

The Second Parliamentary Year of the 13th National Assembly of Pakistan

- **29 Laws passed by the 13th National Assembly in the Second Year compared to 4 Laws in the First Year**
- **The Acts to Ordinance Ratio Improved in Second Year: 29 Acts Vs 27 Ordinances compared to 4 Acts Vs 17 Ordinances in the First Parliamentary Year**
- **Prime Minister maintains his tradition of attending the National Assembly sittings more regularly than any Prime Minister in the recent history of Pakistan**
- **13th National Assembly met for 344 Hours and 27 Minutes during the Second Parliamentary year which is 24% more time than the First Parliamentary Year**
- **Parliament's Role to Resolve National Conflicts and Crises remains weak**
- **Senior MPs fail to set Standards of active Parliamentary Participation for Younger MPs**
- **Key Legislation such as Holders of Public Offices (Accountability) remains Pending**

Islamabad, March 01; PILDAT, in its preliminary report on the completion of the Second Parliamentary Year of the current (13th) National Assembly of Pakistan, has noted a significant improvement in legislation but most of the other performance indicators are in general stagnant at the same level as the first Parliamentary year.

The 13th National Assembly of Pakistan passed **29 laws** during the second year compared to just 4 laws during the first year. The 12th National Assembly (2002-2007) had, on the average, passed 10 laws per year. During the second year (2009-2010), **65 Presidential Ordinances** were laid before the National Assembly which included 38 Ordinances promulgated during the previous Government and accorded 'permanence' through the defunct 'emergency' declared by General Pervez Musharraf on November 3, 2007. The Supreme Court, in its judgment of July 31, 2009 lifted the so called permanent status of these ordinances and the Government decided to bring most of them to the Parliament for approval. The Government promulgated 27 new Presidential Ordinances during the period which almost matches the number of laws passed by the Assembly. The **Acts to Ordinance ratio also improved tremendously** during the year (29 Acts Vs 27 Ordinances) as this ratio during the first year was almost 1:4 (4 Acts Vs 17 Ordinances).

The House met for a total of 101 Working Days spanned over 12 sessions out of which 4 were Joint Sessions of Parliament. The Assembly saw an increase of **24% in the total time** it met compared to the first Parliamentary Year and met at an average for 3.41 hours a day compared to 2.86 hours a day in the first year. The combined average working hours during the 12th National Assembly stood at 3.22 Hours a day. Punctuality in the Sittings time continues to be an area requiring improvement. On the average a sitting starts late by about 40 minutes.

Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani maintained his tradition of attending the National Assembly sittings more regularly than any Prime Minister in the recent history of

Pakistan. He generally responds to some of the points raised by other members during his presence. One wonders why a Prime Minister's Question Period has not yet been formally introduced into the Assembly Rules of Procedure. The Absence of Ministers, despite regular presence of the Prime Minister in the National Assembly sessions has been another source of complaint by the legislators and media. Similarly the practice of MNAs making a beeline for the seat of the Prime Minister to meet him and present their applications also continued during the second year, though to the credit of the Chair, MNAs were publicly reprimanded repeatedly during the sessions to take their issues to the Prime Minister's Chamber and not disrupt the proceedings of the House. Deputy Speaker Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi has especially and justifiably adopted a strict policy in this context.

A few indicators that reflect Members' interest in Parliamentary business did not indicate any major change. Members asked 10,843 Questions during the first year compared to 9,321 during the second year registering a reduction of about 14 %. The average number of questions asked per year during the 5 years of the previous (12th) National Assembly was 9403 – almost the same as in the second year of the present National Assembly. 32 % of the Questions asked were answered during the year compared to 28 % during the first year and 21 % during the 5 years of the 12th National Assembly. Despite a marginal improvement, the **percentage of questions disallowed or simply lapsed (68 %) is still very high** and the National Assembly of Pakistan needs to review its procedures to improve the percentage of Questions answered.

