

EGYPT: Egypt issues law allowing president to appoint judges

Reuters (28.04.2017) – <http://reut.rs/2p4eEHP> – Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has ratified legal amendments that allow the president to make judicial appointments to its top courts, a move judges said would erode the independence of the judicial system.

Parliament passed the amendments on Wednesday but some judges had called on Sisi to hold off on ratifying them, calling the amendments an unconstitutional breach of separation of powers.

The amendments were issued on Thursday in the official gazette, formally passing them into law.

Elected in 2014 after leading the military's 2013 overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood's President Mohamed Mursi, Sisi has deflected Western criticism that he has suppressed political opposition and human rights and has sought to present himself as an indispensable bulwark against terrorism in the Middle East.

Egypt's judiciary has long enjoyed a degree of independence. But judges say a crackdown on the judiciary that started in 2014 has aimed at bringing it under tighter government control.

The amendments stipulate that each court nominate three of its most senior members for leadership, one of whom the president will choose to be its head.

This is a departure from the old system, in which leadership generally passed to the court's most senior member and the president signed off in a largely ceremonial role.

Egypt's judges club, an informal professional association, said on Wednesday it would hold an emergency meeting on May 5 to discuss how to move forward after parliament passed the law. It called on Sisi at the time not to ratify it.

Supporters of the amendments say they are necessary to strengthen Sisi's authority on critical issues such as combating Islamist militants.

Sisi declared a three-month state of emergency nationwide this month after two Islamic State suicide bombings at churches in Tanta and Alexandria killed at least 45.

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