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Jordan has youngest ever PM

BY JOHN ADNAN

Financial Times, May 29, 1973 AMMAN, May 28

MR. ZAID AL RIFAI, King Hussein's chief political adviser, has formed a new young Government here following the resignation of Mr. Ahmed al Lawzi on grounds of ill health.

Mr. Rifai, a Harvard-educated political scientist, is at 36 the youngest Prime Minister Jordan has had. He is the son of the late Samir Al Rifai, one of Jordan's Prime Ministers in the early years of King Hussein's reign and was the last Jordanian Ambassador in London.

The Government has been charged by King Hussein in his letter of appointment with reorganising and reforming Government administration with an implied strengthening of bureaucratic procedures and clamp-down on corruption. Mr. Rifai has also been asked to continue measures to maintain internal security in Jordan and give emphasis on development.

There is no possibility of rapprochement with other Arab states who support the PLO in guerrilla groups. Mr. Rifai's first clash with guerrillas came in 1970, before the September 1970 war when guerrilla organisations named him as one of their chief enemies in the country. In June he was forced to leave his post in the royal court along with the Chief of Security, the Commander of the Army and the Commander of the Royal Guard Regiment in face of guerrilla demands.

Mr. Rifai's cabinet is composed

largely of young technocrats. The majority of the Ministers are under 45, and only one is over 50—the Minister for Reconstruction and Development, Dr. Subhi Amin Amer, who has held this post for several years.

The new Minister of National Economy is a theoretician, Dr. Kamal Abu Jabber, a young professor of Economics at the University of Jordan. The Minister of Finance is Dr. Nuri Shakk, brought over from his post as Head of the National Planning Council. A young judge, Mr. Saleem Masa'adi becomes Minister of Justice. A key official of the Arab National Union, Jordan's only political organisation, becomes Interior Minister for Municipal and Rural Affairs.

A new Ministry for affairs of the occupied territories has been

created, witnessing Jordan's growing concern at the situation in the West Bank and the first Minister is the youngest in any Jordanian government, 29-year-old Mr. Taher Al Masri, a businessman and industrialist from a prominent business family in Nablus the important West Bank town under Israeli occupation. Mr. Masri was in the West Bank on a private visit recently.

Richard Johns writes: Diplomats in London yesterday discounted a report in the Jerusalem Post to the effect that the new Jordanian government was willing to negotiate a peace settlement directly with Israel. The newspaper said that the "decision" was taken at a meeting between King Hussein and Mr. Rifai on Saturday.

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Baathists retain power

BY OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT BEIRUT, May 28

MEMBERS of the ruling Baath Party and their allies in the National Progressive Front have won two-thirds of the seats of the People's Council which was elected over the week-end, according to the official results announced by Colonel Ali Zaza, Minister of the Interior.

Five Communists, including the Party secretary General Khalid Bakdash, have been re-

turned. This is the largest number of Communists ever to be elected to Parliament in Syria. Mr. Bakdash, regarded as the Arab world's most noted pro-Moscow Communist, served in the Syrian Parliament in 1957.

Our Foreign Staff writes: Diplomatic relations between the U.N. and Syria, broken off nearly six years ago at the time of the June War in 1967, have been formally resumed.

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the champ is probably the club president, J. G. "Tod" Slaughter who, without getting a place, went through the whole agony 29 times between 1938 and 1964. His rival must be J. B. Cross who over a span of 29 years finished 15 times between 1937 and 1961. It is such feats which support the view that the US, awarded to finishers in the walk and traditionally worn each Friday for some reason no one can remember is "the only tie in the Stock Exchange won on merit".

How to survive to be PM

Ziad Rifai, the new Jordanian Prime Minister, is the first Premier appointed by King Hussein who is actually younger than the monarch. What Rifai, 36, shares with King Hussein, born a year earlier, is a capacity for physical survival. He is known in Britain because 18 months ago, when Ambassador here, his car was machine-gunned by Black September gunmen in West London. Rifai escaping with a wounded hand.

Back in 1960, when attached to the Premier's office, Rifai was asked to fetch a file by the then Prime Minister, Hazza Majali. When he was out of the room, a bomb exploded killing Majali and 10 others. And in July, 1970, in the run-up to the Jordanian Civil War, King Hussein and Rifai drove out together from the Hammar Palace to investigate an outbreak of shooting between the army and commandos. They found themselves under a hail of machine gun fire. Rifai persuaded the King to take cover in a ditch where he and an Army major jumped on Hussein to shield him. Hussein complained that together they

had done him far more harm than the commandos.

Rifai comes from one of the powerful East Bank families which have little sympathy with the Palestinians and has been a prime target for the commando movement since 1970 when it was believed that he strongly advised King Hussein to take the initiative against them before it was too late. Friendly with Hussein since they were together at the Christian Missionary School in Amman, Rifai's father, Simat Rifai was one of Hussein's early prime ministers; his uncle, Abdel Monem is another recent premier, and he is married to the daughter of yet another, Hanjat Tashouni.

Educated at Harvard and Columbia (but by no means as pro-American as his enemies say) he cut a polished figure as ambassador in London. He returned to be the King's Political Adviser, in which role he may well have wielded more power than his rather colourless predecessor as prime minister, Ahmed al Lawzi. Rifai has observed that Jordan has two types of premier, those who go to the king before making every decision and those who consult him only on broad policy directives. Undoubtedly, Rifai sees himself in the latter category. While in London he made no secret of the fact that he would eventually be premier.

Somebody up there . . .

A Canadian radio station was recently off the air for 24 hours when its transmitting aerial was struck by lightning. The incident occurred at the end of a "phone-in" show. The show's subject? "Is God dead?"

Observer