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**FAFEN’s Preliminary Report on the Senate’s 118th Session**

**Senate Passed Six Bills, Adopted Four Resolutions amid Low Attendance**

* **PM and Opposition Leader remained absent during the entire session**

ISLAMABAD, August 19, 2015: With an average of 13% Senators present at the start and 31% at the end of each sitting, the 118th session of Senate passed six government bills and adopted four resolutions, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN).

The session comprising nine sittings, started on August 3 and concluded on August 13, 2015. Three sittings were held on time while six others started behind the scheduled time. On average, each sitting started two minutes behind the schedule and lasted three hour and 40 minutes.

Since the Senate Secretariat does not share the attendance of lawmakers with 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 House[[1]](#footnote-1). FAFEN’s observation depicts an average of 14 senators (13% of the total membership) present at the start and 32 (31%) at the time of adjournment.

The Prime Minister did not attend the entire session. It is stated in sub-rule (2A) of Rule 61 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate that Prime Minister shall attend the Prime Minister’s Zero Hour (last hour of sitting) at least once a week when the Senate is in Session.

The Chairman, however, attended all the sittings and presided over 84% of the session’s time. The Deputy Chairman attended eight sittings and chaired 13% of the proceedings, while 3% of the time was presided over by the Panel of Presiding Officers. The Leader of the House attended 94% of the session’s time by making his presence in nine sittings, while the Opposition Leader remained absent during the entire session.

The House passed six government bills – the Safeguard Measures (Amendment) Bill, 2015; the Countervailing Duties Bill, 2015; the Anti-Dumping Duties Bill, 2015; the National Tariff Commission Bill, 2015; the Cantonments (Amendment) Bill, 2015 and the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Meanwhile, the National University of Medical Sciences Bill, 2015 received from National Assembly was introduced and referred to the relevant Standing Committee while an Ordinance – the Income Tax (Amendment) Ordinance 2015 – was also presented during the session. A private member bill namely, the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2015, seeking substitution of clause (1) of Article 140A was forwarded to the relevant Standing Committee for further deliberations.

The House took up all 11 Calling Attention Notices (CANs) appearing on the agenda. Three CANs were related to Ministry of Water & Power followed by Ministries of Housing & Works, Interior & Narcotics Control and Cabinet Secretariat (two each) and one each to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Capital Administration and Development Division.

The House adopted four resolutions; one to condemn the vacation of slum area (Katchi Abadi) in Sector I-11 of Islamabad, second against child abuse in Kasur, third expressing complete solidarity with religious minorities, and fourth to congratulate the whole nation on the eve of Independence Day.

The House rejected a resolution for not granting the status of university to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) while four other resolutions – to supply electricity in deprived areas, control the prices of life saving drugs, promote religious harmony and right of appeal in suo-moto cases – were deferred.

The House discussed a matter raised through public petition about proposed privatization of profitable electricity companies. According to sub-rule (1) of Rule 277, any person may submit a petition to the Chairman Senate containing clear suggestion relating to the business before the House, business before a Senate Committee or issue of public importance concerning the Federal Government. The petitioner shall make himself/herself responsible for the accuracy of the matter raised by him/her. The petition shall be submitted online by filling in the Performa on Senate website or by post or by delivering in the Senate Secretariat by hand[[2]](#footnote-2). Fifteen lawmakers – five from PPPP, three from MQM, two from PML-N and one each from PML, PkMAP, PTI, JUI-F and ANP – discussed the privatization issue for 64 minutes while State Minister for Interior concluded the debate during his seven minutes speech.

The Senate held special discussion during its 4th sitting on August 6, 2015 to commemorate its founding day and the first ever sitting that was held on August 6, 1973. Chairman Senate spoke for 17 minutes with regards to the founding day of the Upper House of the Parliament while eleven other lawmakers – two from PML-N and one each from PkMAP, NP, PPPP, ANP, PML, BNP-M, MQM, JUI-F and PTI – also participated in discussion for 69 minutes.

