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Ramadan and moon sighting

lunar months has been debated by scholars throughout history. The hadith that is frequently quoted is: "Do not fast until you see the crescent-moon, and do not break the fast until you have seen the crescent moon, but if conditions are overcast for you then enumerate for it." [Bukhari] The statement, "then enumerate for it" can be taken as evidence for the permissibility of calculation. Allah never commanded that the moon be sighted with the naked eyes to know the beginning of the new month. The Holy Qur'an is very clear that any method of calculation is acceptable. Now, with all the knowledge we have, we cannot sit still knowing that the month has already started and wait for a scholar to go and look for the crescent moon that may or may not be visible because of many factors, the most common of them is the weather condition.

Today, Muslims have expertise and access to technology to understand the calculations of when and where the sighting occurs. Recorded data shows how the science of moon sighting is compared with the actual observations.

Islam is a strong proponent of using reason. Today the fact is that astronomy can accurately establish the time of birth of the new moon, and the time interval when it is impossible to see the crescent-moon due to its not yet being present.

Thus, there is no harm in using this astronomical basis to reject a claimed sighting which cannot possibly be correct.

Just think about people in the Caribbean, they have a 6-month long rainy season and moon sighting is not possible because of clouds. If they count 30 days for 3 or 4 months in a row, the moon is then sighted on the 28th or 27th day. This is a clear indication that the Sharia did not intend the sighting as the only requirement but simply as a facility, that was the sole method available to the Muslims of that era.

It seems this year in Bangladesh, the sighting of the new moon is a fabrication of the

Islamic scholars or politicians.

Dr. Dilara Islam
Bangkok, Thailand

Yet again controversy has arisen in Bangladesh over the sighting of the Ramadan moon with fierce debate in JS and discord and division amongst the simple innocent people. This should not be so because there is an official moon sighting committee in Bangladesh and there are various websites which give the visibility of the new moon which is very accurate for all tropical countries close to the equator. One such website is maintained by the British government HM Nautical Almanac Office: <http://websurf.nao.rl.ac.uk>.

The decision of the moon sighting committee to start the month of Ramadan from the sunset of Sunday 24 September is absolutely sound because the website confirms that in Dacca (still spelt like this for this website) it is impossible to sight the new moon before this date even with optical aids.

So this problem has been caused by some mosques which obviously have affiliation or funding from Middle Eastern countries and they want to follow the lead of their patrons in this matter. In UK we are much aware of this problem. Many mosques and Islamic societies here are affiliated to and are funded by Islamic governments or organisations from outside the UK, and each group has its own ideas as to when a religious festivity should begin. Saudi Arabia has stopped citing any reasons for its proclamations of religious events for many years now and no one really knows what is the basis for the proclamations. Because, obviously, it cannot be the sighting of the new moon as they started Ramadan from sunset of Friday 22 September 2006, which would be impossible. Many of us in UK believe that Saudi Arabia uses the conjunction timing of the moon with the sun for this purpose, but if so, then how, is never made public. Recently the

Fiqh Council of North America has accepted the conjunction time in GMT instead of actual sighting of the moon for festivities to start there and the decisions are rationally explained.

The Regent Park Central London Mosque and many large and small mosques in UK receive Saudi funding and if they did not obey the Saudi proclamations the funding would be cut off.

So these mosques here embellish the bald proclamations of festivities by adding "the moon has been sighted in Saudi Arabia, so Ramadan or Eid will start from... etc", which is a falsehood by them (not Saudi Arabia), to encourage the public to attend.

