 2015, the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance (Second Amendment) Bill 2015 and the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess Bill 2015.

Meanwhile, the Capital University of Science and Technology Bill 2015 was introduced and sent to the relevant standing committee while three ordinances – the Publication of Laws of Pakistan (Regulation) Ordinance 2015, the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Ordinance 2015 and the Cantonments (Amendment) Ordinance 2015 – were also presented during the session.

The House discussed the annual report on the implementation of the federation’s principles of policy in 2011-2012 that consumed 5% of the proceedings’ time. As many as 15 senators – 14 male and one female – participated in the discussion. The House also debated two adjournment motions (AM) – one on the delay in execution of the K-4 project and the other on the merger of KASB Bank and Bank Islami. Another AM on the arrest of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Welfare Board’s workers in Islamabad was discussed for 17 minutes before the Chair ruled it out and directed the Interior Ministry to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

One of the AMs on a news article on Osama Bin Laden’s hideout was converted into calling attention notice (CAN) that was later dropped due to the mover’s absence. Similarly, three other AMs were left unaddressed due to the movers’ absence.

The Chair did not admit an AM on non-absorption of two doctors at PIMS, while another AM on electrocution of passengers in Dadu was not taken up for debate.

The House took up 11 out of 14 CANs appearing on the agenda, which were related to power woes, water shortage, economic affairs, governance and law and order. It also adopted 13 out of 22 private resolutions, while another six resolutions were not taken up during the session. Two resolutions were deferred due to the mover’s absence, while another resolution was taken up for debate but withdrawn by the mover after being opposed by the Minister for Commerce.

The House debated six out of 18 motions under Rule 218 which dealt with the new aviation policy, provision of speedy justice, corruption in Federal Government departments, status of Pak-China Economic Corridor, overall performance of the banking sector and spread of hepatitis in the country. On the other hand, 12 motions were nor taken up, of which three were left due to the movers’ absence.

The House also took up 45 out of 158 (28%) starred questions, while the Senators raised another 149 supplementary questions on the floor of the House. On the other hand, 113 (72%) questions were left unaddressed, some due to the absence of the relevant ministers. The Chair also took note of the absence of a CDA’s Planning and Engineering Members and the Joint Secretary Establishment Division during the question hour and referred the matter to the privilege committee.

The House constituted a special committee to discuss reservation on the Pak-China Economic Corridor. It also passed a motion to increase the strength of Balochistan members and including a member from FATA in the committee. Another motion to form a committee comprising all senators to propose steps for speedy justice was also passed during the session. The lawmakers agreed to present the committee’s report within a period of three months starting after Eid-ul-Fitr.

The House also discussed three public petitions on enhancing the age limit of taking the CSS exam, the Senate’s review of various policy and administrative boards/councils and operationalization of the National Technology Council.

Furthermore, two other motions on extending the nomination period of eight standing committee chairpersons and constituting another committee to prepare a report on issues faced by people following the passage of the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess Bill 2015 were also passed during the session.

A marked increase in points of order (POs) was witnessed, as the lawmakers raised 227 POs that consumed 17% of the session. In the previous session, the senators had raised 66 POs which had taken up 13% of the proceedings’ time.

The session witnessed a total of five walkouts – two against the passage of the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess Bill and one each against an unsatisfactory response to a question, unsatisfactory response to a CAN and against the attack on Ismaili community in Karachi.

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