

and the Jews. In addition, there are a considerable number of Iranian nationals who reside mostly in eastern Iraq.

## Language

Arabic is the official and most widely spoken language; it is used by about 79 per cent of the population. Kurdish (16 per cent) and dialects of Turkish (2 per cent) are common in the north and variants of Persian (3 per cent) are spoken by tribesmen in the east. Most Iraqi officials and business people speak some English, the main foreign language of the country. If necessary, they will provide their own interpreters.

## Religion

Islam is the state religion. It is practised by an overwhelming majority of the country's population. Both the Sunni and Shi'ia sects of Islam are represented, although in different geographic areas. The majority of Iraqis are Shi'ias who live in the southern provinces. The Sunnis are mostly situated in central and northern Iraq.

Religion is an important factor in the life of the Iraqis. Public violation by citizens of the observance of fasting during the Moslem month of Ramadan, for example, is punishable by law. Foreigners are not expected to fast. They will find, however, alcoholic drinks are not served nor generally available even in hotels or restaurants. Smoking outside of buildings is discouraged, but not prohibited.

## Education

Since the establishment of the Republic in 1958, there has been a marked expansion in education at all levels. Education is free from pre-primary to secondary school. Primary education, lasting six years, is now officially mandatory and there are plans to expand full-time education to nine years. At present, secondary education is available at no cost for six years and is rapidly expanding. Private education was abolished and there are now state schools. Preschool education is increasingly privatized but it is expensive for quality full-support facilities.

The demand for higher education is increasing. The science, medical and engineering faculties of the universities have expanded considerably, although technical training is less developed. There are many universities in Iraq, including the universities of Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Salah