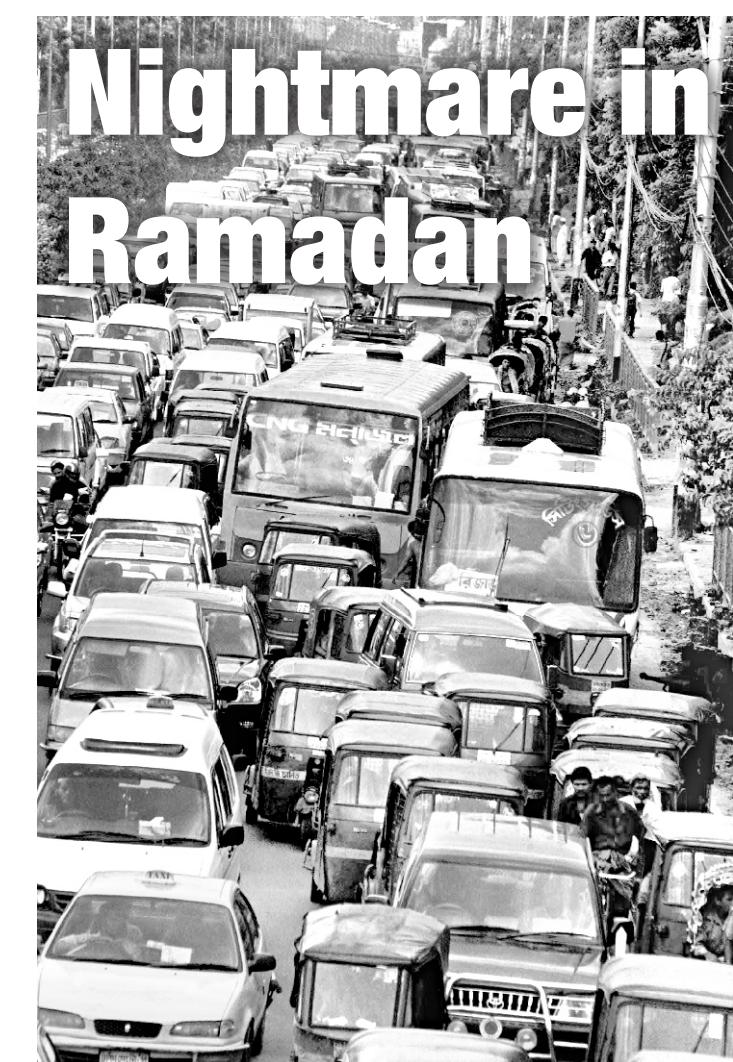
Every mosque or other Islamic society and institution in Bangladesh must follow the official moon-sighting committee's decision there unquestionably and not follow directions from other countries. There should also not be any private parallel moon-sighting group.

Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

It is indeed a matter of great bafflement that we keep on facing trouble like sighting the moon before the month of holy Ramadan starts! This year it was no exception. We have got two departments to sight the moon and decide the exact day to start the fast: The meteorology department - the scientific authority, and the clerics - the religious authority. A general agreement between these two departments determines the beginning, but this time as the scientific department failed to spot the moon on the assumed day there has been a glut of accusations from the clerics.

At this point, one wonders why should we face trouble in determining the date for a solemn occasion and why should there be any controversy on this issue?

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong



It was 2nd Ramadan. I left the office at 4.00pm. I was trying to hire a CNG for returning home, which would cost me 5 times more than the normal bus fare. However, I failed to hire one. No CNG driver was ready to go to my destination and if they agreed, they demanded an abnormally high rate. So, I was forced to walk half a kilometre to Farmgate bus-stop. It was not easy to walk because the footpath was broken and many people already occupied the street. At last, I reached the bus-stop. It was a nightmare there. Almost every bus was packed up with lots of people hanging in the space. If some place to hang on was left and noticed by the waiting people, a competition to achieve the target started. Then after all the troubles when I returned home, I could see no light in my room as electricity was gone. Electricity came after the completion of "iftar". We experienced load-shedding again during "Tarabi" prayer for not less than one hour.

When electricity returned, the news at ten started. Within a few minutes, we were lucky to hear the voice of our prime minister demanding her re-election. Interestingly, she was not pointing her successes, but strongly mentioning failures of the opposition.

Mohammad Kazi Mamun, Tolarbag, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216

Iftar party

With due respect to the solemnity of Ramadan, I want to raise a few questions regarding Iftar parties organised with tax payers' money. We have seen the first one organised for high officials. One can expect that a few more are in the line up as usual. My observations and questions are:

How much expenditure is incurred for each such party?

What kind of budgetary provisions are in the book? How much has been spent

for the one held so far this year?

Is it a political culture, or our religion supports it?

It ends up more in "shaju-guju" and "golpa-golpa". I am not against it, but why use public money?

