



FAFEN Preliminary Report on 35th Session of the 13th National Assembly

Debates on energy crisis, dengue fever, consume one-third of session time

- **32% of time consumed by Points of Order**
- **168 Members take part in proceedings**

ISLAMABAD, Oct 19: Dominated by debates on power outages, dengue fever and increase in prices of petroleum products, almost half of the Members took part in the 35th session of the National Assembly, according to a preliminary report of Free and Fair Election Network on Wednesday.

The session which ended on 18 October 2011 left 52% of the agenda items listed on the Orders of the Day unaddressed primarily due to use of Points of Order as the Lower House also witnessed nine instances of protests and walkouts.

Spread over 31 hours, on average each sitting of the session lasted for two hours and 35 minutes. Similarly each sitting started with an average delay of 56 minutes. A total of 43 parliamentarians - 32 male and 11 female – spoke on power outages, dengue fever, increase in prices of petroleum products and other issues for 614 minutes or 33% of the session time.

Speeches by Members and Treasury rejoinders on Points of Order consumed 32% of the total session time otherwise allocated for the regular agenda. Unless the Chair gives a formal ruling on a Point of Order, speeches and rejoinders do not contribute to any assembly output.

None of the 197 Points of Order during the session consuming 595 minutes attracted the Chair's formal ruling. A total of 56 Points of Order were raised by PMLN Members, 16 MQM, 14 PML, nine ANP, five MMAP and 19 by Independent Members. PPPP members took the floor 78 times on Points of Order, mostly to respond to the opposition's criticism.

Overall a total of 168 Members – 127 male and 41 female - took part in the 12 sittings. In line with the participation trend observed in the previous sessions, male parliamentarians appeared to be less active than their female counterparts. Their participation remained 48% of their total membership at 264 while female participation remained at 53% of their total membership at 77.

A party-wise analysis shows that 88% of MQM parliamentarians took part in the proceedings, followed by PMLN's 60%, ANP's 54%, MMAP's 50%, PPPP's 41%, PML's 33% and 20% of the PMLF.

While the participation of Members was relatively better during the session, the attendance remained low. Since the National Assembly Secretariat does not provide information to media and public on attendance of Members, FAFEN conducts headcount of Members at the beginning and end of each sitting and documents actual time spent on the floor of the House by Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. During the session, 63 Members on an average were present at the beginning of each sitting and 72 at the end.

The Prime Minister attended all but two sittings, attending the proceedings for 17% of the session time. The Leader of the Opposition was absent during seven sittings, attending 20% of the session time. The Speaker chaired the proceedings for 19% of the session time; the Deputy Speaker 45%; and the remaining 35% of time was presided over by Members of Panel of Chairpersons. The Parliamentary Leaders of ANP, PMLF and MMAP did not attend any of the sittings, while leaders of NPP attended nine sittings, PPPS and MQM five each, BNPA four and PML leader attended one sitting.

The 35th session covered good grounds in terms of lawmaking, as the House passed four government bills and a Private Member's Bill. However the House did not take up 10 Motions under Rule 259, 10 Resolutions and two Matters of Public Importance that appeared on the Orders of the Day.

Out of 13 Calling Attention Notices on the Orders of the Day, the House took up nine raised by 15 male and 16 female parliamentarians – six were sponsored by PMLN and three by PPPP.

The session witnessed nine instances of protests and walkouts. PMLN Members walked out of the House in protest against power outages and increase in petroleum products on four occasions. A single PPPP Member boycotted the session to protest against the killings of Hazara community in Quetta. Another PPPP Member walked out to protest against the conduct of fellow parliamentarians. On another occasion, a PML Member staged a walkout on not getting the Chair's permission to continue his speech on a Point of Order. Members of the MQM walked out of the House once in protest over the Quetta killings and power outages.

During the ninth sitting, the House witnessed a tussle between the Members of the PMLN and MQM, which disrupted the proceedings for 10 minutes.

About FAFEN: FAFEN is a network of 42 civil society organizations working to foster democratic accountabilities in Pakistan. It is governed by Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability.