

Article 423

Moon Sighting Controversy of 1426H Eid ul Fitr

The attached (pasted below) is a beautiful, convincingly well written article by Jung's London correspondent. It is based on well founded arguments. It proves beyond any shadow of doubt that those who had their Eid Day on Thursday, November 3, 2005 were misled by the joint Shura Council of ISNA & ICNA. May Allah pardon them and give them Tawfeeq not to repeat such "blunders" again.

If they would have fasted one day more and completed their 30 days of Ramadan, as permitted by Shariah, heaven would have not fallen on their heads. Now they stand committed to a sin having Eid on the day of Obligatory fasting.

All brothers and sisters who had Eid on Thursday [November 3, 2005] have no choice but to repent to Allah (SWT) and **now fast one day as "Qaza" of Ramadan. It would be given precedence over the six days of Shawwal non-obligatory fasting.**

May Allah pardon ourselves and our leadership and give us Tawfeeq not to follow anyone else but our own moon sighting.

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THE QUESTION OF ROOYAT-E-HILAL (Crescent Moonsighting)

Is it essential to follow Saudi Arabia?

By Zahoor Niazi

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In all the European countries Ramadhan started on two different days due to the announcement of Saudi Arabia. There will also be two Eids. In London most people will be celebrating Eid on Thursday November 3 but in other cities of Britain the majority of people will celebrate Eid on Friday November 4. Ordinary people are worried. Young people can't understand why the Ulema are fighting. Why don't they agree on one day of Eid?

In Britain, the Islamic Cultural Centre London (ICCL) should rightly hold an authority, as its trustees include ambassadors from all the Muslim countries. The announcement of the beginning of Hijra year from this centre should be acceptable to all Muslims of Britain. But it is not so. Why not? Perhaps it is because the

majority of British Muslims feel that ICCL has become a spokesman of Saudi Arabia instead of representing them according to some principles. Regardless of whether or not the New Moon is present on the horizon of Britain, the director general of ICCL makes announcements of Ramadhan and Eid dates by following the announcement of Saudi Arabia.

What is wrong with following Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia is the centre of Islam. Haramain Sherefain are there. We pray five times a days facing Makkah. It is only there that we can perform Haj. Then why not follow Saudi Arabia in the matters of Ramadhan and Eid also. If the ICCL follows Saudi Arabia, so what? First, if Allah had willed that Muslims all over the world should celebrate Islamic festivals on the same day, then he would have made the day and night at the same time everywhere. But he has made the day and night each for half the world.

Secondly from the experience and observations of many years it is proved that the Saudi claim of Ruait-e-Hilal is often wrong. I have used the word "wrong" instead of a "lie" so as not to offend some peoples' feelings. Every Muslim's sentimental attachment with Saudia is not hidden. In the last quarter century, there have been only a few instances, when Saudia announced the beginning of a month actually based on Ruait and not on their Umm-ul-Qurra calendar.

What is the Umm-ul-Qurra Calendar?

When the Bright aroused the Arabs against the Ottoman Empire, and the Saudi family formed a government, then it was decided to enforce a Hijra calendar instead of the Gregorian solar calendar. The interesting history of the preparation of this calendar is this. Sometime ago, the Saudi rulers assigned the responsibility to prepare a 32-year calendar to some people. Those people got the monthly times of the Birth of New Moon from the British Royal Observatory. Today by the knowledge bestowed on man by Allah, man can prepare such calculations for hundreds of years in advance. The people who prepared the calendar used a self made principle, which said that if the age of the New Moon on the second day at sunset is 12 hours then that day will be first date of new lunar month. Those people have not kept this principle as a secret but have declared it openly. Due to this method a problem occurred that often the Saudi calendar goes against the principle of Ruait. In order to run the affairs of the sate without any confusion, the Umm-ul-Qurra calendar always got precedence over Islamic dates. Only a few times has Saudia deviated from its calendar to use the correct Ramadhan and Haj dates. This discrepancy is also understood by Saudi Ulema and scholars but their difficulty is that Saudia is a closed society without any freedom of _expression. There is no freedom of congregation. No decisions can be challenged there. Over there nobody has the right to ask "Oh, Omar we will not listen to you until you tell us how come you have got two sheets of cloth whereas everybody else has got only one".