Finally, without any reservation I shall urge upon the authorities to stop this kind of iftar culture. And if needed, do it by individual subscriptions, except for those arranged for the poor.

A reader, On e-mail

Attention: vegetable exporters

I am an expatriate Bangladeshi, working in Sri Lanka since 2005. I have found prices of vegetables too high in Sri Lanka, especially in Colombo and suburban towns. It seems Bangladeshi exporters can find a lucrative market for vegetables export in Sri Lanka.

Exporters may contact local business persons for more details.

In general, the prices in the Maldives are even higher than Sri Lanka since vegetables are being exported from Sri Lanka.

Ashfaqul Wahab
39, Edirweera Avenue
Dehiwala
Colombo

Muslims and the world at large

Syed Badrul Ahsan's write-up should help Muslims understand why they lag behind the followers of other religions.

Having said that, I want to answer a question that Mr. Ahsan has asked and, at the same time, I will also like to correct a mistake he has made in it. First his question: he asked: [Besides, there is the other unequivocal truth, which is that if in the land of the Prophet modern, and therefore scientific, ways of deciding when religious occurrences must take place can be adopted, who are we to take issue with them?] Answer: Most Muslims and the Ulema of the Indian sub-continent believe that the Saudis are not real Muslims and that what they preach and practice in the name of Islam is not true Islam. It is this belief that makes them take issue with the Saudis.

But in case of hajj, the non-Saudi Muslims find no problem with the Saudis, and they gladly perform their hajj under their leadership.

Now the mistake Mr. Ahsan has made. He wrote: [The birthday of the Holy Prophet is observed in unison all over the globe.] Correction: The Saudis do not observe the birthday of the Prophet of Islam.

Mohammad Asghar
On e-mail

Cox's Bazaar

An usual calm prevails after sunset. Few visitors are seen loitering at the beachside market. Rest retire for gossip in the hotel rooms or slowly creep into the restaurants. This is Cox's Bazaar - the world's longest beach and the country's top tourist destination. With so many tourist spots and

panoramic landscapes, Cox's Bazaar has the potential to be the largest source of revenue earning for the country. Surprisingly, there is not even a welcome billboard at the town entrance. It is true that of late there has been mushrooming of a number of standard hotels and restaurants - thanks to the private entrepreneurs, who despite all odds have been brave enough to venture into the business. However, the story ends here. There are no amusement facilities either inside or outside the hotel premises. No facilities for outdoor games (golf, tennis, handball etc.) exist. Garbage lays scattered everywhere, even in the hotel zone. Street lights are meagre adding to sense of insecurity. Jhaubon (pine trees forest) have been developed along the beachside. Possibly the only beach in the world with pine trees and without coconut trees. Why the authorities concerned opted for pine trees is not understood. Planting coconut trees could reap economic benefits. Moreover, coconut trees are known to withstand cyclonic storm and could be an effective barrier against natural disasters.

There is lack of ornamental garden with sitting arrangements along the beach. No tour operator services have developed in and around Cox's Bazaar for the tourists. Not even to the Rakkhina Palli, Buddhist temples within the city or to nearby Himchari or Ramu. There are no arrangements for any package tour to nearby potential tourist spots like Teknaf, Kutubdia/Moheshkhali in small uncovered speed boats or by age old boats is simply hazardous and time consuming. (The privately owned sea vessel to St. Martin's operates only during the peak-season). The roads to Teknaf Beach and to the picturesque Inanai Beach are broken, full of pot holes and simply horrendous. Even if one reaches these places on personal initiative, there is hardly any recreational activity, except for taking bath or a stroll along the beach. Due to lack of privacy, the girls/ladies cannot think of a bath. To top it all is the nuisance of the uninviting flashing cameras of the photographers. Travelling should be fun and enjoyable. There are no good restaurants and no souvenir shops. The women and the children suffer the most for lack of good rest/comfort rooms. No promotional materials are available in the Parjatan熔tels/private hotels to guide the visitors.

Every year IMO celebrates World Maritime Day. The exact date an individual country chooses on its own but is usually celebrated during the last week of September. The day is used to focus on the importance of shipping safety, maritime security and the marine environment and to highlight a particular aspect of IMO's activities in relation to development goals.