Members submitted 734 Call Attention Notices during the year compared to 708 in the previous year – a marginal increase of about 4 %. Average number of Call Attention Notices submitted per year during the previous (12th) National Assembly was 631. Members submitted 373 Adjournment Motions compared to 367 during the first year and 582 per year during the 5 years of the previous National Assembly. Members submitted 611 Resolutions during the year. The privilege notices have registered a marginal decrease to 47 compared to 50 during the first year. The average number of privilege notices per year during the previous (12th) National Assembly was 138 which makes the **present National Assembly much less privilege-conscious compared to the previous one.**

The Budget Session (June 12-30, 2009) during the second year of the National Assembly did not see much improvement in terms of the days and hours of debate and the number of members who participated in the debate. The budget session lasted for 10 work-days compared to 19 during the first year. 170 members took part in the budget debate compared to 229 during the first year. The budget debate lasted for just 42 days compared to 41 and a half during the first year. The quality of debate remained equally unchanged. *The announcement by the Government to change the Budget Process during the 3rd parliamentary year in terms of increased period of debate and a role for the Standing Committees to review departmental demands of grants holds a great promise to improve the parliamentary role in the budget process.*

Key legislation such as the Holders of Public Offices (Accountability) Bill that was introduced in the House on April 15, 2009, remained pending despite repeated

promises and public statements by the Government. The bill, which carries several controversial clauses, remains at the Committee stage despite the period of 10 months after its introduction.

The journey of reforms that the new parliamentary leadership had started back in March 2008 at the inauguration of the 13th National Assembly seems to have stalled and further reforms do not seem to be forthcoming. The National Assembly website that had seen some significant improvements during the first year has become stagnant. For some inexplicable reason, the complete text of the Assembly debates is not placed on the Assembly website. The Senate website, commendably, has started posting their verbatim debates. Record of Committee meetings is also incomplete on the website. Tracking of Bills and Members' attendance record, too, continue to be absent from the website. The National Assembly is yet to have its own Book Shop where Assembly debates, other publications and souvenirs may be available.

Some senior parliamentarians who can serve as a model for younger parliamentarians have lowered their participation level in the parliamentary business sending a demotivating message to other parliamentarians. Mr. Asfandiyar Wali (*NA-7, Charsadda-I, NWFP, ANP*) holds a great promise to inspire young parliamentarians but his participation in the Assembly proceedings in general and as Chairman of the prestigious Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs has been inexplicably weak. Mr. Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari, (*NA-172 D.G.Khan-II, Punjab, PML*) Makhdoom Faisal Saleh Hayat (*NA-88, Jhang-III, Punjab, PML*) and Chaudhry Pervez Elahi (*NA-58 Attock-II, Punjab, PML*) are some of the most prominent MNAs whose lack of active participation does not serve the cause of democracy and supremacy of Parliament.

The Assembly continues to fail in playing a meaningful role in resolving major crises which hit the country with increasing frequency. The confrontation between Judiciary and the Executive on the appointment of Judges and implementation of the Supreme Court judgment on National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) are two recent questions which considerably raised national political temperature but the Parliament failed to resolve either of these by timely action. Effective involvement of Parliamentary parties in developing party stances in the Parliament also seemed a distant dream. Most of the parliamentary parties meet infrequently and for brief periods.

Despite the fact that it has not completed its recommendations as yet, the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Senate and National Assembly on Constitutional Reforms headed by Senator Raza Rabbani (Sindh, PPP) has set high standards of seriousness and hard work by holding 51 sittings in 8 months since its first formal meeting on June 29, 2009. The Public Accounts Committee, headed by Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Leader of the Opposition (*NA-53 Rawalpindi-IV, Punjab, PML-N*) is another committee which has demonstrated an equally high standard of hard work, diligence, painstaking investigation and effective oversight during the past year. The PAC met for about 137 days during the past 2 years which comes to about 68 days per year.