

## Opposition fear new NDP moves will facilitate Gamal succession

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CAIRO: Political opposition have been heavily critical of the ruling National Democratic Party's (NDP) conference and the decisions that have been taken in this year's annual party bonanza.

At the opening of the conference Saturday, President Hosni Mubarak was re-elected as the chairman of the NDP with 99 percent of the vote. Mubarak was the only candidate.

More ominously for opposition groups, the President's son Gamal was one of 50 people appointed to a newly formed Supreme Committee, which under the latest constitutional amendments allows any of the members to be the party's presidential candidate.

"I believe that the NDP conference is an internal matter that will produce nothing beneficial for the [Egyptian] citizen and is nothing more than a step towards Gamal Mubarak inheriting power," Gamal Nassar, media advisor to the Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Guide, told *Daily News Egypt*.

"The NDP has been hegemonic on the political scene for over two decades and this has led to stagnation. They haven't allowed any other movement, whether political or populist, to flourish," he added.

Deputy of Al Ghad party and former judge Morsi Al Sheikh told *Daily News Egypt* "The NDP say there is change with more democracy and citizen rights and political parties, but none of that has been achieved. Not one promise Mubarak gave in his presidential campaign was kept. Violence is as it is, discrimination is as it is, oppression is as it is and political parties have been decimated."

Former leader of Al Ghad Ayman Nour ran against Mubarak in the 2005 [presidential elections](#). He is currently serving a five-year prison sentence after being convicted on charges of fraud and forging signatures to establish the party.

"As you see with the incarceration of Ayman Nour, all the parties are being weakened by the NDP so things stay as they are and they keep holding on to the reins of power," Al Sheikh said, "They fight change, they crack down on protests and imprison journalists."

Former leader of the opposition Kefaya movement George Ishaq told *Daily News Egypt* that "this has all been pre-planned, with local newspapers reporting that Mubarak won the election in a landslide on the morning it took place. These decisions are to open the door for Gamal to assume the presidency. We tell the NDP that their games are clear, and we see what they are doing."

"There is now a marriage of power and capital, and this has led to the introduction of more corruption," Nassar said, referring to the influx of the nation's most powerful businessmen swelling the ranks of the NDP.

“Economically, there has been increased unemployment and price hikes, and monopolizing of certain industries such as steel. The stock exchange has been unstable because of speculation by certain individuals and only people with ties to the party are benefiting from this supposed economic boom,” he said.

“As for our foreign policy, the role of Egypt has diminished in Palestine, and there is an unclear position in Iraq and Sudan,” added Nassar.

“In the end, the NDP has put itself on one side, and everybody else on the other, like judges, journalists, and workers,” Nassar said. “It has appropriated government institutions for its limited interests and not the interests of others. They have fancy slogans, but where are these slogans from reality?”

However, Ishaq believes that it will not be so easy for Gamal Mubarak to assume the presidency because of staunch opposition to the idea among Egyptians. “There will be popular opposition if Gamal assumes the presidency,” he said.

Previously, only the chairman of the party could be the party’s candidate for presidency, but with the new constitutional amendments in place, a member of the Supreme Committee would be eligible.

Al Sheikh said, “This is not a strange matter. They said that Mubarak would remain as head of the party and appointing Gamal to the Supreme Committee is to nominate him in the future for the presidency. What is strange is that no one ran against Mubarak in the party elections so what is the point of holding elections where he gets 99 percent? This shows it is a charade and it is neither a liberal nor democratic party, because democracy means competition.

“The point of all this is to create a façade for public opinion that there are elections, this is a referendum and not an election,” he added.

Gamal Mubarak is also head of the policy secretariat in the party, and the latest developments in the party conference have fuelled the notion of his ascendancy to the presidency after his father.

Al Wafd party member Mounir Fakhry Abdel-Nour was the only opposition member to be nonplussed with the developments at the NDP conference.

“It has no importance. The Supreme Committee was formed to adhere with Article 76 of the constitution which talks about such a body,” he told Daily News Egypt, “the NDP didn’t have such a body so it was created by combining the political bureau with the policies committee.”

He poured scorn on the idea that this was a move which would facilitate Gamal Mubarak’s rise to power. “It is not a sign of anything.”

Both the president and his son have refuted the notion of succession in the past, with the president declaring that power shall not be “inherited.” However, it is widely believed that Gamal’s rise through the political ranks of the party will lead him to the main seat of power.

*The NDP conference will continue until Tuesday.*