

The Annual Pilgrimage to Makkah

Hajj During the Pandemic: Looking Back at 2020

Hajj 2021: Pilgrims' Safety is the Foremost Priority

Muslim World League Seals "Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan"



Looking at
HAJJ TRADITIONS



Hajj literally means “to set out for a place.” Islamically however, it refers to the annual pilgrimage that Muslims make to Makkah with the intention of performing certain religious rituals as prescribed by Prophet Muhammad.”




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Muslim World League

Recent Activities in Review



May 22

Dr. Al-Issa gives the opening lecture at a scientific symposium organized by ISESCO. He addresses an audience of high-ranking Islamic and international religious figures and scholars about the Charter of Makkah.

ISESCO honors Dr. Al-Issa for his efforts in promoting peace and harmony among nations and people and for his service to the Prophet's legacy.



May 27

Dr. Al-Issa receives Miguel Moratinos, the High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). Mr. Moratinos praised Dr. Al-Issa for "spreading dialogue among followers of religions, strengthening social integration, and combating hatred and hatred of strangers."



June 7



June 10

The MWL is proud to host The Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan Conference, bringing together scholars from Afghanistan and Pakistan to agree on a pathway towards enduring peace in Afghanistan.

Dr. Al-Issa meets with Mr. Ayman Mazyek, President of the Supreme Council of Muslims in Germany. Mr. Mazyek hands Dr. Al-Issa a copy of the Charter of Makkah translated into German. During the reception, a memorandum of understanding is signed between the MWL and the Council.



June 13

Dr. Al-Issa meets with the Chairman of the Pakistan Scholars Council and the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Harmony and Middle East Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Hafez Muhammad Tahir Al-Ashrafy.



June 19



June 24

Dr. Al-Issa meets with the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Peninsula Affairs, Mr. Daniel Benaim, and the Chargé d’Affairs of the U.S. embassy in Riyadh, Ms. Martina Strong.

Dr. Al-Issa hosts Adama Barrow, President of The Gambia, at the headquarters of the International Museum of the Biography of the Prophet in Medina. The meeting includes the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the MWL and the Fab Charitable Foundation to implement a package of comprehensive relief and development projects.

June 25





In this issue we discuss the origins, rituals and current state of the Hajj, the holy pilgrimage that all faithful Muslims are obliged to make at least once in their lifetime. This year's Hajj will take place from July 17-22, and again it will be limited to residents of Saudi Arabia because of the need to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

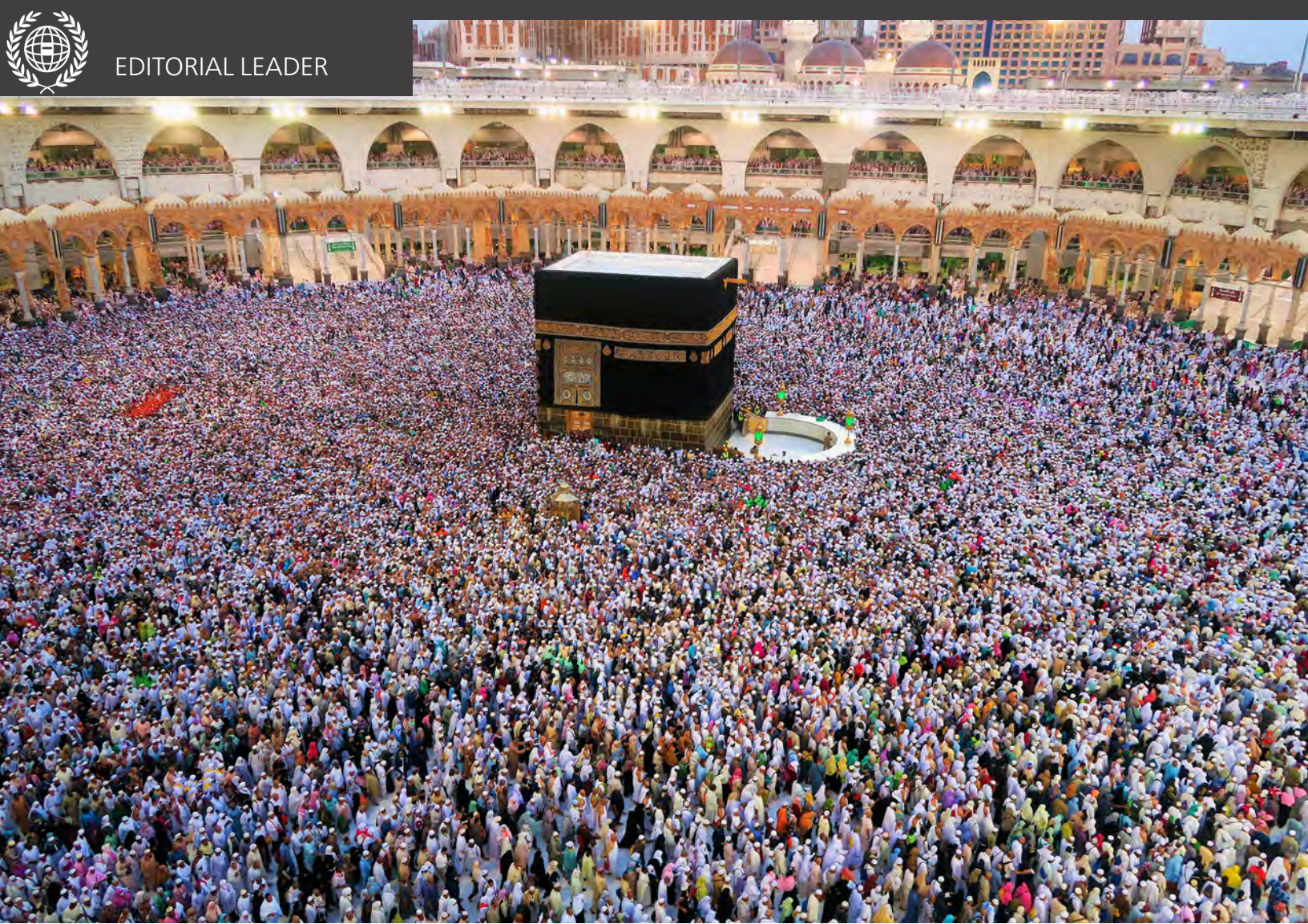
Normally, some 2.5 million pilgrims will make the Hajj, but last year, the Hajj was limited to Saudi citizens, only 1,000 of whom could be in the Grand Mosque at the same time, out of respect for social-distancing norms. This year, some 60,000 Muslim residents of the Kingdom, regardless of citizenship, will participate, but the Hajj will remain a smaller and more intimate version of its usual self until at least 2022.