Many journalists have been either imprisoned or lost their jobs on small matters. Such a situation is not only in Saudia. Many other Arab countries are even worse. In London, a Libyan businessman said if someone performs Fajr prayer for four consecutive days, the on the fifth day he will be taken away by secret police to question him about the "revolution he may be planning". Similar things happen in Syria. Perhaps it is due to such a mental state that only the Muslims of the sub continent refuse to accept the decisions of ICCL blindly but verify them on Islamic principles.

When does a new day begin in Islam?

In the Solar calendar at 12 O'clock at midnight one day finishes and the next day starts. Jews also use a lunar calendar. Before the state of Israel, to start a new month they had more confusion and disagreement than the Muslims have. Then Israel formed a rule that if the New Moon is born before 12 O'clock at midnight, then the next day will be the first date of the new lunar month. Muslims have a different criteria altogether, which is this: If on the 29th day of the current lunar month at the time of sunset, the New Moon is present on the horizon and is visible then the new lunar month will start. Otherwise thirty days are completed in the current lunar month. Unfortunately in the preparation of the Saudi calendar this criteria has been ignored. According to the past criteria if the New Moon is born even after 12 O'clock at midnight and if the next day at the time of sunset the age of the moon is 12 hours then that will be the first date of the new lunar month. (Note: in the recent years the Saudi criteria has changed to: If the New Moon is before Sunset and it is present on the local horizon after sunset then the next day is the first date of the lunar month. But at times they deviate even from this criteria.)

What is a 'New Moon'?

The terminology of 'New Moon' is in common use, although the moon, the sun and earth are the same which Allah had created at the beginning of the universe and will remain the same till the last day. Like billions of other planets these three are also constantly revolving in their orbits. The moon revolves around the earth. The earth in addition to moving in its own orbit also revolves together with its moon around the sun at the rate of 64 thousand miles per hour. Then the sun together with all its planets is revolving in its galaxy and this galaxy is revolving amongst a cluster of many other galaxies. The term 'New Moon' is only used in the sense that when the moon after completing its revolution around the earth in approximately 29.5 days, reaches an astronomical point which is in line with the sun and earth. At that time, the sunlight falling on the moon is not visible from the earth. The moon's earth facing side is dark, as if there is no moon. But from here the moon starts a new revolution. This phenomenon is known as Conjunction, New Moon or birth of the moon. However when the New Moon has moved away about 5.8 to 8.8 degrees and its age is about 17 to 23 hours, then it becomes visible. There are many other factors involved in the visibility. But without going into technical details, I will only say that sometimes due to other factors even a 36hours old moon is not visible. Therefore human knowledge so far has not reached the stage to tell us about the moon's visibility in different countries with an accuracy of minutes and seconds but calculations can be made within a few hours difference.

A formula for Britain.

In 1984, in a meeting of Ulema and Astronomers held in ICCL, a formula was devised. According to the formula if a New Moon is present on the British horizon but cannot be visible due to clouds, and if a Shahada of Ruait is available from a near country e.g. Morocco, then the new lunar month should be started. However after only one year and holding a Birmingham based group for violating this formula, the ICCL threw away the formula in the dustbin and started to follow the Umm-ul-Qurra calendar in the name of Saudi Arabia. There was no central Ruait-e- Hilal committee set up and neither any scholars nor scientists were taken into confidence. The Director General of ICCL appointed himself to declare the dates of Ramadhan and Eid without any research. According to the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Sir Iqbal Secrani, once he asked the then Saudi ambassador Ghazi Al Ghusaibi why do you impose Saudi decisions in this country? To this the ambassador replied that we never ask ICCL to follow Saudi Arabia. They should follow the local conditions of Ruait. But may be some people, dreaming for a bright future, try to be more faithful to the king than the king himself. Sir Iqbal Sacranie also narrated to me

his conversations he had with the present Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Shaikh Al Shaikh and the Minister of Endowments. The President of East London Mosque, Dr Abdul Bari was also present. The Saudi dignitaries asked them (Iqbal & Bari) why do you follow Saudi Arabia? You should fix the dates of festivals according to your own calculations.

What are the reasons of confusion and disarray?

