



EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 27–MARCH 12, 2019

Summary

- The Constitutional Affairs Committee is holding several dialogue sessions with political figures and civil society members to discuss the proposed constitutional amendments. The body is expected to meet twice next week and complete its outreach by March 24. Following its meetings, the committee will meet for one week to finalize the proposed amendments before sending them to a plenary session of the House of Representatives to conduct a final vote.
- House of Representatives Spokesman Salah Hassiballah announced that the House will refrain from publishing the full text of future legislation until the body has met with relevant experts on the specific bills. This decision represents a growing lack of transparency present within the legislature.
- Following a train accident on February 27 at the Ramses Station in which 24 individuals died, the Transportation Committee began investigating the incident by meeting with figures in the national transportation industry. As part of a national reshuffling that occurred after the accident, the House ratified the appointment of Lieutenant General Kamal al-Wazir as transportation minister on March 10.

Notable Developments

Constitutional Amendments Progressing Through House Committee:

The Constitutional Affairs Committee's review of the proposed constitutional amendments is underway, as the committee **stopped** accepting additional proposals from representatives on March 9. The committee is currently in the midst of a 15-day review period in which it will **consult** civil society members, legal experts, and university officials regarding their opinions of the proposals. Representative Helmi al-Sharif, a member of the committee, **stated** that the first such dialogue is to occur March 18 and 19, and Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al is **expected** to attend the sessions. At the conclusion of the 15-day consulting period, the committee will **convene** for one week to finalize the proposed amendments before sending them to plenary session for a final vote. If passed, the amendments will then be voted on in a national referendum, which is expected to take place before the start of Ramadan in early May.

House Restricts Availability of Legislation:

Parliamentary Spokesman Salah Hassiballah **stated** that the House will refrain from releasing the full text of legislation until the body has conducted community dialogues with experts on the particular legislation in question. In the past, news outlets generally posted the full text of legislation after it had been approved by the House, yet this information has become increasingly unavailable. This announcement represents a growing lack of transparency within the legislature that TIMEP has documented in its cumulative session reports.¹

Representatives React to Tragic Train Crash and Condemn Neglect:

On February 27, a train at Cairo's Ramses Train Station **exploded** after colliding with a concrete barrier, resulting in 24 deaths and at least 50 injured, prompting Transportation Minister Hesham Arafat's resignation. Since being appointed transportation minister in February 2017, Arafat appeared before the House's plenary session or its standing committees on at least 10 occasions to discuss various issues associated with the transportation industry, including previous train crashes that also resulted in fatalities. Following the incident, the Transportation Committee **held** a private meeting with officials from the Transportation Ministry and the National Railway Authority to discuss the accident. A delegation from the committee later **visited** the station to assess the damage, where Committee Chairman Hesham Abdel Wahid **attributed** the accident to 70 years of neglect within the railway system.

After Arafat's resignation, President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi **appointed** Lieutenant General Kamal al-Wazir, the chairman of the Armed Forces Engineering Authority, as the new minister of transportation. The House subsequently **approved** Wazir's nomination on March 10.

¹ See TIMEP's report on the most recent session of Egypt's House of Representatives [here](#).

Other Developments

In Legislation:

The House **approved** the government's draft Western Desert Excavation Law on March 11. The law **authorizes** the minister of petroleum and the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation to contract with the Egyptian Phosphate Company to search for phosphate reserves in the Western Desert.

The House **approved** the government's amendments to the Medical Practice Law on March 12. The law **requires** medical professionals in Egypt to obtain at a minimum a bachelor's degree from a university in Egypt or the same degree from an accredited university in another country. Medical professionals will also be required to **undergo** government training in order to be recognized by the Ministry of Health.

The House **approved** the Reconciling Building Violations Law on March 12. The law **designates** new restrictions for construction on land previously zoned for agricultural purposes.

The House **approved** the government's amendments to the University Law on March 11 following State Council review. The amendments **reduce** restrictions placed on faculty members' paid administrative leave and loosen restrictions on the ability of faculty members to hold positions at two separate institutions simultaneously.

The House **approved** amendments to the Gas Market Activities Law on March 11. The amendments **nullify** an existing article in the law, which determines how gas-related funds are allocated in the state budget based on revenue gained from licensing procedures and business transactions.

The House **approved** the Electronic Payments Law on March 11. The law **requires** companies to compensate their employees, except temporary workers, using electronic mechanisms as a means of phasing out cash transactions.

The House **agreed** in principle to the government's draft Technological Universities Law on March 10, which aims to improve the technological sector within higher education.

In Session:

The Arab Affairs Committee **issued** a statement highlighting the importance of the Arab League in resolving conflicts within the Arab world, with an emphasis on the ongoing situation in Palestine.

Abdel 'Al **stated** that he received a request to lift the immunity of an anonymous representative, which he subsequently referred to the General Secretariat of the House to review.

The African Affairs Committee **expressed** condolences to Ethiopia following the crashed jet that killed 157 individuals, including six Egyptians..

In News and Statements:

The African Affairs Committee **hosted** Tunisia's ambassador to Egypt, Nejib Mnif, on March 11 to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries.

Representative Elizabeth Shaker of the Health Committee **described** the decision of Health Minister Hala Zayad to dismiss the director of the National Heart Institute as "random," adding that Zayad's decision-making skills have been questionable for several months.

Deputy Speaker of the House al-Sayyid al-Sharif **hosted** his counterpart from the Indonesian People's Representative Council, Fadli Zon, on March 7 in the presence of each deputy's

respective parliamentary associates. The two officials discussed historical relations, bilateral agreements, mutual economic opportunities, and foreign exchange students.

During a meeting between Abdel 'Al and Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali al-Ghanim on March 7, Abdel 'Al **noted** the importance of bilateral relations between their respective countries.

Representative Alaa Salam of the Energy Committee **accused** Petroleum Minister Tariq al-Mulla of embezzling over LE250 million from the state for the failed company Petro Trade.

Abdel 'Al **bestowed** the presidency of the Arab Parliament on the Jordanian Speaker of Parliament after completing his one-year term as the organization's rotating president.

During a session of the Arab Parliament in Jordan, Abdel 'Al **denounced** U.S. President Donald Trump for closing the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem stating that the decision was unjust toward Palestinians.

Abdel 'Al **met** with Jordanian Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz on March 4 to discuss issues of mutual concern for their respective countries as well as regional developments.

Abdel 'Al, along with other prominent parliamentary officials, **hosted** Albanian President Ilir Meta on February 27, where the group discussed improving bilateral relations in the fields of politics, the economy, and cultural dynamics.

Free Egyptians Party Chairman Essam Khalil **hosted** Tanya Fernandez, Cuba's ambassador to Egypt, on February 27 to discuss means of improving bilateral economic and cultural relations.

The Egyptian-German Parliamentary Friendship Association **met** with German Bundestag Vice-President Thomas Oppermann on February 27 to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries, especially in terms of illegal migration.

Looking Ahead

- Abdel 'Al will **meet** with Higher Education Minister Khaled Abdel Ghaffar on March 13 to discuss the recently approved amendments to the Medical Professionals Law.



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EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH

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.