The Hajj is a major undertaking for the average person, but even more so for the Saudi government, which has an entire ministry dedicated to all aspects of the Hajj: applications to attend, admission, payments, visas, organization, safety and security, care and feeding of pilgrims—everything. In a normal year, the Kingdom literally hosts 2.5 million guests for more than a week, all of whom are focused on two places: Makkah and Madinah.

This is not a normal year, of course, but the conditions that will bring fewer people to the Kingdom bring greater challenges for health and safety. Many of the traditional rituals that include person-to-person contact, sharing of food and drink, and kissing of objects will be prohibited.

All faiths consist of two important elements: belief and practice. Virtually every faith prescribes some rituals, sacrifices or daily practices that reinforce teaching. Many of these practices also serve as reminders of the greatness of God. They take us out of our temporal lives and into a spiritual reality. They can be daily practices that become a part of our normal routine, like praying and fasting. Or they may be grand events that force us out of our daily lives for a time and into a spiritual realm that we inhabit with other faithful. The Hajj is one of these, and the challenges it poses—in time required, in cost and in distance traveled—only increase its spiritual value. Anything of true value commands such a high price.

- The Editors



People Gathering Near Kaaba, Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

The Hajj:

The Annual Pilgrimage to Makkah

As Muslims prepare for restricted participation in the Hajj pilgrimage for the second consecutive year, Muslims' values of tolerance, faith, diversity and hope are as important today as never before.

WHAT IS THE HAJJ?

Hajj literally means "to set out for a place." Islamically however, it refers to the annual pil-

grimage that Muslims make to Makkah with the intention of performing certain religious rituals as prescribed by Prophet Muhammad. In the final months of the year, the holy city of Makkah becomes even more vital, as an estimated 2.5 million pilgrims make their journey to the Holy Sites.

Making this pilgrimage is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. The others are the profession of

Allah as the only God and Muhammad as His Messenger (Shahadah), fasting during Ramadan (Sawm), charitable giving (Zakat) and ritual prayer (Salat) religious duties that every practicing Muslim must perform. All Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey and can support their family during their absence must make the Hajj at least once in their lifetime. About two million people visit Makkah each year from every corner of the globe during Hajj, providing a unique opportunity for people of different nations to meet and understand one another. The Hajj is the largest annual gathering of people in the world.

Although Makkah is always filled with visitors, the annual Hajj pilgrimage begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year. Islam follows a lunar calendar, so the Hajj and Ramadan can fall, predictably, at any time of the year. The rituals of the Hajj, which are of Abrahamic origin, include circling the Ka'aba seven times and traveling seven times between the mountains of Safa and Marwa, as did Hagar, the wife of Abraham, during her search for water. The Ka'aba is an ancient cubic stone structure located inside the Grand Mosque in Makkah. The Ka'aba was built and rebuilt by prophets and is considered the center of the Muslim world.

After completing these acts, the pilgrims stand together on the wide plain of Arafat and join in prayers for God's forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Last Judgement. The close of the Hajj is marked by a festival, the

Eid al-Adha, which is celebrated with prayers and the exchange of gifts in Muslim communities everywhere. This, and the Eid al-Fitr, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, are the main festivals of the Muslim calendar.

THE HISTORY

The origins of the Hajj date back to 2,000 B.C. when Ismael, the infant son of Prophet Ibrahim (Or Abraham, as he is called in the Old Testament) and Ibrahim's wife, Hagar, were stranded in the desert. With Ismael close to death from thirst, Hagar ran back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwa looking for water until the angel Jibril (Gabriel) touched down to earth and created a spring of fresh water for the baby, known as the Well of Zamzam.



The Ka'aba is an ancient cubic stone structure located inside the Grand Mosque in Makkah. The Ka'aba was built and rebuilt by prophets and is considered the center of the Muslim world. "

Following the orders of God, Ibrahim is said to have built a monument at the site of the spring known as the Ka'aba. Worshipers from many faiths traveled to revel at the site, and in 630 A.D., Prophet Muhammad led a group of Muslims there in the first official Hajj, destroying the idols placed there by polytheistic worshippers and re-dedicating the site in the name of Allah. The path that Prophet Muhammad and his followers traveled is retraced as part of the Hajj rituals, which include making Hagar's walk between Safa and Marwa, stoning the wall of Satan that tempted Ibrahim to defy God, slaughtering an animal in honor of the sacrifice that Ibrahim made to save his son, and climbing the Mount Arafat, from which Mohammed made his last sermon.

