

Guardian

Jordanian PM brings Muslim fundamentalists into cabinet

Wafa Amr and agencies
in Amman

THE Jordanian Prime Minister, Mudar Badran, brought five members of the powerful fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood party into his government yesterday.

The changes, in addition to the appointment of a new foreign minister, followed six weeks of negotiations between Mr Badran and the Brotherhood.

The reshuffle gives Muslim fundamentalists control over health, education, social welfare, religious affairs and justice.

The sacking of the Religious Affairs Minister, Ali Faqir, was seen as likely to please Saudi Arabia, which was angered by public attacks on the Saudi royal family after Riyadh invited foreign troops onto its soil after Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait.

Some diplomats suggested his removal was a condition for the resumption of aid to Amman.

The foreign minister's job goes to Taher Masri, a Palestinian from the West Bank town of Nablus.

Mr Masri, chairman of the lower house of parliament's for-

ign affairs committee, has shown stronger public support for Iraq's Gulf crisis stand than his predecessor, Marwan Qassem, but the move is not expected to affect Jordan's foreign policy, which is set by King Hussein. He also enjoys good relations with the PLO.

Despite the Brotherhood's victory in securing cabinet posts, many officials do not regard the change as a setback for Jordan's liberal society. Brotherhood leaders were said to be less than satisfied with the changes.

Since its launching in the 1950s, the Brotherhood has enjoyed close relations with the government, and generally flourished at the expense of the left. However, after last year's reforms the left was given some freedoms.

Analysts believe that the Brotherhood will not adopt a combative approach but will wait to gain further popular support.

The increased influence of the Brotherhood and the growing surge of Islam has become a sensitive issue for the government. Some analysts argue that the Brotherhood's participation in government will moderate rather than radicalise the fundamentalists.

Brotherhood five appointed to Jordan cabinet

The Jordanian Prime Minister reshuffled his cabinet yesterday, appointing a new Foreign Minister and bringing five members of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood into the government.

Mr Mudar Badran appointed Mr Taher Masri, former Foreign Minister, to replace Mr Marwan Qassem as Foreign Minister in a move apparently to ease pressure from the Brotherhood, the biggest bloc in Parliament.

Mr Masri, chairman of the lower house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, has shown stronger public support for Iraq's Gulf crisis stand than Mr Qassem but the move is not expected to affect Jordan's foreign policy, which is set by King Hussein. -- Reuter

Jordan pins hopes on Brothers

DHAHRAN — By bringing five Muslim Brothers into the cabinet in a reshuffle, Jordan's Prime Minister is co-opting the largest political grouping into government at a time when the economic and political problems facing the country have seldom looked bleaker, writes Charles Richards.

In the November 1989 elections, the Muslim Brothers, an Islamic group, campaigned on the all-embracing but banal slogan "Islam is the solution". Such a formula will be hard pressed to solve Jordan's great economic problems, its rising unemployment and huge foreign debt. The Prime Minister, Mudar Badran, may be calculating that by giving the Muslim Brothers such responsibility at this time he will expose their shortcomings in actual administration.

However, failure to bring them in would have discredited Jordan's much-trumpeted experiment with greater popular participation. And the new ministers have taken over the key portfolios of education, justice and health where they can influence social affairs.

The other major change is a new Foreign Minister. Taher al-Masri, of a prominent Palestinian family, regains the job from which he resigned to stand for parliament. He is more interested in the Palestinian issue than the outgoing Minister, Marwan Qassem, who was both all at sea over the Gulf crisis and, as an East Banker, was deeply unsympathetic to the Palestinians. The formulation of foreign policy remains in the hands of the King.

■ JERUSALEM — David Levy, Israel's Foreign Minister, yesterday warned Jordan about beefing up extremism by including the Muslim Brothers. AFP reports.

"Very, very extreme elements are being strengthened in Jordan. It's a red light that's being lit for that country's authority," he said.

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