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Qatar has 147 cellphones per 100 persons

Internet penetration at 43 percent

DOHA: Internet penetration was a high of 43 percent in Qatar last year and while there were 147 mobile phones per 100 persons, the number of landlines was on a decline.

Internet penetration was only 24.7 percent in the country in 2005, figures cited by the 2010 report on Qatar's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reveal.

The percentage of landlines had dropped from 23.1 percent in 2005 to 16.6 percent last year.

The report was discussed at a press meet held by the President of Qatar Statistics Authority (QSA), Sheikh Hamad bin Jabor bin Jassim Al Thani, here yesterday.

Sheikh Hamad is also chairman of Qatar's Permanent Population Committee and also present at the news briefing was Dr Hassan Al Mohannadi, vice-chairman of the population panel, among others.

Al Mohannadi said that Qatar had disbursed \$2bn in aid to poor countries through various global organisations between 2005 and 2009 and that had played a key role in the country's foreign policy and international cooperation.

Sheikh Hamad said that Qatar was well on its way to achieving its Millennium Development Goals by 2015, which is the final deadline.

Fighting poverty and hunger, ensuring equal distribution of income and enhancing living conditions of people are some of

the MD goals. Citing figures, he said primary education covered some 92 percent of Qatari men and between 93 and 95 percent of Qatari women.

As for literacy, it was a high of between 95 and 99 percent among young Qatari women in the age group of 15 and 24 years between 2001 and 2009. While the literacy percentage for Qatari men in the above age group varied between 98 and 99 percent.

Sheikh Hamad said that rare economic growth over the past years had allowed Qatar to invest heavily in economic and social infrastructure. High levels of public spending in key programs and projects had accelerated national progress, he said in the MDG report for 2010.

The report has been prepared by the QSA in close coordination with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Special emphasis was on areas like health, education, environment and urban development, the report pointed out.

The report, however, added that in areas such as gender equality and empowerment of women, progress was being made but some challenges remained and they basically involved changing behaviors of individuals.

There is, therefore, the need to support civil societies in strengthening their involvement and capabilities to contribute to achieving the ND goals, Sheikh Hamad said.

THE PENINSULA

Heir Apparent hosts Iftar



The Heir Apparent H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with H H Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Special Adviser to the Emir, H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani, and prominent Islamic scholar Dr Yousuf Al Qaradawi at an iftar banquet hosted by Sheikh Tamim in Doha yesterday.

Three-fold rise in food spend

DOHA: Ramadan is an Islamic month of fasting and austerity, but according to experts, food consumption goes up almost three-fold during the month.

A small Qatari family (with five members) on an average spends QR15,000 extra in the month mainly on feasts for relatives and friends, while the figure goes up to QR45,000 in the case of large families.

Nearly 300 tonnes of fresh fruits and vegetables are consumed in Qatar during the holy month, whereas the sheep slaughtered number around 3,000.

In a normal month, the consumption of fruits and vegetables remains half at 150 tonnes while only 2,000 sheep are slaughtered.

People spend some QR900m on food alone during Ramadan while in other months the average expenses on food are only QR450m.

These details were outlined by experts and marketmen, including a former expert from the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consultancy (GOIC), Sami Hawaj, in an interview to a local Arabic daily.

The demand for edible oil,

rice and juices of different kinds, among other things, goes up sharply during the fasting month. And due to large consumption of juices, the demand for fresh fruits goes down.

The experts said that the prices of commodities were stable basically because there is no shortage of materials since the warehousing capacity had increased three-fold since last Ramadan.

"So importers got stocks and stored for sale during the fasting month," one of the experts said.

THE PENINSULA

Qatar confident of joining F1 fraternity; track being upgraded

DOHA: Qatar, with one of the best motorsport racing circuits in the region, is confident of joining the Formula One family.

In the Middle East, only Manama and Abu Dhabi host Formula One races, but Qatar is upbeat on becoming the third stop on the F1 calendar.

Nasser bin Khalifa Al Attiyah, president of the country's Motor and Motorcycling Federation (QMMF), yesterday said Losail International Circuit is being upgraded to stage Formula One races.

