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News Digest for July

AFRICA

Increasing international isolation of Nigeria

40630

 also including resignation of Ghanaian Finance Minister
 Inkatha election plan for Kwazulu-Natal • Zaire: ousting of Monsengwo • Rwanda: high prison death toll • ECOWAS

AMERICAS

United States: pressure on Clinton

40636

• also including violence in Mexican province • Nicaragua: constitutional changes • Argentina: inauguration of Menem • Peru: investiture of Fujimori • Brazil: de-indexation

ASIA-PACIFIC

Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

• also including Thai election • US recognition of Vietnam • Chinese detention of Harry Wu • Taiwan: tension over Chinese missile test • Japan: government's election setback, Pacific War issues • South Korean rice shipments to North • Sri Lanka: army offensive • ASEAN meetina

EUROPE

Hospitalization of Yeltsin

40650

• also including Chechenya ceasefire • Armenian elections • new Croat commander • UK Conservative Party leadership contest, rioting in Northern Ireland • Spain: González and the "dirty war" • Paris underground bomb • Turkey: democratic reforms • Europol Convention

MIDDLE EAST -**ARAB WORLD** INTERNATIONAL

Algeria: failure of government-FIS talks

40659

also including Israeli government changes
 Qatari Cabinet reshuffle

First arraignment under UK War Crimes Act

40663

• also including Amnesty International annual report • State of the World Population 1995

Papal letter to women

News Digest for August

AFRICA

Establishment of new Ethiopian republic

• also including new Rwandan government • Expulsion of refugees from Zaïre • Angola: dos Santos-Savimbi meeting • São Tomé and Príncipe: coup attempt • Liberia: peace agreement

• new Madagascan government • new ADB president • SADC summit

AMERICAS

United States: Perot's Texas conference

40671

• also including Bermudan independence referendum, resignation of Prime Minister • Chile: proposed legislation curbing role of military • Mercosur summit

ASIA-PACIFIC

Japan: major Cabinet reshuffle

40678

 also including Japanese war apology
 killing of hostage in Kashmir
 Vietnam: visit by US Secretary of State • Protests over planned French nuclear tests • ARF meeting

EUROPE

Bosnian Serb capture of Srebrenica and Zepa

 also including NATO assault on Serb targets in Bosnia, Croat offensive in Krajina
 Yeltsin's return to work • Ukrainian currency crisis • CEFTA agreement • dismissal of French Finance Minister • Northern Ireland: deadlock over all-party talks • inauguration of German-Dutch army corps • ETA plot to kill Spanish King • Italy: approval of pensions reform

MIDDLE EAST -ARAB WORLD

INTERNATIONAL

Iraq: defection of Hussein Kamil

40701

 also including new Saudi Arabian Cabinet
 progress in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, suicide bomb attacks in Israel • Algeria: announcement of elections

Chinese nuclear tests

40706

• also including UNDP Human Development Report • UN agreement on fish stocks



New Saudi Cabinet

Distribution of portfolios as of Aug. 24, 1995 (*—new appointment; †—altered responsibilities:

Prince Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz Crown Prince; First Deputy Prime Minister; Commander of National Guard

Prince Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz Second
Deputy Prime Minister; Defence and Civil
Aviation

Prince Miteb ibn Abdul Aziz Public Works and Housing

Prince Nayef ibn Abdul Aziz Interior Prince Saud al-Faisal Foreign Affairs Abdullah ibn Muhammed ibn Ibrahim al-Shaikh Justice

Khalid ibn Muhammad al-Anqari Higher Education

Abdullah ibn Abdulmohsen al-Turki Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance

†Sulaiman Abdul Aziz al-Sulaim Finance and National Economy

Abdul al-Wahhab Abdul Salam Attar Planning

Mahmoud ibn Mohammad al-Safar Pilgrimage

*Osama ibn Jaafar ibn Ibrahim al-Faqih Commerce

*Osama ibn Abdul-Majid Shobokshi Health

*Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz ibn Muammar Agriculture and Water Resources