CARRYING OUT THE PILGRIMAGE

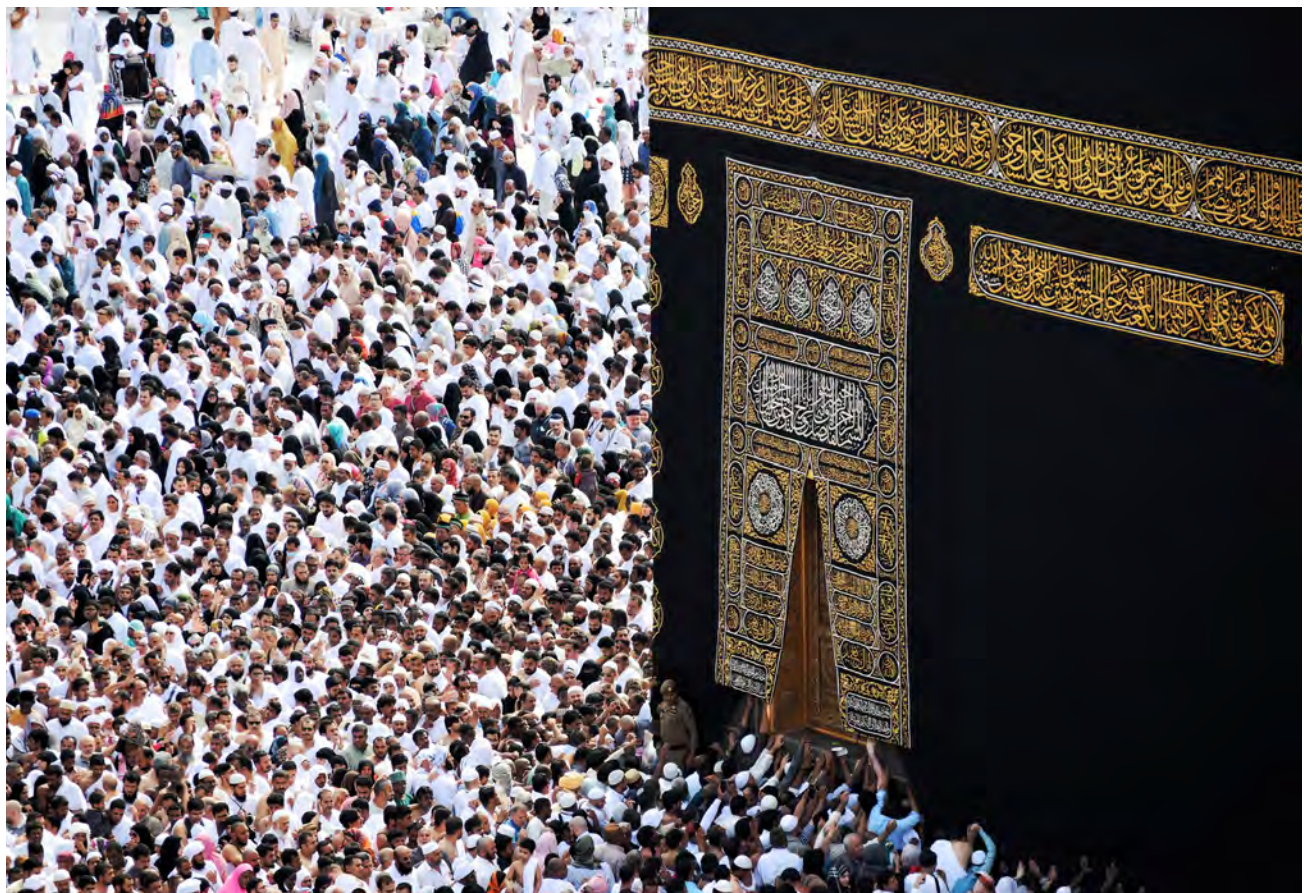
In order to complete pilgrimage rituals, a person must be in a state of ihram, which is a special state of ritual purity. This is done by wearing special white clothes (which are also called ihram) and obeying these eight rules:

Pilgrims may not engage in marital relations, shave or cut their nails, use cologne or scented oils, kill or hunt anything, or fight or argue. Women must not cover their faces, even if they would do so in their home country, and men may not wear clothes with stitching.

