

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the former Emir of Qatar who transformed the Gulf state into one of the world's wealthiest and most influential nations, has died at the age of 74.

The Amiri Diwan, Qatar's royal court, announced his death on Sunday, describing the former ruler—widely known as the “Father Emir”—as a leader whose legacy shaped both Qatar and the wider Arab world. No cause of death was given.

A four-day period of national mourning has been declared, with flags flying at half-mast across the country. Government offices and public institutions have also suspended normal operations in tribute to the former leader.

Sheikh Hamad ruled Qatar from 1995 until 2013, when he made the rare decision among Gulf monarchs to abdicate voluntarily in favour of his son, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the country's current emir.

During his 18 years in power, he oversaw a dramatic transformation of Qatar. Revenues from the country's vast natural gas reserves fuelled rapid economic growth, helping turn the small Gulf nation into a major global investor and an increasingly influential diplomatic player.

He is also widely credited with establishing **Al Jazeera** in 1996, a move that reshaped the Arab media landscape by introducing a new model of independent television journalism that gained audiences far beyond the Middle East.

A modernising vision

Sheikh Hamad's rule was marked by ambitious economic reforms, large-scale infrastructure development and an increasingly active foreign policy that elevated Qatar's international profile.

Alongside him was his second wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, who became one of the country's most recognisable public figures. Unlike many royal spouses in the region, she played a prominent role in promoting education, culture and international development, while representing Qatar on the global stage.

Together, they helped project a modern image of Qatar as the country expanded its influence through diplomacy, investment, sport and education.

Leadership passed to a new generation

In 2013, Sheikh Hamad handed power to his son, Sheikh Tamim, then 33 years old, in a carefully managed transition that surprised many observers.

Sheikh Tamim, a graduate of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom, has continued many of his father's policies while steering Qatar through regional tensions, the 2017 Gulf diplomatic crisis and the successful hosting of the **2022 FIFA World Cup**, the first World Cup held in the Middle East.

Funeral and condolences

Funeral prayers for Sheikh Hamad were held on Sunday at Doha's Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Mosque, attended by Sheikh Tamim, members of the ruling Al Thani family and senior government officials. He was later buried in a private ceremony at Lusail Cemetery.

From Monday, Sheikh Tamim is expected to receive foreign dignitaries, monarchs and world leaders at Lusail Palace as they offer condolences to the ruling family.

Tributes have begun arriving from leaders across the region and beyond, reflecting Sheikh Hamad's influence during nearly two decades in power and the lasting impact he had on Qatar's emergence as a major regional and global player.