*Ali Ibrabim al-Naimi Oil and Mineral Resources

*Ali ibn Talal al-Jehani Telegraphs, Posts and Telephones

*Fouad ibn Adbul-Salam ibn Mohammad Farisi Information

*Mohammad ibn Ibrahim al-Jarallah Municipal and Rural Affairs

*Mohammad ibn Ahmad al-Rashid

*Mousaed ibn Mohammad al-Sulaymi

*Nasir ibn Muhammad al-Sallum Transport

*Hashem ibn Abdullah ibn Hashem Yamani Industry and Electricity

Ministers of State

*Mutlib ibn Abdullah al-Nafisa

*Abdul-Aziz ibn Ibrahim al-Mansei

*Musaed ibn Mohammad al-Ayban

*Madani ibn Abdul Qadir Alaqi

*Mohammad ibn Abdel-Aziz al-Shaihk

before, in which some 160 of the 250 posts under review were reallocated.

End to cash crisis

In comments published on Aug. 7 in al-Seyasseh and its sister paper the Arab Times, King Fahd declared an end to the cash crisis caused by the 1991 Gulf war and low oil prices. It was reported that the government had repaid in May the last instalment of a US\$4.5 billion loan which it had taken out to pay for the Gulf war, and had began paying

the US\$5 billion of debt owed to local businesses.

Last article p. 40662; reference article pp. R141-142.

BAHRAIN

Pardon for rioters - Discovery of "subversive group"

The Amir of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, issued a pardon on Aug. 16 for 150 people sentenced in connection with the recent riots [see p. 40663].

On Aug. 23 sources within the Interior Ministry said that public security organs had uncovered a "subversive group" whose seven members were reported to have confessed to committing acts of arson and sabotage of public and private installation in the Diraz and Barbar areas.

Last article p. 40663; reference article p. R132.

KUWAIT

Approval of 1995/96 budget

The National Assembly on Aug. 22 finally approved the government's 1995/96 budget (for the year beginning July 1) after being assured that the government would submit a five-year deficit reduction plan by the start of the next parliamentary session, scheduled for late October. This compromise ended four months of tension between the government and the National Assembly, which had refused to pass the budget unless presented with "a clear plan to tackle the deficit" [see pp. 40575; 40621].

The 1995/96 budget projected total revenues of KD 2,910 million (approximately US\$10 bn) and estimated expenditure at KD 4,230 million leaving a net deficit of KD 1,320 million.

Partial approval of amendments to bad debt law

Differences between the government and the National Assembly were eased further by the Assembly's partial approval, on Aug. 16, of the government's amendments to the 1993 bad debt law which relaxed the repayment terms on between \$15 billion and \$20 billion in bad debts owed by the private sector. The amendments were passed by 37 votes to 10. Debtors choosing the option of cash settlements of debts due in September 1995 would be allowed to repay in five annual instalments, beginning Dec. 6. Debtors repaying over a longer period would have less debtforgiveness. A proposal to lengthen their repayment period from 10 to 20 years was rejected.

The original bad debt law had laid down a schedule for debtors setting March 1994 as the deadline

to register their preferred method of payment. This deadline was later extended to October 1994. In early 1995 a majority of debtors pressed the government for more time to pay, forcing the introduction of the amendments.

The government justified its proposals for delayed payment on the grounds that enforcing repayments in September would damage the economy. However, some opposition deputies accused the government of enriching politically influential debtors at state expense. On Aug. 8 the parliamentary finance and economic committee also rejected some aspects of the amendments.

Last article p. 40621; reference article p. R136.

MIDDLE EAST

Progress of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations

During July and August, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators strove to reach an accord (widely known as "Oslo B") on implementation of the next stage of the Palestinian self-rule agreement. Although discussion on the accord was intensive, and was interrupted only briefly by the controversy over suicide bomb attacks on Israeli civilian targets [see below], a full agreement had not been reached as of early September.