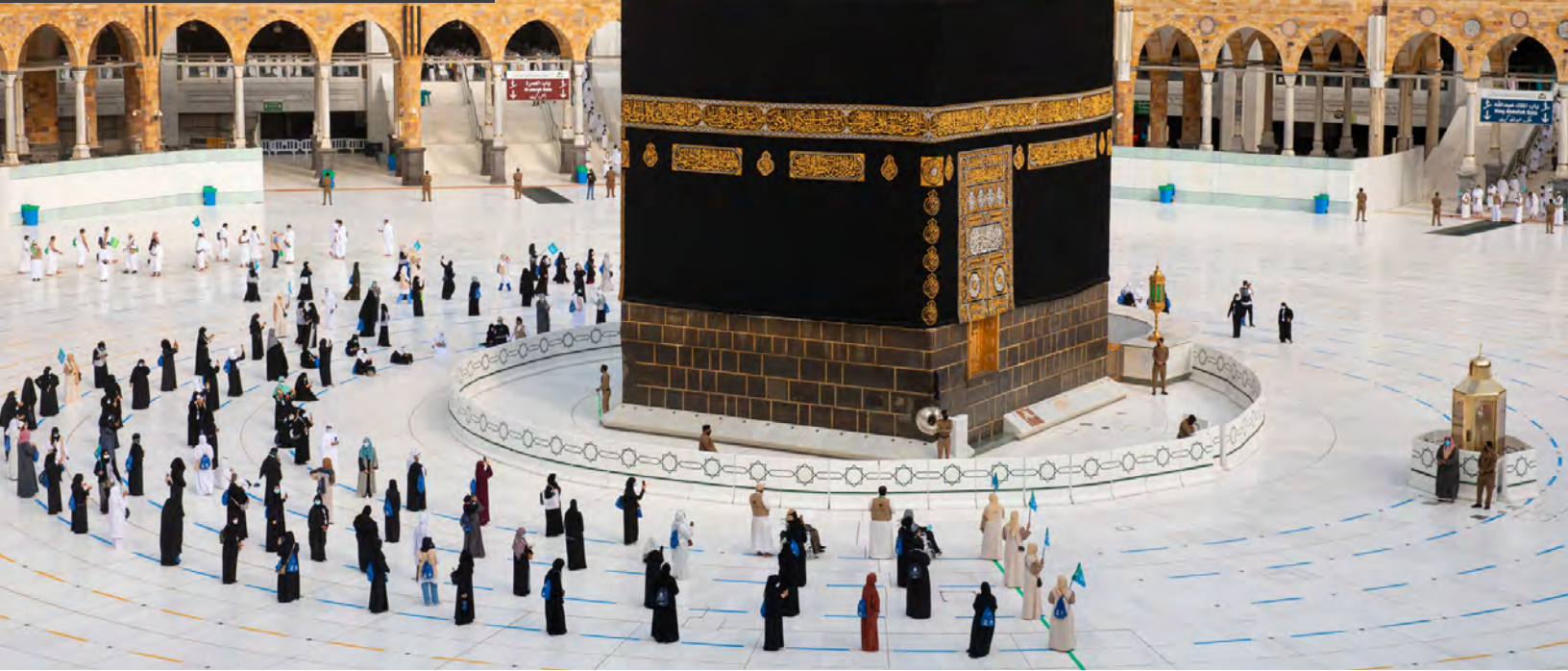
2021 AND BEYOND

The MWL extends to you and your loved ones its sincere best wishes on this important and

blessed period of celebration and reflection – a moment that brings families together in Muslim communities around the world and beyond. Our thoughts are particularly with the millions of people who have been affected by Covid-19, forcibly displaced, or torn apart by conflict, war, and persecution and have remained unwavering in their devotion, faith and resilience. Even though no foreign pilgrims will be allowed to perform the Hajj once again this year in response to the coronavirus pandemic, it is our hope that Allah’s blessing will light your way, strengthen your faith and bring joy to your heart as you praise and serve Him today, tomorrow and always. Hajj Mubarak!



People Gathered At Kaaba, Makkah, Saudi Arabia.



Hundreds of Muslim pilgrims circle the Ka'aba as they observe social distancing to protect themselves against the coronavirus, in the Muslim holy city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

Hajj During the Pandemic: Looking Back at 2020

In 2020, Muslim pilgrims participated in a downsized version of the annual Hajj, as the Saudi government worked to prevent a coronavirus outbreak during the five-day pilgrimage. For the first time since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah made the decision to bar pilgrims arriving in Saudi Arabia from foreign countries. With the Hajj being one of the largest mass gatherings in the world, the Saudi government wisely advised Muslims to postpone bookings until the pandemic could be mitigated. This decision came months after the COVID-19 outbreak had been declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) a few months prior.

The 2020 Hajj was scaled down considerably, and participation for Hajj rituals was restrict-

ed to only 1,000 people, adhering to social distancing measures over fears of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Pilgrims performing Hajj in 2020 had to undergo a rigorous selection process and were required to go through periods of self-isolation before arriving in the holy cities. They were also expected to quarantine after their arrival and upon their return. In fact, some 70% of the worshippers last year were foreign residents of Saudi Arabia, with the rest being Saudi nationals. While all holy sites remained open, adequate physical distancing and disinfection measures were also put in place with oversight and assistance at regular intervals during the pilgrim's journey.

Before COVID-19, there was constant overcrowding during Hajj, but in 2020, the flow

of people within the Grand Mosque was well organized. A limited number of worshippers were allowed in at a time and there was clear demarcation to ensure physical distancing. Indicated by a label, these were prepared with strict health guidelines that eliminated the possibility of virus transmission.

During 2020's amended Hajj, wearing masks was mandatory, and pilgrims were subject to temperature checks and placed in quarantine if required. Daily text messages were also provided as reminder of preventative health measures. Also, unlike previous years when people would crowd to collect Zamzam water, in 2020, it was shared by mobile porters.

Throughout the duration of the Hajj, the pilgrims had to social distance and no pilgrims were allowed to touch the Ka'aba.

Undoubtedly, the newest innovation that came as a result of the pandemic was the use of mobile apps that provided test results and vaccination status. The apps were also used to apply for access to public places.