The House carried a motion under Rule 194 (1) during its 5th sitting to extend the period for presenting the report regarding tapping of VIPs’ phone calls till October 16, 2015. The House also adopted two motions in the last sitting under Rule 194 (1); one to extend the period for presentation of reports about awarding a contract to a black listed company for the construction of a section of road (from Kohri to Karkh on M-8) for further 30 days and the other regarding import of LNG in the country till September 25, 2015.

Another motion under Rule 196 (1) was adopted by the House about giving equal representation to all provinces in various policy and administrative boards and councils envisaged under several Acts of the Parliament.

The House took up a motion under Rule 172A and gave nod to convert the House into a committee in order to consider mode of Senators’ elections. After transforming the House into committee, the experts could be invited for sharing their opinion.

The House approved amendments in the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 2012 to insert new Rules 162-B and 277. Two motions discussed in the House under Rule 60 were regarding Lowari tunnel project and restrictions on banned militant outfits and their resurrection under a different name or as charity organization. Both issues raised through these motions came into limelight in response to starred questions replied on May 13 and July 7, 2015 respectively.

The House also took up 70 out of 160 (44%) starred questions on floor of the house, while the Senators raised another 158 supplementary questions. Of these questions, 44 were raised to Ministry of Water and Power followed by Ministries of Narcotics Control (14), Petroleum and Natural Resources (13), Federal Education and Professional Training, Housing & Works (11 each) and Capital Administration and Development Division (8).

The Chair did not allow PTI lawmaker to move a privilege motion about alleged illegal appointments and malpractices in Hazara University, Mansehra. The Chair refused to maintain it, terming that mover was not member of Senate during the period of such illegal appointments in the aforementioned university.

The House debated six out of 11 motions under Rule 218 which dealt with FC’s interference in Balochistan government’s matters, issuance of fake degrees in the country, establishment of National Commission on Human Rights, responsibility of the Federation in pursuance of Article 148 of the Constitution, broadening the tax base and closure of textile industry due to high electricity and gas prices. On the other hand, five motions were not taken up, of which four were not considered due to movers’ absence (under sub-Rule (3) of Rule 218, read with sub-Rule (2) of Rule 136).

In addition, 12 reports by various Senate Standing Committees were also presented during the session of which five were related to legislative bills. The other reports included 3rd quarterly report for the year 2014-2015 of the Central Board of Directors of the State Bank of Pakistan on the state of the Economy, non-briefing to any other minister to reply questions on behalf of CADD, new aviation policy, shifting of Civil Aviation Authority Headquarters, work of renovation of Benazir Bhutto International Airport Islamabad, renovation of Peshawar Airport. A report on a public petition regarding revival of FATA Tribunal and the authenticated copy of President’s address was also presented.

Fifteen Adjournment Motions (AMs) appeared on the agenda during the session of which the House debated three AMs – one on the distribution formula of National Finance Commission (NFC) award, second about loss of human lives and properties due to recent devastating flood and the other on breakdown of electricity in Karachi.

A report of the Standing Committee on Water and Power about power cuts by K-Electric in Karachi and report on 2nd biannual monitoring on the implementation of NFC Award were merged together with two aforementioned AMs which were debated in the House.

The Chair admitted two AMs for discussion which were regarding disconnection of gas of Pakistan Steel Mills and steps for construction and rehabilitation of 2005 earthquake affected areas. The remaining ten AMs were not taken up for debate.

The lawmakers raised 89 points of order that consumed 14% (275 minutes) of the session. The House witnessed two instances of walkout during the eighth sitting. A PkMAP lawmaker walked out of the House for three minutes over unsatisfactory reply to a question he raised. PPPP, PML, ANP and PkMAP lawmakers also staged a token walk out for one-minute against the attitude of treasury lawmakers supporting construction of Kalabagh Dam.

*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.*

1. (<http://www.senate.gov.pk/en/content.php?id=53>), retrieved on August 19, 2015

\*Senate Secretariat started sharing attendance of its lawmakers from August 18, 2015. FAFEN’s petition no. PP-622 was approved by the Chairman Senate regarding making public the attendance of Senators in the House as well as in Standing Committees. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/updatedrpcb.pdf>, retrieved on August 19, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)