In May, Israel and the Palestine National Authority (PNA) had committed themselves to a July 1 deadline for reaching an accord [see p. 40572]. When the two sides failed to meet this deadline [see p. 40618], officials on July 4 set a new target date of July 25.

On July 16, some 120 Palestinian and Israeli officials opened an intensive round of negotiations in northern Israel. Yassir Arafat, the Chair of the PNA and the PLO, and Shimon Peres, the Israeli Foreign Minister, met in the Egyptian city of Alexandria on July 19 in an effort to quicken the pace of the negotiations. On July 23 the two sides conceded that they would not meet the July 25 deadline.

The negotiations were suspended on July 24 when a suicide bomber attacked a bus in Tel Aviv [see below]. Talks resumed at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba in late July.

Taba Declaration

Arafat and Peres joined the Taba negotiations on Aug. 7-9, and reached an interim agreement which was initialled on Aug. 11. This interim agreement, the so-called Taba Declaration, provided for Palestinian direct elections for an executive and legislative council (and, separately, for a president/chairman of the council) and for the transfer of much civilian authority from Israeli to Palestinian hands. The most contentious part of the agreement covered Israel's military redeployment from the West Bank, and provided for a controversial and complicated staggered withdrawal process.

The Financial Times of Aug. 14 reported that under the terms of the interim agreement, the West Bank would become "a patchwork of Palestinian cantons" during the "phase two" period leading up to "final status" negotiations (scheduled to start in mid-1997 at the earliest). The agreement provided for the creation of four "area" categories in the West Bank:

Area A comprised six of the seven main West Bank towns (Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Qalqiliya, Ramallah and Bethlehem, but not Hebron), which would immediately be placed under the PNA's civilian and military control.

Area B comprised the majority of the 460 Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Civilian authority for the villages would be transferred immediately to the PNA, but Israel would retain control of overall security.

Area C comprised most of the rural, sparsely populated hinterland. Israel would begin deployment away from these areas in mid-1996 and complete it by July 1997 at the earliest.

Area D comprised the 144 Israeli settlements in the West Bank along with Israel's military installations. Israel would retain full control of these areas until the end of "final status" talks, scheduled for May 1999.

The interim agreement was approved by the Israeli Cabinet on Aug. 13.

Gonen Segev, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, voted against the agreement and Ehud Barak, the Interior Minister, and Shimon Shitrit, Minister of Science and Technology and Religious Affairs, abstained. Peres reported to the Cabinet that the deal "kept the following in Israeli hands: 73 per cent of the lands of the territories; 97 per cent of the security and 80 per cent of the water".

The PLO executive committee met in Tunis on Aug. 14-15 to discuss the agreement. No vote was taken, but reports suggested that some members opposed concessions made by Arafat regarding the redeployment.

Some Palestinian critics of the agreement argued that it would make it practically impossible for the PNA to govern the West Bank as a single territorial unit

Farouk Qaddumi, one of Arafat's most ardent critics, boycotted the executive committee meeting and instead issued a "National Transitional Programme Blueprint" from Jordan in which he resolutely opposed the Taba Declaration. The agreement was also vehemently rejected by the "rejectionist" Palestinian factions and by the Syrian government.

With the initialling of the Taba Declaration, the main stumbling blocs preventing the signing of "Oslo B" included the issue of Hebron (where some 450 Jewish settlers lived in the midst of 100,000 Palestinians), the participation of Palestinians from East Jerusalem in Palestinian elections, and the division of scarce water resources.

On Aug. 24 the two sides reportedly agreed to set aside the water issue until "final status" negotiations.

On Aug. 27 Israel and the PLO signed a protocol in Cairo allowing for the eventual

transfer of eight civic powers to Palestinians in the West Bank.