Post-Pandemic Outlook

The successful completion of the 2020 Hajj was a major tribute to the leadership and commitment of the Saudi authorities, and it reflects their extensive experience of organizing the annual Hajj pilgrimage, and continued commitment to improving public health issues related to mass gatherings events. The decisive actions, public health preparedness and strict implementation of public health prevention and intervention measures, pre-Hajj, during Hajj and post-Hajj, provides many lessons worth emulating by sectors and events that bring together large numbers of people, including sports, religion, entertainment, and hospitality industries. Of particular interest is the use of mobile phone technology, which could be a very potent tool in combating the pandemic across the globe. We at the Muslim World League (MWL), support the decisive, logical, and prudent decision making by Saudi authorities which enabled the pre-Hajj nightmare of public health, political, economic, and religious concerns to be overcome.



A limited numbers of pilgrims pray in the first rituals of the Hajj, as they keep social distancing to limit exposure and the potential transmission of the coronavirus, at the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Makkah.



Robots serving Zamzam water bottles at the Grand Mosque in Makkah.

Modernity Meets Ancient Hajj Rites

In recent years, society's rapid technological advances have found their way into one of the world's most sacred rituals. A deeply personal experience for Muslim worshippers, the Hajj pilgrimage is anchored in spirituality, and traditionally was characterized as experience stripped of worldly possessions. Today, registrations and bookings are carried out online, and personal cell phone use is common among pilgrims. The most important use of technology has been to assure health and safety.

The service of the Two Holy Mosques is considered one of the most important priorities for

the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has continuously worked to modernize the Hajj journey for the well-being and security of all involved. As part of its operational plan for this year's Hajj season, Saudi Arabia's General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques has worked to put in place all possible health precautions while also ensuring that the Hajj rituals can take place, the experience is enriched, and proper hospitality is provided in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The goal is to make sure that the Hajj ends with zero cases of COVID-19 and also with no loss of life.

For the past several years, the Kingdom has incorporated the latest technology into the pilgrimage. New to Hajj in 2021, robots will distribute bottled water to promote social distancing, according to Abdul-Rahman Al Sudais, the General President of the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque.

Prior to pandemic measures limiting the number of attendees, the crowd control measures implemented include the use of thousands of cameras and security officers to coordinate the movements of people densely packed into narrow streets, walkways and paths of Makkah and Mina. Facial recognition technology and other high-tech security systems are advanced enough to decipher between pilgrims, dressed in nearly identical terry white cloth garments.

In 2019, robots connected doctors with patients using 4G technology during Hajj rituals in Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafat.

Last year, the National Committee for Hajj and Umrah introduced smart technology in the form of electronic ID wristbands that connect to an application on their phones. Upon their arrival, before entering Makkah, pilgrims were issued the smart bracelets with GPS capabilities to help them navigate the Holy Sites. Each card contains a unique QR code containing the bearer's contact and medical details. The smart card system gives pilgrims access to camps, transport, hotels, cashless payment terminals and ATMs, and help authorities identify crowded spots at the holy sites in Makkah and Madinah. They also allow the Saudi health ministry to observe movements and ensure the mandatory quarantine was observed. Thermal scanners are used across the holy sites to monitor people's temperatures.

Last year, was also the first-time pilgrims were given special attire to wear, which was laced with silver nano technology that helps kill bacteria and makes clothes water resistant. As part

of the special protocols, each pilgrim was assigned to a group of around 20 others. A group leader then guided them throughout the Hajj to each destination at a specified time, to avoid crowding in places like the Grand Mosque, where Muslims circle the Ka'aba.

In 2020 I'tamarna application was launched to enforce health standards and make it easier for people to book their journeys. The launch of the app came due to the coronavirus pandemic and preventive measures that require specifying the number of pilgrims. I'tamarna offers booking services that pilgrims can use ahead of their arrival in Makkah for accommodation, transport and recreation.

For those that cannot make the pilgrimage this year due to travel restrictions, a handful of apps exist that offer virtual views of Makkah. To open the experience up to Muslims around the world who are unable to attend, a German company created an interactive digital Hajj experience, called 'Muslim 3D.' While not meant as a substitute for the physical pilgrimage, it provides a virtual tour and an edutainment experience about Islamic lifestyle, history and rituals. There have also been other attempts to create virtual Hajj experiences, including Experience Makkah from Cairo-based Vhorus, the Saudi Arabia-built Manasik VR, and Miradj 360 VR, developed in Tatarstan. These apps have the potential ease stress and help future pilgrims familiarize themselves with the rituals, and can also help drive deeper understanding among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Modern technology has the potential to enhance, rather than detract from this ancient spiritual rite. Going forward, Saudi leadership will continue to facilitate affairs of Hajj and visits of the Two Holy Mosques, using all of the tools at its disposal to provide the best services so that pilgrims can perform their rituals in a spiritual atmosphere, with care for their comfort, security and safety.

The Significance of Hajj

The journey to Makkah involves many different rituals for pilgrims including ihram, whereby Muslims enter into a sacred state of purity during Hajj. Ihram includes a specific form of dress, two white sheets for men and modest, plain dresses for women, symbolizing the equality and unity of pilgrims from all over the world. Without any indicators of economic status, nationality or sect, Muslims are able to reflect on their purpose in the world as a community.

Muslims believe the Hajj originates during the time of Prophet Ibrahim, who built the Ka'aba, a black box-shaped building in Makkah's Grand Mosque, the Masjid al-Haram, with his son Ismael. The Ka'aba holds significant meaning to Muslims because it represents the oneness of God, and pilgrims circle it seven times counter-clockwise as part of the rituals of the five days of the Hajj.

