

Ramadan and working hours in Qatar



By Jason Majid and Emma Higham

This year, in the State of Qatar, the Holy Month of Ramadan is expected to start on or around the July 9th, 2013 depending on the sighting of the crescent moon. Ramadan will last for between 29 and 30 days, also depending on the sighting of the crescent moon, after which Eid al-Fitr, the festivity of the breaking of the fast, will be celebrated. Eid al-Fitr in Qatar is a public holiday with the majority of Qatar employees enjoying three days of public holidays. Subsequently the festival of sacrifice or Eid Al-Adhar will be celebrated with another three days of public holidays. This year Eid Al-Ahdar is start on or around October 15th.

For Muslims, Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection, improvement and increased devotion and wisdom. One way in which reflection, improvement, devotion and wisdom is sought is through fasting. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five Pillars of Islam, the other four pillars are, belief, worship, charitable giving and hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca which all Muslims should complete once in their lives. Muslims fast during Ramadan between sunrise and sunset. In Qatar fasting is strictly promoted and observed with many restaurants and food outlets remaining closed during the period during which fasting takes place. Some hotel restaurants remain open for hotel guests and others.

Children and other Muslims who are travelling or otherwise unwell are not required to fast, however, many do and/or make up for the days during which they did not fast at a later date when they are capable of fasting.

During Ramadan the majority of Qatar employees will work two hours less each day as required by Qatar laws and regulations. The normal working day of eight hours, or forty-eight hours a week, will be reduced to six hours, or thirty-six hours a week, on the basis of a six day week. Employers and employees which operate and work, respectively, a five day week will need to reduce their working hours accordingly.

The provisions of Qatar Law No.(14) of 2004, Qatar Labour Law, the provisions of which govern the employment of the majority of Qatari employees, specifically provides for reduced working hours for all employees whether or not they are Muslim and/or fasting dur-

ing Ramadan. Daily working hours are reduced from eight hours to six hours. Two hours of overtime may be worked in addition to these six hours with the result that the maximum working hours per day for individuals working overtime will be eight hours rather than ten. The usual overtime rates should apply during Ramadan.

Compliance with Qatar laws and regulations during Ramadan in relation to reduced working hours is promoted and observed in the same way as for fasting. The Ministry of Labour is the pertinent Government agency with regulation and enforcement responsibility. Where employers have any questions in relation to their Ramadan working policies and procedures they should attend the Labour Department and confirm that such policies and procedures are compliant. In particular the hours for employees working shifts should be discussed and agreed.

The QFC Employment Regulations which govern the employment of all individuals employed by the Qatar Finance Centre

Authority, Qatar Financial Centre Regulatory Authority and the entities licensed and regulated by those authorities provide for reduced working hours for fasting employees only. All other employees will work normal hours, whatever those hours are and have been agreed to be between the employer and the employee. Where employees fast and work normal hours they will be permitted the usual rest breaks.

Ramadan working hours for Government employees are set by the Minister or his authorised representative in the respective Qatar Ministries, quasi-Government entities and other

Government agencies. Working hours will usually be confirmed shortly in advance of Ramadan. In the same way the duration of the Government employee's public holidays for the Eid festivities will be confirmed in advance and are usually longer than those enjoyed by non-Government employees.

Note: all Qatari Laws (save for those issued by, eg. the QFC to regulate its own business), are issued in Arabic and there are no official translations, therefore for the purposes of drafting this article Clyde & Co LLP has used its own translation and interpreted the same in the context of Qatari laws, regulation and current market practice.

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