The protocol, signed by Jamil Tarifi for the PLO and Oren Shahor for Israel, provided for the transfer of authority over labour, trade and industry, gas and petrol, insurance, postal services, statistics and census, agriculture, and local government. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Shahor said that "the agreement will be fully implemented during the coming weeks".

Economic affairs

The Financial Times of July 28 reported that the Palestine Monetary Authority, the embryonic central bank of Palestine, had started to license, inspect and supervise commercial banks operating in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

The report described this as the Palestinians' first attempt to exercise authority over monetary policy, and said that it represented "a tangible step" in the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Suicide bombs - Other security issues

A suicide bomb attack on a crowded commuter bus in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan on July 24 resulted in the death of six Israeli civilians. A further 30 Israelis were injured in the attack. The last suicide bomb attack on Israeli civilians had taken place in January in Netanya, when Islamic *Jihad* bombers killed 21 Israelis [see p. 40380].

On Aug. 1, a little known Palestinian faction, *Hezbollah*-Palestine, claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement issued in Beirut. However, Israeli officials claimed that the attack was carried out by *Hamas*, the main Islamist "rejectionist" faction.

Both the Israeli government and mainstream Palestinian leaders condemned the attack, and vowed to carry on with peace negotiations after a short break to allow for the dead to be buried. However, Likud and other Israeli opposition parties responded to the attack by calling for an end to the peace negotiations.

A member of the *Izz al-Din Qassam* battalions (the military wing of *Hamas*) carried out a suicide bomb attack on a bus in West Jerusalem on Aug. 21, killing five Israelis and wounding 107 others. The Israeli government and mainstream Palestinian leaders condemned the attack, but again pledged to carry on with peace negotiations.

Israel sealed off the Palestinian self-rule area of Jericho shortly after the bombing, claiming that three *Hamas* members involved in the attack were hiding in the region. On Aug. 24 Israel demanded that the Palestinian authorities in Jericho hand over the suspects, but the PNA refused, claiming that they had already sentenced two of them to terms of imprisonment for anti-PNA activities and that the third could not be found. Eventually, after a stand-off which lasted until Aug. 30, Israel lifted the closure of Jericho.

On Aug. 23 Israel had announced the discovery and arrest of a Nablus-based ring of 30 Hamas activists who it claimed were responsible for the two suicide bomb attacks. Two men described as "ringleaders" (Nasser Issa and Hatem Ismail) had been arrested before the Aug. 21 bombing, but had

only confessed to any involvement after the attack. Within Israel, this fact prompted a debate about interrogation techniques, with many senior figures arguing that the Aug. 21 attack could have been prevented if the security forces had been allowed to use more forceful methods to extract information from the suspects.

Issa and Ismail were reportedly trained by *Hamas* military expert Yahya Ayyesh (also known as "The Engineer"). On Aug. 24 Arafat ordered a search for Ayyesh, and Palestinian police arrested at least 30 *Hamas* members in the Gaza Strip on Aug. 28-29 during the search. On Aug. 18, using information supplied by Israel, Palestinian police had arrested three *Hamas* activists in Gaza.

On Aug. 25 an Israeli undercover unit killed two *Hamas* members in the West Bank town of Hebron. Israel claimed that the two (Ibrahim al-Qawasmi and Nader Shehadeh) were members of a cell linked to the Aug. 21 bombing.

Israeli security forces arrested a number of *Hamas* members on Aug. 27 in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to a police statement, "the arrests foiled plans to carry out a series of murderous attacks".

Two Israeli teenagers were shot and killed in the Wadi Qelt nature reserve in the West Bank on July 4. A telephone call to the Associated Press news agency claimed that the attack was carried out by the Popular front for the Liberation of Palestine.

[For Israeli request for extradition from USA of alleged *Hamas* leader Musa Abu Marzuq see p. 40705.]

Closure orders against Palestinian offices

Moshe Shahal, the Israeli Police Minister, on Aug. 27 signed closure orders against three Palestinian offices in East Jerusalem.

