

Celebrating The Holy Month of Ramadan in Algeria

> Algiers-Mohamed Bokreta

The auspicious month of Ramadan is greatly welcomed here in Algeria where past customs have been practiced for generations. This month symbolizes enjoyment and happiness and a great opportunity for repentance and worship.

God says in the Koran: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint". Holy Quran (2:183).

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. It enjoys a special importance around the Islamic world, especially in this country. It is a month of worship but it also brings many blessings to those who do good deeds and help the needy, widows, orphans and downtrodden on earth. As I

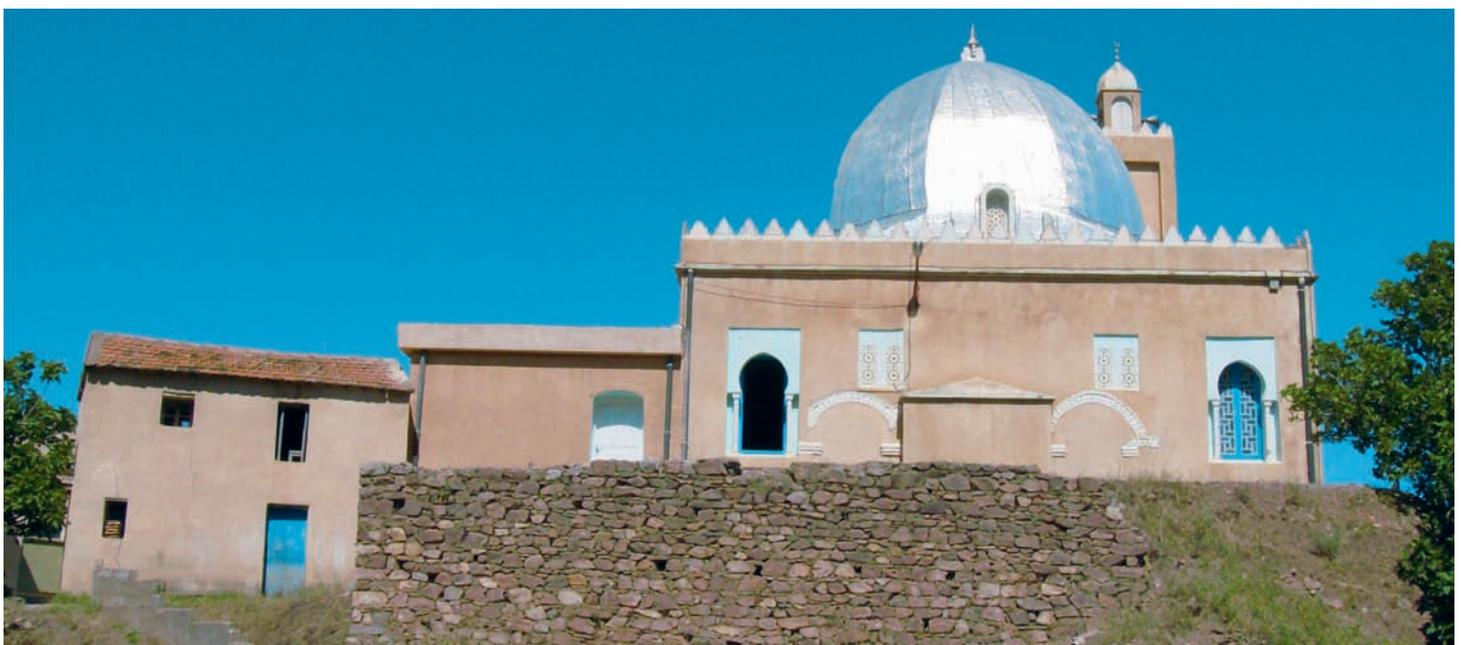
have witnessed for more than fifty years in this country people rapidly change during this month, and it seems that a metamorphosis has taken over everyone as they become more generous, more cordial, more friendly and more ready than at other times of the year to do good work.

The poor and the needy receive food, clothing and money from the well-to-do in this community. Many people go to the mosque in the neighborhood to break their fast and enjoy "Suhour" (pre-dawn meals). ▶



▶ Sidi Al Maghilli

مسجد سيدي المغيلي



Sidi Abderrahmane al Illouli's Mosque

مسجد سيدي عبد الرحمن اليلولي في يلولة

The people of the neighborhood send fruit, food and drinks to the nearby mosque. A friendly "community" dinner every sunset of this holy month creates a wonderful, heart-rendering atmosphere.

Ramadan is a time when Algerians become more attuned to people in need, as volunteering has become a Ramadan tradition, particularly among young people, where high school students devote some of their time to cooking and serving dinners at the "Rahma" (benevolent) restaurants. In Algiers alone there are about seven great Rahma restaurants, each serving between 120 to 400 meals a night, as it is very important that the "dignity of the people" is preserved and that everyone can break the fast with a warm meal during this blessed month. Ramadan is also a great occasion on which Muslims invite one another and friends to break the fast together by sharing their food and warm feelings of true Islamic brotherhood. During this period, people all over Algeria and elsewhere in the Muslim world partake of the culinary delights to have enough energy to cope with the difficulties of the day. The pleasant tasting food in Algeria and the Maghrib countries is famously known as the Zalabia sweet, a sort of cake made with sugar syrup.

Some tradesmen and unemployed youngsters often transform their shops into bakeries producing the famous "Zalabia". However, some vendors are taking

advantage of the shopping mood of the people and increasing their prices. In recent years Algerian traders and craftsmen have decided to minimize the impact by deciding to distribute and check some important items, such as meat, but this has little impact on the ever rising prices.

Ramadan, besides being the month of worship and Divine blessings, carries a great historical importance. The revelations of the Holy Quran commenced during this month. The epoch-making "Battle of Badr" the first battle fought by the Prophet and his Companions against the non-faithful tribe of Quraish took place on the 17th of Ramadan in the second year of Hijra. The "Conquest of Mecca" took place on the 20th of Ramadan in the eighth year of Hijra. The last ten days of Ramadan are a time of special spiritual power. Some nights, among the last ten nights are called the "Nights of Glory" (Laylat Al-Qadr). These are the 21st, and 23rd or 27th nights. Muslims stay up during these nights and offer special prayers. The 27th is the holiest of the holy nights.

A clear sign of respect for Ramadan in Algiers is that you cannot see any Muslims eating, drinking or smoking in public during daylight hours. Ramadan is also a time of intensive worship, such as reading the Koran, giving charity, purifying one's behavior and doing good deeds. All Mosques and Zawayas open until late during this month in all cities of Algeria. It is such an important time that

these places of worship are teeming with believers who read the Holy Quran. Some pray until very late while others listen to the recitation of the holy Koran, its interpretation, as well as some other lectures related to this holy month.

This year National Algerian TV is launching a new programme entitled: "the Knights of the Holy Quran". The show, a joint project between Algerian TV and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, is part of a plan to implement more balance in Algerian TV programming. Contestants from 15,000 applicants, including reciters of the Holy Quran from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey and Indonesia, will gather in Algiers. The best will be named "Knight of the Quran" and will be announced on the last day of Ramadan. Throughout the show, the competitors will recite verses from the Holy Quran and the audience will vote for the best reciter. ■



Recitations of Koran

تلاوة الذكر الحكيم



Recitations of Koran

قراءة القرآن الكريم



Dhikr

ذكر