Because of the announcements of ICCL the Muslim community of Europe and Britain is suffering from confusion and disarray. The Arabs in London blindly accept ICCL. Then there are religious leaders in different cities of Britain who get paid by the Royal family for their Haj, Umra, conferences or they receive Royal donations for their Mosques and Madrassahs. According to an estimate, hundreds of people are on the Saudi payroll. Amongst the Saudi followers are even those “non-followers” who have deviated from the clear words of the Prophet’s Hadith. There are also the Deobandi Ulema who want to remain in the good books of the Saudi higher ups. In this group are also included the activists of Tableeghi Jamat (Propagandists). These people have influence in approximately 400 of the estimated 1200 mosques in Britain. There is no accurate database available yet but it is also estimated that about 500 mosques belong to the Ahl-e-Sunnat Al Jamat (Brelvi Group). The UK Islamic Mission has 45, Shia group 50 and Minhajul Quran half a dozen mosques. All these (about 600) mosques follow the formula of Ruait or Imkan Ruait. In addition to the Deobandi group, Ahle Hadith and Arabs who have a combined total of possibly 100 mosques accept Saudi announcements. Interestingly, the leaders of the Deobandi group in the sub-continent do not follow Saudi Arabia, even though, in terms of the horizon, the sub-continent is nearer to Saudi Arabia than Britain is to Saudi Arabia. These leaders have so far declared the Saudi announcements as wrong and unacceptable. Dar-ul-Aloom Deoband in its Fatwa of 20 April 2003 has stated that in Britain it is not right to announce Ramadhan and Eid according to Saudi Ruait. To act on the Saudi Ruait is also against the principles of Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence). This Fatwa has received support from another big centre, Madrassah Mazahar Al Aloom Saharanpur. A prominent and high ranking Deobandi scholar and judge, Mohammad Taqi Usmani has written in a letter that “the incidences of accepting Shahada before the birth of New Moon are unacceptable in my view. I have also talked with several Saudi scholars and they were also perplexed. Because the matter is handled by Majlis Al Qadha Al Aala (Riyadh), those scholars were helpless”. Whenever a conversation took place with the Imams of Harmain in the Harmain or during their visits to Britain, they choose to stay quiet about the correctness or otherwise of the Saudi decisions. However to persistent questioners, they asked why do you act on the Saudi decisions and why don’t you start the new month on the basis of the crescent in your country?

Tradition of the Prophet’s (Peace be upon him) Companions.

In the period of the Prophet’s (pbuh) Companions, the Islamic new month was started according to the local Ruait. According to Sunan Abu Daood a man went to Damascus and stayed there for the whole month of Ramadhan. After his return he said we have already seen the new moon (in Damascus). Then Abdullah Bin Abbas said we have been commanded by the holy prophet (pbuh) to act on the local Ruait, even if the Caliph himself has declared Ruait in another land. For the Companions it was not important whether the Eid is held on Thursday or Friday, but they were anxious to follow the commandments of Allah and His Prophet (pbuh).

Unity – against whom?

A large cross section of Muslims earnestly believes that because Saudi Arabia is the centre of Islam, we should have Ramadhan and Eid with Saudi Arabia as united Muslims. One day, when a colleague in my office put

forward this point of view I said to him 'OK, I accept your view. Even though at present the sun is shining in London but because the sun has set in Makkah and over there it is the time of Maghrib prayer, so let us, for the sake of 'Muslims Unity', offer our Maghrib prayer right now.' He was very surprised with this reply and was speechless. Then I said to him why do you want to follow the centre of Islam only in the matter of Moon. You should also follow it in their prayer times which are set according to the sun. This talk of unity; is this unity against Allah in that unity must be achieved in clear violation of Commandments Allah and His Prophet (pbuh)?

Ulema are Worried but Quiet

Majority of prominent Deobandi Ulema in Britain are worried and unsatisfied with the present situation. In their private gatherings they consider Saudi announcements as incorrect but in public they keep quiet for the sake of so called "unity". In such circumstances, a small but effective group is able to impose its own preferences over others. The Tableeghi Jamat, is making an effective contribution in bringing people towards prayer and fasting. Their leaders are practical men and not scholars. The scholars from whom they derive guidance from are limited in their knowledge to the level of Daras Nizami. They are neither familiar with the present problems and nor do they have any solutions for them.

Observatory calculations not acceptable!

These people insist on giving preference to Shahada over observatory calculations. They believe this is the view of their leaders. But I think they misunderstand their own leaders. The founder of Dar Al Aloom Haqqania Akhora Khatak, Maulana Abdul Haq writes: "In the Mohammadan Sharia, the rule for Ruait-e-Hilal is that if on the evening of 29th if the horizon is absolutely clear then it is necessary to have Ruait from a 'big crowd' of people". It is however surprising that in Saudia there has never been a situation of 'big crowd'. It is always one or two old aged people with weak eyesight who provide witness of moon sighting! Do the millions of Saudi people have no interest in moon sighting and have they given this responsibility to two to four govt. officials?

