



# EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



## WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 3, 2018

### Summary

- The BBC published a report critical of human rights abuses in Egypt, prompting several representatives to decry the media outlet along with other Western organizations for their role in distorting the country's national image.
- Constitutional Affairs Committee Chairman Bahaa Abu Shoqa announced his intention to campaign for president of the Wafd Party.
- Representatives expressed outrage over the Beheira train accident, which resulted in the deaths of 15 individuals.

## Presidential Election Developments

### Political Parties Continue Campaigning:

Following the National Election Authority's approval of President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi and Moussa Mustafa Moussa's participation in the upcoming presidential election, political parties and representatives in parliament continued their campaign efforts. The Tagammu Party will **meet** in an emergency session to **discuss** its official campaign strategies ahead of the upcoming election, though the party has already **declared** its support for Sisi. Currently the party holds one seat in the House of Representatives. Additionally, the Nation's Future Party **announced** that it will organize rallies in various cities in the Giza governorate on March 8 to campaign for Sisi.

## Wafd Party Internal Election Competition:

Following Wafd Party Chairman al-Sayyid al-Badawi's [announcement](#) that the party's internal election would occur prior to the presidential election, several ranking officials within the party [expressed](#) their disdain for the decision and [called](#) for a fresh face to lead the organization. Bahaa Abu Shoqa, secretary-general of the party and current Constitutional Affairs Committee chairman, stated that he will [campaign](#) for Wafd Party president. Abu Shoqa [denounced](#) Badawi's decision, adding that the internal elections for the party will [occur](#) after the presidential election because of popular demands from members of the organization.

## Notable Developments

### Representatives Decry Western Media Outlets:

The BBC published a [report](#) documenting instances of forced disappearances in Egypt, continued human rights abuses, and a lack of democratic processes ahead of the upcoming presidential election. Several representatives and government officials criticized the BBC for the article, while using the opportunity to speak out against prominent Western media outlets and organizations [including](#) the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and Amnesty International. Representatives addressed the report from a variety of perspectives, including media responsibilities, terrorism, and defamation of the state. The Egypt State Information Service (SIS) [called](#) for a boycott of the BBC following the report's release.

After the SIS call to boycott the BBC, several representatives—notably Free Egyptians Party Chairman [Essam Khalil](#), [Tariq al-Khouli](#) of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Arab Affairs Committee Chairman [Saad al-Gamal](#)—expressed their support for this initiative over attempts by the news organization to fabricate information and promote the interests of extremist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Some representatives [equated](#) the recent report to a unique form of terrorism aimed at distorting the image of the nation through nonviolent and atypical measures.

In light of the criticism of the BBC, Defense Committee Chairman Kamal Omar [argued](#) that censorship of the organization does not represent a limitation on freedom of the press. Rather, he explained, the decision [entails](#) a government attempt to prevent the spread of misinformation aimed at distorting the national image. During the backlash period against the BBC, an internal memorandum [circulated](#) through the House of Representatives requesting legal action against the media organization. Human Rights Committee Chairman Alaa Abed outright [rejected](#) the report based on committee visits to state prisons and the positive assessments that they made following these delegation trips.

### Representatives' Outrage following Beheira Train Crash:

Two trains [collided](#) in the Beheira Province, killing 15 and wounding an additional 40 citizens. The crash sparked outrage among members of the House of Representatives, with parliamentarians calling for answers to the tragic incident. Multiple representatives including Mustafa Bakri of the Constitutional Affairs Committee [demanded](#) that the transportation minister's appear in front of the general body of parliament to discuss the accident, and criticized the minister for allowing the incident to occur. Following multiple requests submitted by members of the House, the Transportation Committee [held](#) ongoing meetings to discuss the collision, in an attempt to determine the cause. In similar news, Representative

Soleiman al-Amiri of the Local Administration Committee **called** for the formation of a fact-finding commission to investigate the crash.

## Other Developments

### In Legislation:

The cabinet **approved** amendments to the Penal Code that **permit** the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of purchasing explosives and using them for terrorist purposes. The law currently **calls** for life imprisonment for individuals who obtain explosives without adhering to the proper licensing policy for acquiring these products. This legislation follows intense criticism from the **European Parliament** for Egypt's increased use of the death penalty under Sisi's presidency.

