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`een nominated and awaits final ,proval from the client.

The final report on bidders for supply of electrical equipment and cables for the plant has gone to ***National Electricity Corporation.*** An award is expected before the end of August.

Two other jobs — control and instrumentation systems, and civil works — are under review. An award is expected by September. Consultant is the UK's ***Ewbank Preece Consulting Group (EPCG).***

Early start to oil drilling expected

Drilling is to start within a year in two foreign-held oil concessions. Switzerland-based ***Pan Ocean Oil Company (Panoco)*** and ***US Oil Company (Usoco)*** hope to spud the first well in their Suakin offshore gas concession by the end of 1988, Usoco says.

The two firms were awarded a gas exploration and exploitation licence for the 13,000-hectare area in April. They say appraisal work is complete and seismic work will continue once a contractor has been chosen.

The firms' production-sharing arrangement divides the area in two. Block A centres on a 450-kilometre-square area in Suakin. This is surrounded by Block B, covering 12,550 square kilometres, Usoco says.

The US company hopes to produce a small volume of gas for export by mid-1989. By 1992, daily output could amount to 59 million cubic feet of natural gas and about 10,000 barrels of condensate. This could be used for domestic projects, such as a new nitrogenous fertiliser plant and petrochemicals unit.

The two companies aim to drill 24 wells in their five-year development programme at a cost of $176 million. They will put up the finance. Around $10 million will be spent this year.

A tender for drilling and other supplies will go out in September, although Usoco hopes to get most of the equipment locally. The company is negotiating with ***Western Geophysical Company of America*** about some of the work.

The US' ***Sun Oil Company*** hopes to start drilling in its northern concessions by early 1989. It is now processing the results of seismic surveys done by another American firm, ***Geosource.*** These show hydrocarbons potential in some exploration wells, but local reports of a major oil strike are exaggerated, Sun Oil says.

The company is seeking another partner for its joint venture. It operates in Sudan as ***Sun Sudan Oil Company***, with South Korea's ***Yukong*** and the US' ***Marathon Oil Company.***

IN BRIEF

● The government has announced a crackdown on unions, claiming that 19 of Sudan's 21 strikes this year were illegal. Strikes at strategic installations will be banned and illegal strikers fired. The walk-outs are in response to the general economic hardship and planned austerity measures. Bank employees and at least 22 other unions plan to demonstrate against privatisation plans for at least four state-owned banks (MEED 8:7:88). The government is looking at 76 state-owned enterprises for possible privatisation. A five-day strike by the accountants and cashiers union in July cost the treasury $9.5 million in revenue, officials quoted by Reuter say.

● A military co-operation agreement has been signed with Egypt to facilitate the exchange of military information, Defence Minister Abdel-Majid Hamed Khalil says.

● Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs Minister Berhanu Bayih paid a surprise visit to Khartoum at the end of July, in what is a further sign of improving relations. Both Ethiopia and Sudan are struggling to contain rebel uprisings and cope with the flood of refugees escaping war zones in their respective territories.

● Eight locust swarms have been sighted in Sudan since 9 July, covering areas of up to 30 square kilometres. The invasions, coupled with a recurrence of drought and displacement of refugees from the Horn of Africa, threaten to create a serious famine.

SYRIA

Oil output boost results in trade surplus

The trade account showed a $240 million surplus in the first half of 1987, following a rise in domestic oil output and continuing efforts to restrain imports. Government officials say the performance has been repeated in the first six months of 1988, following years of chronic trade deficits.

The most significant change in the trade account has been in the oil sector. In the first half of 1987, exports of fuels — mainly petroleum and products — totalled £Syr 1,302 million ($332 million), against imports of £Syr 443 million ($113 million). In 1986, fuel exports were £Syr 2,188 million ($557 million) and imports £Syr 1,949 million ($497 million). The cut in oil imports is a direct result of the start-up in production at the Deir al-Zor field. By mid-1987, output there was 50,000 barrels a day (b/d); it is now more than 100,000 b/d and will reach 200,000 b/d in 1989.

The oil factor has also resulted in a change in the pattern of trade, particularly with supplies from Iran dwindling to insignificance. Between 1982-85, Iran was the largest source of imports by a big margin, supplying 5 million-6 million tonnes of crude oil, worth more than $700 million, a year. In 1986, Iran dropped to fifth place, supplying goods valued at $186 million. In the first half of 1987, imports from Iran totalled just $2.2 million, with exports there rising to the equivalent of $48 million.

The bulk of crude oil import requirements in January-June 1987 was met by Libya.

Otherwise, the main trading partners were Italy, West Germany, France, Romania and the Soviet Union.

Syria: trade account, January 1986 - June 1987
(£Syr million)

	Jan-June 1987	Jan-Dec 1986
Exports	3,198	5,199
Imports	2,253	10,709
Balance	+ 945	- 5,510

Exchange rate: $1 = £Syr 3.925 (fixed official rate, 1986-87)
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus

IN BRIEF

● Italy's ***Gruppo Industrie Elettromeccaniche per Impianti all'Estero (GIE)*** has formally signed a DM60 million ($33 million) contract to build three substations. The project will be financed by mixed credits, including an Italian government loan. The 400-kV substations will be built in Adra, Hama and Aleppo (MEED 26:3:88).

● The local ***Mount Kassioun Company*** is to work on the first stage of the Al-Wahdeh dam project in Jordan. Mount Kassioun is part of the consortium — including Italy's ***Impreglio*** and Amman-based ***Consolidated Contractors Company*** — awarded an estimated JD 2.5 million ($6.8 million) contract to build the diversion tunnel. The dam, on the Yarmouk river, will provide irrigation water and hydroelectric power for Jordan and Syria (see Jordan).

TUNISIA

Ben Ali renews his government

Wide-ranging changes in the cabinet were announced on 26 July, allowing President Ben Ali to remove seven ministers appointed by ex-president Bourguiba and appoint younger technocrats (MEED 22:7:88, page 7).

Veterans, including minister of state for justice Slaheddine Baly and transport and tourism minister Abderrazak Kefi, leave the government. A close Ben Ali aide, Interior Minister Habib Ammar, is promoted to minister of state. A one-time general, former youth and sports minister Abdelhamid Escheikh becomes foreign affairs minister, replacing Mahmoud Mestiri — who assumed responsibility for the portfolio after Ben Ali's November takeover.

In other changes, the National Economy Ministry has been split in two — Energy & Mines under Sadok Rabah, who established a strong reputation as secretary-general of ***Entreprise Tunisienne d'Activites Petrolieres (ETAP)***, and Industry & Commerce under Moncef Belaid. Both are newcomers to government.