As the fifth and final pillar of Islam, performing the pilgrimage is not only an honor, but also an obligation for adult Muslims who are physically and financially able to complete it. The word Hajj

means "to attend a journey," and the pilgrimage signifies both the physical journey and the spiritual one contained within the Hajj. The journey replicates the steps of Prophet Muhammad, who led the Hajj during the last year of his life, 632 A.D. Makkah, located in Saudi Arabia's western Hijaz province, is the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and the place where he received the Quran in the early seventh century.

Many are not aware of the fact that there are 3 types of Hajj in Islam namely Hajj Ifrad, Hajj Qiran, and Hajj Tamattu. All the forms of Hajj are rewarded but the most recommended form of Hajj by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is Hajj-ul-Tamattu, which involves combining the Hajj with the Umrah in the same journey. Most pilgrims who come for the Hajj from different parts of the world arrive a few days before it actually starts and perform Umrah first.

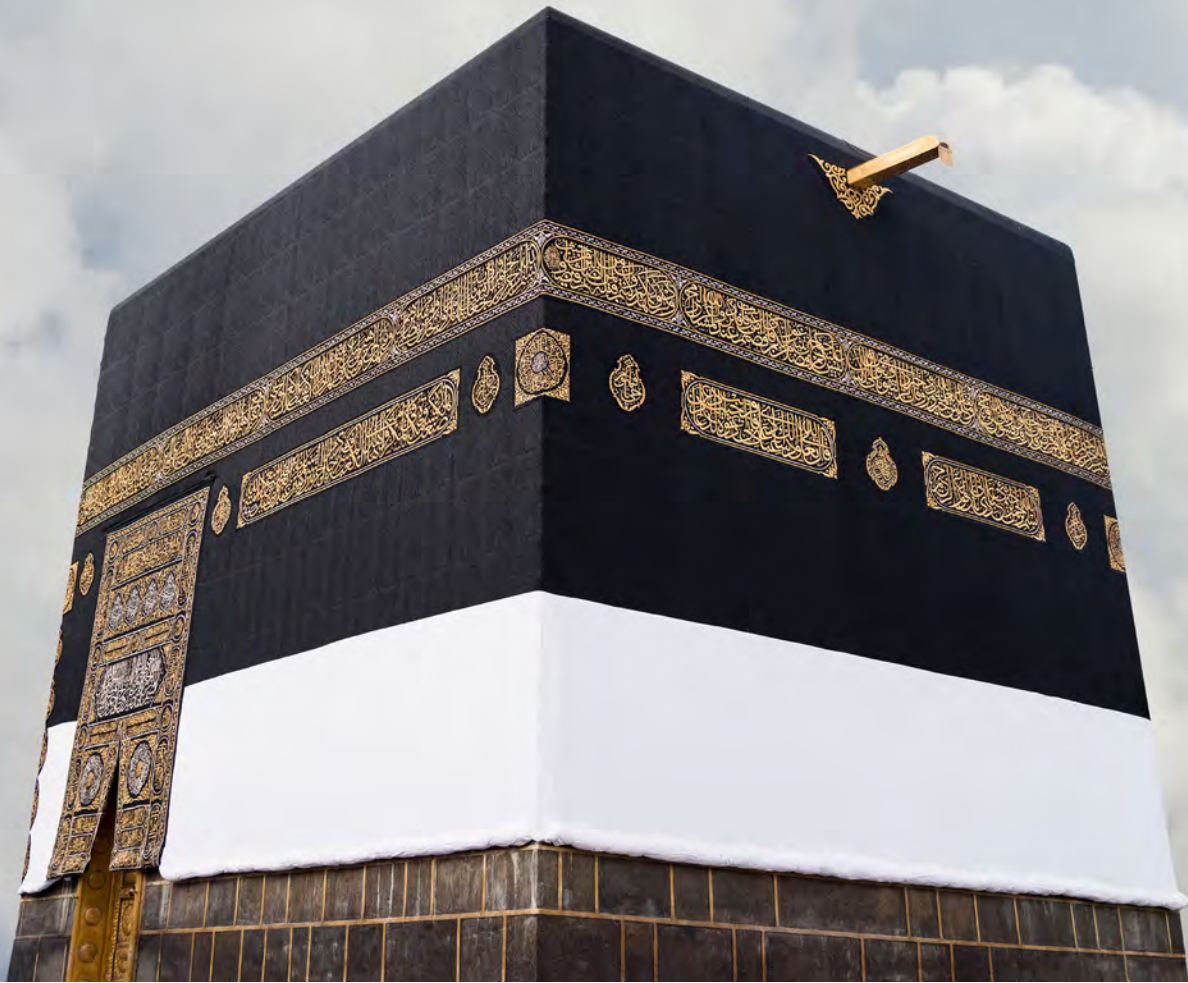
In the years to come, many are hopeful foreign visitors will be invited once again to perform the Hajj to instill unity not just within Muslim nations, but within all nations.



Muslim pilgrims pray on the second day of the hajj pilgrimage, near the holy city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia.



Muslim pilgrims around the Ka'ba at the Grand Mosque ahead of the Hajj 2019 pilgrimage.



Kaaba in Makkah/ This year, for the second time, Saudi Arabia holds restricted Hajj to ensure the safety measures of Muslims performing this year's Umrah.

Hajj 2021:

Pilgrims' Safety is the Foremost Priority

This year, safety measures remain in place to ensure the health and safety of Muslims performing their Umrah.

