ISLAMIC NEW YEAR

The Islamic New Year — also known as the Arabic New Year or Hijri New Year — is the first day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. The first year of this calendar began in Gregorian CE 622 when the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina with his companions.

In the Islamic calendar, days begin at sunset. The event falls on a different day every year because the Islamic year is 11 to 12 days shorter. As rituals and prayers mark the occasion, Muharram is known as the month of remembrance and is sacred to Muslims across the world.

The word Hijri is derived from Hijra meaning migration. The starting point of Islamic calendar is migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD.

Islamic New Year 2021 will be referred as Hijri 1443.

**History of Islamic New Year:**

In Mecca and other areas, Muslims of the 7th century CE faced religious persecution for their beliefs. Therefore, the exodus of Muhammed and his followers to the city that would later be called Medina — a movement called the Hijra — where Muhammad would set forth a constitution that delineated Muslim’s rights and responsibilities. This event is of great importance in the Muslim faith, which is why Islamic New Year commemorates this sacred moment of history.

It’s not just the first day of the month Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar year, that’s important to observe for Muslims around the world. The entire month is of holy significance. For example, it is also in Muharram — second only in importance as a solemn occasion to Ramadan — that the 10th day, Ashura takes place, marking Noah’s leaving the Ark and also Moses crossing the Red Sea.

For Shia Muslims, it’s also the death anniversary of Muhammad’s grandson Hussein. They mark the occasion with mourning ceremonies. Shias, particularly those in Afghanistan, Bahrain, India, Lebanon and Pakistan, take part in remembrance parades called “matam”, where men gather in the street to take part in ritual chest-beating. For Sunnis, Muharram is a time of ushering in the new, with solemn prayer and reflection.

The lunar calendar is 11 or 12 days shorter than the Western solar calendar, so a sort of “cycle” is created around Islamic New Year as it falls back year after year. This is so those of the faith can experience the same range of temperatures and weather events as all the historical figures in their holy books did.

Muharram is an important religious and cultural event, so asking Muslim friends about the significance of Muharram can be an interesting learning lesson. Muslims themselves could also share stories, ideas and feelings with others, to mark the Islamic New Year.