Islam is a code of 'established rules' (Musssalamat). No witness is acceptable against an 'established rule'. With the progress in science many 'exemplary rules' (Mushtahbahdt) have become 'established rules'. But the poor Mullahs have not yet heard of such changes. The birth of the moon is a similar case. If say two or ten people bear witness to having seen the new moon before its birth, while astronomical science categorically denies this, how can the entire Muslim nation accept such a witness. Imam Abu Hanifa said: "If the sky is clear, the testimony of a 'big crowd' is necessary to celebrate Eid". Present day prominent scholar Shaikh Yousuf Qardhawi says: "If according to the Observatory the new moon is not born yet, then any claim of its sighting must be rejected". Like this year in Nigeria, three people claimed to have seen the new moon before its birth and then some people started their fast on Nov 3.

Who saw the Ramadhan Moon?

On Monday Oct. 3, the Conjunction i.e. the New Moon in London occurred at 11.28 and on that day the sunset as well as the moonset was at 18.33. In other words the new moon which was only 07.06 old was not even present above the horizon. In Makkah the new moon was present on the horizon for 3 minutes, its age was 04:39, altitude 0 degree and distance from the sun was 2.2 degrees. In such a situation, the new moon cannot be seen even with a telescope let alone with the naked eye. The Mullahs have no knowledge of such facts and no desire to learn them. In spite of this they are bent upon misleading the public. It is noteworthy, that Saudia started Ramadhan on Oct. 4 but even on that day none of the Middle Eastern

countries had any moon sighting. With the true moon sighting method the Saudia's first Ramadhan would have been Oct 6, like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

When is Eid?

The Shawal moon will be born in London on 2 Nov. at 01:25. On that day the sunset will be at 04:31 and moonset at 04:20. In other words the moon will go down the horizon some 11 minutes before the sunset. It will be impossible to see it. In spite of this those who wish to celebrate Eid on Nov. 3 and think that the moon does not have the strength to hide from the holy land, although it can hide from the whole world but cannot hide in Saudia, then those people should take pictures of the moon on Nov. 2 in order to beat the scientists and observatory in their expert knowledge! Will Saudia and its followers accept this challenge? For Allah everybody is responsible for his own actions. A person cannot escape by saying that what could I do, when my local Imam had announced Eid. One day I said to a Deobandi Alim that some people's necks have become so strong that they are willing to take the load of breaking the fast of millions of people. In Europe, according to the moon calculations, Nov 3 will be the 30th fast day. Now whosoever wants to please Saudis can miss the fast on that but those who want to please Allah should fast on Nov 3 and celebrate Eid on Nov 4. If a person will complete 30 days fast on Nov 2, then he should consider his first day fast i.e. Oct 4 as Nafil and ask Allah to accept it. It is the responsibility of mosque committees to declare Eid day in the light of solid facts and not by following someone blindly.

Future Course of Action

We should try that ICCL, for its central role and in order to restore its confidence, should form a Central Ruait-e-Hilal Committee comprising of Ulema of all Madhaheb and Astronomers to act throughout the year. If ICCL is not ready to perform such a role then the leading organisations such as Muslim Council of Britain and British Muslim Forum should join hands to form a committee to provide guidance to the entire Muslim community. If even these two institutions do not play their roles, then I am afraid the Imam and Mosque Council of the Home Office task force will unite the Muslims!

Future of Islamic Cultural Centre London

A member of the House of Lords intends to file a petition in the high court stating that the British Crown had gifted the land of ICCL when there were only a few Muslims in this country. Now there are nearly two million Muslims, and therefore the ICCL should be handed over to them and that its present administrations should be closed down. From the other angle, the Saudi Govt. and its Embassy should also see whether after spending millions of pounds they are earning respect or a bad name amongst the Muslim community of Britain. Also within the community, there is a movement to include three representatives of the community. The ICCL should be grateful to Saudia for financial support but should not divide the community by its wrong decisions.

With reference to this subject I contacted ICCL to know the views of its director general Dr Ahmed Al Dubayan but he could not be reached, nor did I receive any message from him.