The State Council **concluded** its deliberations on the draft law establishing the Supreme Council to Counter Extremism. The State Council **returned** the law to the cabinet to review amendments under question.

The Budget Committee **approved** government amendments to the Income Tax Law. The legislation **seeks** to simplify the bureaucracy surrounding tax payments for both citizens and government agencies.

### In Session:

Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al participated in a delegation visit to Abu Dhabi, where he **met** with the crown prince of the emirate to discuss the two nations' role in regional security and political affairs. During separate meetings, Abdel 'Al spoke with a group of Egyptian citizens and encouraged them to **participate** in the upcoming election and **serve** as ambassadors for Egypt during their time living abroad.

During a joint meeting between the Foreign Affairs Committee and a delegation from Sudan, the Sudanese ambassador to Egypt **expressed** his desire for the Egyptian military to assist in ensuring a stable regime in Sudan. Representatives Tariq Radwan and Tariq al-Khouli both **affirmed** their support of Sudan in securing the state and continuing parliamentary relations between the two bodies.

### In News and Statements:

Representative Mustafa Bakri of the Constitutional Affairs Committee **praised** Egypt's continuing severing of diplomacy with Qatar, while **adding** that Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain will not be forced out of their position with Qatar.

Sisi participated in the inauguration of a military installation east of the Suez Canal, prompting some representatives to comment on the opening of the bases. Representative Said Taeema of the Transportation Committee **said** that Sisi wore his military garments during the opening of the installation as a symbol of the nation's ongoing struggle against terrorism. Representative Tadrus Qaldus of the Communications Committee **praised** the opening of military headquarters in Sinai aiming to combat terrorism. Qaldus **asserted** that the recent success of military operations in the region will lead to development projects to rebuild Sinai in the near future.

The Coalition in Support of Egypt and Coalition Chairman Muhammad al-Suweidi **rejected** the Human Rights Watch's statement regarding the alleged use of cluster bombs in military operations. He **stated** that the organization represents the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Representative al-Badri Ahmed Daif of the Energy Committee **hailed** the Palestinian cause as chief

among Egypt's international concerns, especially in light of the Jerusalem decision from last fall. He **upheld** Egypt's commitment to the two-state solution to the conflict.

Representative Fawzi al-Sherbasi of the Housing Committee **accused** Qatar of meddling with the Palestinian conflict in an attempt to prevent a peaceful solution to the ongoing situation.

Media Committee Chairman Osama Heikal **stated** that Egypt is in need of new laws regulating the media, as the last set of media laws were passed in 1976. Heikal **added** that the media has now come to be used as a tool to overthrow regimes. He also **referred** to media magnates attempting to gain influence through their programming and **said** that Egyptian television shows should reflect Egyptian moral standards. Heikal's comments follow continued attacks by representatives against the media in addition to calls to ratify the Media Bodies Law aimed at regulating the industry.

## Looking Ahead

- Parliament will **vote** on three laws Sunday, including amendments to the law on the National Railway Authority, the draft National Council for Women Law, and the draft Public Land Use Law. The Railway Law **amends** the bureaucratic structure of the national railway system, the National Council for Women Law **promotes** women's interests especially pertaining to involvement in the government, and the Public Land Use Law **concerns** the use of state property for public benefit.
- The Foreign Affairs Committee is **holding** a meeting next week with Cairo University political science professor Muhammad Kamal to discuss how to approach the United States vis-a-vis the Egyptian presidential election.
- The Tourism Committee will **visit** Luxor governorate following the presidential election to inspect the progress of tourism developments in the region.
- Parliament will **hold** three training workshops in conjunction with the Inter-Parliamentary Union Sunday through Tuesday next week. The sessions will **focus** on cyber crime, legislative drafting, and corruption.



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Egypt Parliament Watch is the most comprehensive project on Egypt's elected legislature, providing analysis of the body's performance in fulfilling its constitutionally mandated tasks, the legislation it produces, and the political dynamics at play.