With COVID-19 still spreading, the Kingdom limited the number of this year's visitors as well. However, Saudi authorities have made it a priority to improve Hajj and Umrah sector services since the beginning of the pandem-

ic. Thanks to that, the kingdom will be able to receive 60,000 pilgrims from inside Saudi Arabia this year. To limit the spread of the virus, foreign Muslims are barred from the Hajj for a second consecutive year.

This decision may be a disappointment for many Muslims worldwide, but it was absolutely necessary, and it follows the teachings of



Hajj 2021 will be limited to 60,000 pilgrims.

Islam, including the belief that life and health are the highest values and should be protected by all believers.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is honored to host pilgrims every year, confirms that this arrangement comes out of its constant concern for the health, safety, and security of pilgrims as well as the safety of their countries,” said the statement of the Saudi Press Agency. The Muslim World League supported these measures to limit the risk of spreading new variants of the virus.

Considering this, only vaccinated pilgrims aged 18-65 with no chronic illnesses will participate



Only vaccinated pilgrims aged 18-65 with no chronic illnesses will participate in this year’s Hajj. It’s worth noting that this year, women are allowed to perform the Hajj without a male guardian (mahram).”



All the pilgrims will have to follow safety measures, including social distancing.



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- The Saudi Press Agency

in this year's Hajj. It's worth noting that this year, women are allowed to perform the Hajj without a male guardian (*mahram*).

To help the Saudi Ministry of Hajj administer a safe Umrah season, all visitors will have to adhere to strict safety measures. Upon arrival, the pilgrims' luggage will be disinfected. In the areas of the Two Holy Mosques and the central areas of Makkah and Madinah, social distancing will be strictly enforced. The pilgrims won't be allowed to bring meals from outside Makkah. Instead, they will be provided with three daily meals in Mina and two meals in Arafat. In Muzdalifah, on the other hand, they will be supplied with dinner. Additional food and beverage services will also be available.

To ensure compliance with the safety measures, the Hajj administration will equip all



A smart application, I'tmarna, allows the pilgrims to apply for praying permits in Makkah and Madinah's mosques together. "

the visitors with a smart card. The application serves as an electronic ID that is also linked to all services provided for pilgrims, such as accessing camps, transportation and hotels, and even making payments.

The Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has developed an advanced tech-focused crowd management model to protect pilgrims and elevate their experience. A smart application, I'tmarna, allows the pilgrims to apply for praying permits in Makkah and Madinah's mosques together. On the other hand, Ershad helps representatives of Authorized Agencies of Annual Hajj pilgrimage identify the pilgrims performing Hajj rituals. Another app, Manasikana, serves to give directions and locations, and provides prayer schedules and even weather forecasts in Makkah and Madinah.

Although the decision to restrict the Hajj to domestic worshipers caused sadness for many Muslims abroad, the government of Saudi Arabia has risen to provide the pilgrims with a safe experience in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

A large number of the safety measures are due to smart solutions and new technologies. Saudi Arabia aims to host 30 million pilgrims and Umrah visitors a year in the post-pandemic reality, and the digitization of services is an essential part of managing the movement of Hajj pilgrims in the future.



New technologies play an essential role in providing the pilgrims with the Hajj experience.



Dr. Al-Issa at the “Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan” Conference.

Muslim World League Seals “Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan”

The Muslim World League sealed a groundbreaking agreement of government ministers and senior scholars from Afghanistan and Pakistan on June 10 that creates a road map for resolving the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan.

The “Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan” was signed following a full-day conference in the Holy of City of Makkah. Supported by the gov-

ernment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the agreement establishes the religious parameters to achieve a just and comprehensive peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, in line with Islamic principles.

MMWL Secretary General Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa led the effort. Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony of Pakistan, and Moham-



Dr. Al-Issa at the “Declaration of Peace in Afghanistan”.

mad Qasim Halimi, Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs of Afghanistan, signed the accord.

“This brotherly meeting was characterized by determination, love and harmony, and reflected the strong resolve of our brothers in the meeting to advance peace in Afghanistan,” Dr. Al-Issa said. “Brotherly peace is characterized by strong faith, sincere determination and responsibility, and this agreement was reached in the most sacred place on earth by religious scholars. There can be no stronger declaration of peace, and it will prove successful, God willing.”

Among other things, the declaration does the following:

Condemns all acts of violence and extremism, regardless of the perpetrator or motivation, and judges all attacks against civilians as a violation of the fundamental principles of *Shariah*.

Commits all sides to finding common ground on political, social and economic issues to ensure a final and sustainable end to the Afghan conflict.

Rejects any attempt to justify violence on the basis of religion, nationality, civilization or race.

Recognizes the unique role of religious scholars to ensure peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Leverages the influence of the religious scholar communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan to ensure compliance by all parties to the conflict.

Demonstrates the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's long-standing efforts to achieve peace in Afghanistan and steadfast commitment to the people of the country.

Reflects the status of reconciliation as the optimal resolution for conflicts and disputes as laid out in the Noble Qur'an.

"Saudi Arabia has always been there for Afghanistan and is leading the effort to ensure we achieve peace," Qadri said.

He added: "Our religion teaches us how to be united and harmonious with one another, and advocates international cooperation in all charitable work. Islam focuses on protecting the nation, encouraging development and progress, promoting peace and preventing subversive acts."

"We are truly fortunate for the unity and accomplishment of this declaration and its potential for ending the bloodshed that has lasted for years," Halimi said. "The obstacles to reconciliation in Afghanistan have been removed completely and there are none now."