The order gave the Palestinian "statistics ministry", "health ministry" and "broadcasting authority" four days to close their offices. Israeli officials had earlier warned that they would "take steps" against Orient House, the PNA headquarters in East Jerusalem.

New pro-PNA Hamas splinter group

On Aug. 13, a group of activists broke away from *Hamas* and launched a new organization (*Al Massar*—The Path) which renounced violence and recognized the 1993 Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles. The organization was immediately recognized by the PNA.

The Independent of Aug. 14 reported that Israeli analysts suspected that the new group was an "Arafat front", designed to enhance the PNA's legitimacy and divide the Islamic opposition. The group's secretary-general was Mahmoud Abu Dan, an officer in Palestinian intelligence.

Campaign of civil disobedience by Jewish settlers

In July and August Jewish settlers carried out a campaign of civil disobedience in opposition to the further implementation of the Israeli-PLO peace accord.

At the forefront of the campaign was a group called Zu Artzenu ("this is our land"), which organized road blocks and the establishment of new,

makeshift settlements on Arab lands. The settlers' actions were given added force on July 12 when a group of 15 influential Zionist rabbis ruled that there was a Biblical prohibition against the evacuation of Israeli army bases in the West Bank. They called upon Israeli soldiers to disobey orders to hand any bases over to Palestinian control.

On a number of occasions the actions of the settlers ended in confrontation with the Israeli police and security forces, resulting in many arrests, and in confrontations with Arabs. On Aug. 13, settlers who were occupying Arab-owned hilltops in Beit El on the West Bank shot dead one of a group of Palestinians who were trying to demolish their makeshift settlement.

Israeli-Syrian track

No progress was reported on the Israeli-Syrian track of the Middle East peace process during July and August. In late June the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff had met in Washington for talks on security arrangements [see p. 40618].

Denis Ross, the US special co-ordinator for the Middle East peace talks, visited Syria and Israel in early July, but failed in his efforts to arrange another round of talks. Reports indicated that the talks were suspended over disagreements on security arrangements on the Golan Heights in the event of an Israeli withdrawal. The Syrians reportedly told Ross that they would not resume talks at military expert level until Israel withdrew its demand for the establishment of an early warning station on the Golan. Syria argued that the establishment of Israeli-manned stations would represent an infringement of Syrian sovereignty.

The Knesset, the Israeli legislature, defeated a bill on July 26 which would have made any decision to return any part of the Golan Heights to Syria contingent on the support of 70 of the 120 Knesset members, or a majority in a national referendum. The bill was defeated in a tied vote of 59-59.

In what was widely regarded as an unusual move, the US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyck, had reportedly met with Israeli opposition members prior to the Golan vote to lobby against the bill.

The Middle East Economic Digest of Aug. 11 reported that Rabin had told government ministers on July 30 that "he doubted a peace deal could be reached with Syria before the next general election in Israel", which was due to be held before November 1996.

Last article p. 40618.

ISRAEL

Allegations of Israeli war crimes

Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin on Aug. 20 rejected calls for an official investigation into allegations of Israeli war crimes against Egyptian prisoners of war during the 1956 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. A number of such allegations had surfaced during August.

At the start of the month, Brig.-Gen. (retd) Arye Biro admitted to Israeli journalists that he had ordered the execution of 49 Egyptian POWs during the 1956 war. On Aug. 16 Arieh Yitzhaki, an Israeli military historian, alleged that Israeli forces under the acting command of Benyamin Ben Eliezer, the current Housing Minister, had killed some 300 Egyptian POWs in the 1967 war. However, a spokesman for Eliezer said that he denied all knowledge of the alleged killings. On Aug. 17 Gabriel Brun, a journalist who served in the 1967 war, published an account in Yedioth Aharonoth describing how he saw fellow Israeli soldiers execute five Egyptian prisoners of war (POWs) in the Sinai.

