

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.

Independent
3-1-91