

Free Wi-Fi service in Iraq during Arbaeen Ritual

Millions of pilgrims gather in Iraq's holy city of Karbala to mark Arbaeen, a sacred Shia Muslim ritual. Arbaeen, also known as Chehelum, commemorates the end of the 40-day mourning period after the killing of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, in a battle in 680 AD. His martyrdom is considered a defining event in the schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Many make the pilgrimage on foot from Baghdad, a journey of 80km which can take days. Some walk from as far as Basra in southern Iraq, a journey of nearly 700km. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come from neighboring Iran; a journey that takes about a month on foot. Although Arbaeen is a Shia ritual, some Sunni Muslims and people from other religions such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism also make the pilgrimage.

MCI decided to provide free Wi-Fi Services to Pilgrims who were traveling to Iraq for Arbaeen. The region is vastly robbed of the primary internet access facilities and suffers from really low coverage. Furthermore, using the local operator in Iraq was costly and also there were not enough sites between Najaf and Karbala to cover the network traffic during Arbaeen. MCI concern for the past two years was to find a solution for this problem to start a project for Wi-Fi services in Iraq. In the following, there are a number of challenges which the team dealt with successfully:

- Time frame as the main challenge due to the special transportation regulations for security control, and tent locations which were temporary and installed only 10 days before Arbaeen.
- Lack of Security, as the team worked while constantly at risk.
- Lack of stable power
- Lack of local contractors and also location know-how of the non-local contractor.
- No transportation services from 22nd of November for security reasons so the team had to carry the equipment and walk.

