

Why look for the moon on the 29th date and the next day?

It is well-known amongst Muslim scholars and moon sighting experts that a lunar month is either 29 or 30 days long. It is never less than 29 days or more than 30 days long.

According to Islamic tradition, Muslims always look for the crescent moon (Hilal) on the 29th lunar date and if it's not sighted then 30 days of the month is to be completed. This method works well with equatorial countries/locations where clear skies are the norm and cloudiness are an exception.

Perhaps, what is not so well-known is the fact that a lunar year has about 6 months that are 29 days long and all others are 30 days long, making a lunar year of 354 days long approximately, which is 11 days shorter than a solar year (hence Ramadan rotating through all the seasons).

The normal moon sighting practice of equatorial countries does not work in the case of the UK due to the prolonged adverse weather conditions throughout the year. These persistent adverse UK weather conditions are caused by the high and low pressures of the surrounding oceans.

Therefore, if the UK Muslims keep on completing 30-days month (as per tradition) then after about 6 months, the month length will become less than 29th days, which is not allowed in an Islamic (Hijri) Calendar system.

Similarly, if the month is prematurely ended on 29th day due to human errors (or by accepting erroneous foreign news), the future months are likely to be more than 30 days long, which is also not allowed. It is either 29 or 30 days and not less than 29 or more than 30 days.

Furthermore, the Fiqh scholars have stated that the Hilal must be seen on the 30th day (in clear sky) otherwise the start must have been wrong and if that's Ramadan then a Fast must be kept on the 31st day. In the case of the Hilal being sighted on the 28th date, a Qadha fast must be kept after Eid (see references).

Therefore, it is necessary for the UK Muslims to look for the Hilal on both 29th **and the next day** (30th or 1st) to minimise errors, especially in adverse weather conditions of the UK.

Besides, the above data may inform if it's possible to rely totally on UK moon sighting reports or not in the future, without borrowing conflicting foreign news, as is the present practice.

Note that the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent (where most UK Muslims are from), usually start Ramadan/Shawwal almost every year after sighting a 30+ hours old moon in clear sky conditions, hence it is easily seen by the naked eye.

Any sighting of a moon less than 24 hours old, especially in cloudy weather will require the help of optical aids (e.g. binoculars), which has been permitted by many UK scholars.

References (from Maulana Yakub Qasmi, 2000):

1. Al Taqreer Ul Rafee, by Allamah Ibn Abedin Ash-Shami, Vol.2, p.146
2. Al-Fiqh Ala Al-Madhahib Al-Arba Ah by Abd al-Rahman al-Jaziri, Vol.1 p.552
3. Maraqi Al Falah by Allamah Tahtawi, p.359
4. Nur al-Idah by Imam Shurunbulali, p.283

[Checked by Mufti Zakariya Akud]