The theme was chosen to

provide world community with the message that the IMO has taken all the technical cooperation programmes in responding to the outcome of 2005 World Summit and is contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals to ensure global development, with special consideration of maritime needs in Africa.

"Maritime activity has a key role to play in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, for shipping not only moves the world's burgeoning trade, but can also contribute substantially to sustainable development, while international commerce promotes production, job creation and greater socio-economic prosperity. And the combination of all these has, undoubtedly, the potential to lift people from hunger and poverty and also eradicate life-threatening diseases," said Secretary-General of IMO Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos, former Greek shipping expert.

Like others, in this 'World Maritime Day' programme, IMO hosts the traditional reception to be attended by the world's distinguished shipping experts, including members of the diplomatic corps, at the Banqueting House in Whitehall, London. World Maritime Day will also be observed and celebrated in many Member States and by many organisations associated with IMO, providing an opportunity to promote shipping as a major contributor to the world economy and the welfare of all nations. Argentina, Australia, Singapore and many other countries have chalked out extensive festive activities/events towards celebrating the day in a befitting manner.

In Bangladesh also, the shipping authorities and organisations are arranging to celebrate the day with colourful events highlighting the significance of the day. On this day, we condole the deaths of Fishermen in the Bay of Bengal. **Capt. Mohammad Ali**, Former Head of Nautical Studies, Marine Academy, Chittagong

E-governance
E-governance or electronic governance may be defined as delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic means. Such means of delivering information is often referred to as information technology or IT in short form. Use of IT in government facilitates an efficient, speedy and transparent process for disseminating information

Corrupt politicians

I fully agree with Mr Syed Hossain that this is the high time to stand against the misguided politicians.

Politics in Bangladesh is overtly engulfed by corruption and confrontation, hooliganism and hatred, greediness and glitch, and many more such negative elements. Why? Because, it is an easy means for earning money without limit and without accountability.

UNESCO supports e-governance project in the Caribbean, Spain, other Latin American countries, and many other countries in the world.

UNESCO, in collaboration with the Caribbean Centre for the Development (CARICAD), and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) launches a series of electronic governance related capacity development activities in

government more accountable, transparent and effective.

UNESCO supports e-governance project in the Caribbean, Spain, other Latin American countries, and many other countries in the world.

However, is it really a healthy situation? Is this the path that we want to follow? Most probably not.

We are on the wrong track. A nation so divided cannot prosper. It is beyond imagination how a nation without accord on certain issues of national interest can make progress. Sooner or later, we should think about it and come to a conclusion whether we will leave the fate of the nation to a few hundred irresponsible, corrupt, politicians, or we will try to find some healthy alternative.

Sahara Chowdhury

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Assassination of Prof. Aftab

Former vice-chancellor of the National University (NU) Prof. Aftab Ahmed died after struggling for life since assailants shot him in his residence on Saturday last. During the rule of four-party alliance, four university professors have been killed. The killers have not been identified, or if identified not tried. We have witnessed how a suspected killer in Prof. Taher murder case who belongs to a four-party student faction has been given shelter. No attempts have been made to identify the killers in other murder cases.

A teacher, be it school, college or university, is regarded as a highly respected person in the society. With the passage of time, the dignity of teachers has eroded due to various factors.

The assassination of our university teachers, I think, is the result of ugly politics. We have to get rid of this game. Otherwise, many more, like Prof. Aftab, will be victimised.

Mallik Akram Hossain
The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Filthy note

We, the common people, have to suffer a lot because of the worn-out two taka notes. Though the government introduced coins of the same value, many of these coins, according to some of the observers, have ended up in the banks. That is, these coins are now in the possession of the collectors, or hoarders as they should be called, who have an inclination to garner these metallic objects. As a result, there is a scarcity of the said coins in the market.

Because there is a dearth of coins, we have to use the dirty, grimy, torn two-taka notes. Even sometimes these paper notes are hard to come by. That these filthy notes often give rise to altercations in public buses and other modes of transport is a common fact of our lives. Moreover, these instances of verbal exchange often give occasion to swearing, and even fist fights. Thus these torn and worn-out notes are adding to our miseries.

We hope that the authorities will look into the matter and introduce new paper notes of the said value.

Zabed Walli

Pahartoli, Chittagong

