

# Muslims in Japan observe fasting month of Ramadan



Yohei Matsuyama is silhouetted by a window as he looks at religious books at Hira Mosque.



Muslim men pray as they wait to break the Ramadan fast at the Japan Muslim Association in Tokyo. — AP photos

**Y**ohei Matsuyama breaks his daylong fast with chopsticks. He's seated on the floor at a narrow table with a dozen other Japanese Muslim men and boys as they eat "gyudon," a dish consisting of rice topped with beef. These Japanese Muslims are observing the holy month of Ramadan. The dawn-to-dusk fasting, which is an exercise in self-restraint, is intended to bring the faithful closer to God. "Praying is very important for me. Praying is more important than work," said Matsuyama, 31, who does postdoctoral research on the history of Islamic thought at Tokyo University. He lives with his wife and 8-year-old daughter, to whom he teaches Arabic. His family is all Muslim. Shinto and Buddhism are the predominant religions of Japan. The Japan Muslim Association, of which Matsuyama is the director, puts the number of native Japanese Muslims in the country at around 10,000.

Matsuyama's interest in religion began early. In junior high school, he was influenced by the Bible and considered himself a Christian. But he changed his mind a few years later, converting to Islam at the age of 18. "I read the basic teachings of Islam on the Internet and thought that's the ultimate religion for me. So I decided to convert," he said. "Perhaps I was a bit different from the average Japanese," said Matsuyama, who is also known by his Muslim name, Mujahid. "My family (was) surprised about my conversion," he said. "But my family is open-minded." Each day this week, The Associated Press will focus on a Muslim devotee living in the minority in the Asia-Pacific region, illustrating what the fasting month of Ramadan means to the Muslim community in that country.— AP



Muslim men, right, and women, left, are separated by a wall as they pray before breaking the Ramadan fast.



Yohei Matsuyama, a Japanese Muslim and postdoctoral research fellow at Tokyo University, reads the Quran at Hira Mosque in Gyotoku, Chiba Prefecture, east of Tokyo.



Yohei Matsuyama, second left, a Japanese Muslim, sits with other Muslim men as they break the Ramadan fast.



Yohei Matsuyama, center helps prepare food to break the Ramadan fast.



The Quran translated to Japanese and other religious books are placed on a bookshelf at Hira Mosque.



Muslim men break their fast with chopsticks as they eat "Gyudon", or Japanese beef bowl.



Yohei Matsuyama stands in front of his home with his daughter Ai, 8, in Gyotoku, Chiba Prefecture, east of Tokyo.