Request for extradition from US of Hamas leader

The Israeli government on July 31 submitted a request to the US government to extradite Musa Abu Marzuq, who was allegedly the chair of the political bureau of the Islamist "rejectionist" group *Hamas*.

Israel accused Marzuq of devising *Hamas* policy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and of organizing the smuggling of arms, and sought his extradition on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, manslaughter and grievous bodily harm. Marzuq had lived in the USA for some 14 years on a permanent resident's visa, but had been stopped by New York immigration authorities on July 25 as he tried to re-enter the country after spending five months abroad. He was detained after his name showed up on a list of suspected terrorists.

Marzuq appeared before a US judge on Aug. 8 and a hearing on Israel's extradition request was scheduled for Oct. 17. *Hamas* issued a statement on Aug. 2 which warned of "devastating consequences" if the extradition went ahead.

Last article p. 40660; reference article pp. R135-36.

LEBANON

Fighting in south

The recent outbreak of fighting in the south [see p. 40661] was followed in August by a series of Israeli air and artillery attacks against *Hezbollah* targets, carried out from inside Israel's self-declared "security zone".

On Aug. 2-3 Israeli air and ground forces launched raids on *Hezbollah* bases in the Iqlim highlands near Sidon, north of the security zone, resulting in dozens of casualties.

On Aug. 19 three *Hezbollah* fighters were killed amid renewed artillery shelling of the area around the southern town of Nabatiyeh. Further Israeli shelling and air attacks in the region, reported on Aug. 23-26, killed three more *Hezbollah* fighters.

By Aug. 29, it was confirmed that a total of 12 *Hezbollah* fighters as well as three pro-Israeli militiamen had died in the fighting.

In an unrelated incident on Aug. 31, five Palestinian guerrillas including the son of Ahmed Jibril, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), were killed in an explosion during a training exercise in the village of Kussiya, east of Beirut.

Murder of pro-Syrian Sunni leader

Shaikh Nizar al-Halabi head of the pro-Syrian Sunni organization, the Islamic Charity Projects Society (Al Ahbash), was shot dead on Aug. 31 by unknown gunmen outside his home in Beirut's western sector.

Last article p. 40661; reference article p. R137.

EGYPT

Crackdown on Muslim militants - Executions of alleged terrorists

The crackdown against Muslim militants launched in the wake of the assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak in June in Addis Ababa [see pp. 40622-23; 40660] continued during August. On Aug. 6 two men convicted in May of murder and plotting to revive the *al-Jihad* organization [see p. 40576] were hanged.

Official sources confirmed further arrests during August of alleged members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood and suspected "terrorists".

The Interior Minister, Gen. Hussein Mohammed al-Alfi, declared on Aug. 27 that he had evidence that the Brotherhood had "contacts and co-ordination" with the Sudanese fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF) and with "terrorist groups", and that Sudan was a "dangerous centre of terrorist activity".

Alfi also claimed that recently arrested terrorist suspects had confessed to having been trained in Sudan. These allegations were intended to lend weight to the official Egyptian view of Sudanese involvement in the attempt on Mubarak's life. However, on Aug. 1 the Ethiopian authorities in vestigating the assassination identified all 11 members of the assassination team as Egyptian members of the Gamaat Islamiya, one of Egypt's principal clandestine militant Islamic groups.

Last article p. 40660; reference article p. R132.

LIBYA

Relations with Russia

On Aug. 1 the Egyptian news agency, quoting diplomatic sources, reported that talks in Moscow had resolved the problem of Libya's debt to the former Soviet Union, estimated at US\$2.5 billion, with Libya recognizing Russia as the heir of the former Soviet Union. An improvement in relations was further signalled by the reported signing of several agreements sanctioning Russian involvement in the construction of gas pipelines and electricity lines and stations in Libya.

Last article p. 40660; reference article p. R138.