"Hosting a Formula One race is definitely in the strategic plan for Qatar. We have a great track and we are currently working on upgrading it to official specifications. We have already covered the standard requirements and we are three quarters through the project. We just have some minor changes and modifications to make," Al Attiyah said.

"We have already upgraded areas such as the run-offs on the track and want to be recognised as an F1 Grade A circuit with testing capabilities," the QMMF chief told Gulf Weekly newspaper yesterday. The QMMF president is charting out plans to speak to Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone after the 5.37km Losail International Circuit completes its upgrade.

The Losail International Circuit is the only race track to have hosted MotoGP night race. The circuit was built in 2004 at a cost of around \$58m. In 2007, an another \$17m saw the circuit get its night lamps to stage MotoGP races in artificial light.

THE PENINSULA

Gmail allows phone calls in US

SAN FRANCISCO: Google yesterday began adding Internet telephone capabilities to its free Web-based email service in the United States.

Gmail was infused with Voice, a Google telecommunications service that lets people use a single telephone number for all of their phones.

"Starting today, you can use Gmail to receive or place Google Voice calls," software engineer Nick Foster said in a blog post.

"We're rolling out this feature to US-based Gmail users over the next few days." AFP

Trailer accident



A crane helps clear the accident site after a trailer with a container tipped over at a roundabout near the Museum of Islamic Art yesterday.

Store gets 16 Saudi women cashiers

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's leading supermarket chain has broken the country's strict taboo on women working in public with a pilot programme of women cashiers, a company official said. Panda hypermarkets has put 16 Saudi women to work at one store in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah to test the concept in a country where Islamic conservatives have prevented women from working in gender-mixed environments. "The women, compared to men, are really hard workers," Panda

spokesman Tarik Ismail said.

"If everything is okay, then we will expand the programme (in) the kingdom," he said on Tuesday.

Ismail said the company has been quiet about the move due to the sensitivity of the issue.

A conservative Islamic educator has already called for a boycott of Panda due to the mixing, but it is not yet clear whether that has had any impact.

Operating more than 100 retail stores across the country, the United Azizia Panda Co, owned

by publicly listed foods giant Savola, already employs women sales clerks in its hypermarket in Dubai in the UAE.

But inside Saudi Arabia, Islamic conservatives have for decades enforced a prohibition against unrelated men and women mixing in the workplace. A Jeddah University business professor, Reem Asaad, has been campaigning since 2008 to force the labour ministry to allow women sales clerks in lingerie shops, but with little success. AFP

OPINION

Democracy deficit

An acute shortage of power leaving Baghdad in semi-permanent blackout, the city's artery that is the mighty Tigris, choked into a stream, mountains of garbage piling all over, the crime graph unrelentingly going up with human trafficking, rapes, killings becoming routine, health services in urgent need of emergency care, educational institutions gasping for breath, and the government, well it has been in the making for months on end. That's where the US combat troops left a democratic Iraq this week.

Was this the vision the US had when it invaded Iraq in 2003? The situation in Iraq today, to most Arab observers, looks worse than it was during the regime of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and gives credence to the widely held view: The US invasion of Iraq was not about democracy but more about toppling Saddam Hussein and having control over the country's oil. Note what George W Bush said on June 28, 2005, Fort Bragg: "As Iraqis grow confident that the democratic progress they are making is real and permanent, more will join the political process... These elections are inspiring democratic reformers in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Our strategy to defend ourselves and spread freedom is working. The rise of freedom in this vital region will eliminate the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder, and make our nation safer."

But the way the Americans managed Iraq, they have delayed the democratic process in the Middle East back by at least 10 years. Many of those in the Middle East who have vigorously advocated for a democratic change in their countries have second thoughts. With unsettled conditions in Iraq, they have begun doubting and think that maybe it's better to have a strong dictator than to lose the safety and stability in their countries.

Iraq has become a bad example for democracy in the region. Six months have passed since the Iraqi national elections but still no government has been formed. Continued on page 2



Khalid Al Sayed
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

RAMADAN
TIMING

Today's Iftar 6.01pm
Tomorrow's Imsak 3.39am