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**Press Release**

**49 Senators stay mum during budget deliberations**

ISLAMABAD, July 02, 2015: Forty-nine Senators did not take part in the debate on Federal Budget 2015-16 during 116th (budget) session of the Upper House that ended on June 17, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its Session Report on Thursday.

The session, comprising nine sittings, started on June 5 and lasted 31 hours and 29 minutes. Apart from the first sitting, which witnessed a delay of 32 minutes, all sittings started on scheduled time.

Members’ attendance remained low throughout the session, with an average of 17 members present at the start of each sitting and 30 lawmakers at the time of adjournment. A maximum of 49 members attended the proceedings on average.

The budget debate lasted 12 hours and 45 minutes, consuming 40% of the session’s total time. As many as 55 lawmakers shared their views on the budget, which included 15 Senators from the ruling PML-N, followed by PPPP (14), MQM (seven), JUI-F (four), three each from ANP and PTI, two from PkMAP and one each from BNP-A, BNP-M, JI, PML and PML-F. In addition, two independent lawmakers also took part in the budget debate.

The Standing Committee on Finance, Revenue, Economic Affairs, Statistics and Privatization submitted 92 recommendations on the Finance Bill 2015, of which 23 were related to development projects while the remaining 69 were related to non-developmental issues such as taxes, subsidies, salaries and pensions. Fifty-six of the total 92 recommendations were incorporated in the final budget by the National Assembly without going through them clause-by-clause and putting them in front of the House for approval or disapproval, as required by sub-Rule 3 of the Rule 141 of the National Assembly’s Rules of Procedure.

The Senate Chairman attended seven sittings, presiding over 60% of the session. The Deputy Chairman was present in six sittings, chairing 10% of the session. Nearly 16% of the time was presided by members of the Panel of Chairpersons, while the remaining 14% was consumed in breaks.

The Prime Minister did not attend any sitting. The Leader of the House attended all the sittings for the entire duration, while the Opposition Leader attended 71% of the session in seven sittings.

The House adopted four resolutions during the session to condemn the killing of citizens in Mastung, genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, provocative statements by the Indian leadership and to mourn the loss of lives in a flood in Khuzdar.

Five reports were presented before the House during the session. Three of them were presented by the Standing Committee on Finance and one each by the Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research and Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights.

The lawmakers raised a total of 24 points of order (POs) which consumed 47 minutes (3%) of the session. However, none of the POs were able to receive a formal ruling from the Chair.

A PPPP lawmaker also raised a question of privilege against the Interior Ministry and the Election Commission of Pakistan for notifying the schedule for the local government elections in Islamabad despite the concerned legislation being pending with the Senate. The House referred the question to the Privileges Committee.

The session witnessed a total of three walkouts – two of which were held in the third sitting over insufficient funds for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Karachi. In addition, the opposition parties held another walkout in the fourth sitting for not broadcasting their budget speeches live on television.