Pakistani and Afghan scholars, many of whom participated virtually from their home coun-

tries, thanked Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Mohammad bin Salman for the Kingdom's support for peace and stability in Afghanistan. They commended the Kingdom's efforts to bring together scholars from both countries and build bridges that unite Afghans.



Brotherly peace is characterized by strong faith, sincere determination and responsibility, and this agreement was reached in the most sacred place on earth by religious scholars. There can be no stronger declaration of peace, and it will prove successful, God willing. "

- Mohammed Abdulkarim Al-Issa





Pilgrims are gathered on Mount Mercy on the plains of the Arafat during the annual Hajj Pilgrimage, outside Makkah.

Customs, Rituals, Traditions and the Hajj

The Hajj (also spelled hadj or hadj) is very important to Islam and includes many rituals and traditions. A person who is unable to perform the Hajj in person is allowed to perform the Hajj via proxy by having a relative or friend go on the pilgrimage in their place. This representation entails the proxy to go through long-standing traditions and rituals executed during the Hajj pilgrimage that make it a thorough experience.

The pattern for the pilgrimage was established by Prophet Muhammad, but variations have developed over the centuries. The formal steps



The Hajj is the fifth of the five pillars of Islam, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia, which every Muslim adult must make at least once in his or her lifetime.”

aren't followed as strictly by Muslims today as they were in the centuries following their creation, as they visit the Makkah sites in a different order.

The pilgrimage begins on the 7th day of Dhū al-Hijjah (the last month of the Islamic year) and ends on the 12th day. There are certain things the pilgrim does even before reaching Makkah. When the pilgrim is 6 miles (or 10 km) away from Makkah, they enter a state of holiness known as ihram and wear special garments associated with that.

On the first day, the pilgrim walks around the Ka'aba seven times, which is the welcoming tawaf, and kisses the black stone. This is then

followed by a prayer session inside a mosque near the Ka'aba and then drinking water from the Zamzam. The pilgrims then move to the Safa and Marwah hills near the Ka'aba, where they either run or walk seven times between the hills, to symbolically emulate the run Ismael's mother Hagar did in search of water for her son.

On day two, the pilgrims spend the whole day in prayer at Mina, a holy place outside Makkah.

On day three, the pilgrims move to the Mount Arafat, where it is believed that Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon. At the Arafat, they stand in vigil from noon to sunset to offer supplications, seek repentance and listen



Pilgrims surround the Kaaba in Makkah, at night.

to sermons. This particular ritual is the ultimate day of the Hajj and is considered compulsory for the pilgrimage to be successful. After the sunset prayers, they leave for Muzdalifah, where they will spend the night and collect stones for the next day's ritual.

On the fourth, fifth and sixth days, the pilgrims will move back to Mina, where they perform the symbolic stoning of the devil by throwing seven pebbles or stones at the largest of three pillars. At this stage, Eid al-Adha, or the festival of sacrifice, is celebrated. This is when animals such as goats and sheep are slaughtered and sacrificed to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice to God, when he obeyed the command to sacrifice his son. The male pilgrim's heads

are usually shaved, and the female pilgrims will remove a lock of their hair. At the end of this ritual, the pilgrims will return to Makkah, where they complete the farewell tawaf seven times. After the farewell tawaf, the pilgrimage is finally completed.

The Hajj serves as a unifying force in bringing people together from diverse backgrounds. Once the believer has fully completed the pilgrimage, they may add "hajj or Hajji" (for male) or "hajjah" (for female) to his or her name. The pilgrimage, if performed properly, is believed to wipe out previous sins for the pilgrim performing it.



Pilgrims are surrounding the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque before leaving for their annual Hajj pilgrimage.



Young Muslim Couple.

Muslim Youth and Hajj

Historically, the Hajj has been a journey for middle-aged to senior Muslims. This may be due to the cost of the trip as well as the length of the pilgrimage. Some of the cheapest packages for the Hajj still run around 7,000 USD. For younger Muslims who are establishing their careers, taking two weeks off seems un-doable, let alone the financial burden of the trip.

In other cases, perhaps the religious immaturity of youth keeps them from attempting the once-in-a-lifetime spiritual journey; they would rather wait until their faith further develops to fulfill the requirements of the fifth and final pillar of Islam. But this need not be true; the

rewards derived from the Hajj are priceless regardless of age or level of devotion.

Many Muslim youth grow up yearning to one day circle the Ka'aba, pray for supplication at the base of Mount Arafat and drink *ZamZam*. With the onslaught of social media today, these images are ever present, but still, many hold off.

The obligations surrounding the pilgrimage are loosened for those physically or financially unfit to make the trip, so it would seem that youth, unburdened by the obstacles that come with old age or family responsibilities, should be more inclined to make the trip to Makkah.



Young adult at Hajj.

There will never be a “perfect” time to attempt the Hajj. It requires sacrifice, and a pilgrim must



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capitalize on the opportunity of going through the Hajj when it presents itself, even if there are certain drawbacks. Once the door opens, it may never open again.

Young adults who find themselves able to make the Hajj may think that there will come a better, more financially stable time to embark on the journey. However, the uncertainty of the future and the rewards that come from completing the pilgrimage itself can make it ideal to do the Hajj at a younger age.

For some young Muslims, completing the Hajj represents a strengthening of faith. For others, it is a chance to rediscover faith that may have been lost or tarnished. Regardless of what draws you to Hajj, the experiences you will gain along the journey will be enlightening.

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