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## The Application of Rukyah and Hisab in Determining the Starting Dates of the Months of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand

Nur Aida Athirah Sulaiman, Shahir Akram Hassan

Centre for Islamic Development Management (ISDEV), Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM,  
Pulau Pinang

Email: shahirakram@usm.my

### Abstract

Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country, with a small Muslim minority, concentrated primarily in its' southern region, near the Malaysian border. Both countries are said to use the same "Rukyah and Hisab" method to determine the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal. Therefore, the months of Ramadhan and Syawal should start on the same days in both countries, which both are used the same method and same time zone. In recent years, however, differences in the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal have been observed between the two countries. The following questions arise as the result of this discrepancy: 1) What are the methods currently used by Thailand? and 2) What is the application of rukyah and hisab in determining the starting dates of the months of Ramadhan and syawal in Thailand? The objective of this research is to answer these questions, by identifying and analyzing the method currently being used in Thailand to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal. Documented research, semi-structured interviews, and non-participatory observation are used to collect the data, which then undergo qualitative content analysis. The method used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand is based on the "rukayah hakiki" method.

**Keywords:** Determining Method, Ramadhan, Syawal, Rukyah, Hisab, Thailand

### Introduction

Based on the International Lunar Date Line (GTBA/ILDL), Malaysia and Thailand's positions fall within the same time zone. Lunar months, such as Ramadhan and Syawal, are expected to begin on the same days in countries within the same time zone. Nevertheless, there are still differences in the dates when Ramadhan and Syawal begin in Malaysia and Thailand. The International Lunar Date Line (GTBA/ILDL) was introduced by Mohammad Ilyas, to standardize the starting dates of Hijrah months at the international level. The GTBA is designated, based on scientific data, and using the minimum requirements for the sighting of the new crescent moon. The standardization of the dates will only occur when the same criteria for new crescent moon sighting are used

everywhere (Zainal, 2002:142-143). Earlier research showed that both Malaysia and Thailand used the “rukayah and hisab” method. However, if we observe the starting dates for Ramadhan and Eid-al-Fitr (1 Syawal) in the last six (6) years, there has been more than one instance where they were different (Office of the Keeper of the Rulers’ Seal of Malaysia, 2012; The Sheikhu Islam Office of Thailand, 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b; 2016a and 2016b). The following questions arise as the result, namely, what the exact method currently used in Thailand is, and whether it is different from the one currently in use in Malaysia.

Thailand was chosen as the subject of this study, because the Rukyah and Hisab method have already been successfully applied in Muslim-majority countries in Southeast Asia. Abdul Salam (2016) applied the Rukyah and Hisab method in Malaysia, as part of her master’s dissertation. Hassan & Hanapi (2015) and Hanapi & Hassan (2017) applied it in Brunei Darussalam, and Ahmad & Hassan (2017), in Indonesia However, no one has applied this method in a Muslim-minority country in Southeast Asia yet. Hence, Thailand was chosen as the subject of this research.

Over the last six years, the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal between the two countries have been different, on several occasions. Table 1 and Table 2 show the differences.

**Table 1: Starting dates for Ramadhan fasting in Malaysia and Thailand, 1432 AH to 1437 AH**

Year (AD/AH)	Malaysia		Thailand	
	New Crescent Moon Observation Date	Date of 1 Ramadhan	New Crescent Moon Observation Date	Date of 1 Ramadhan
2016/1437	5 June	<b>6 June</b>	5 June	<b>7 June</b>
2015/1436	<b>16 June</b>	18 June	<b>.17 June</b>	18 June
2014/1435	27 June	29 June	27 June	29 June
2013/1434	8 July	10 July	8 July	10 July
2012/1433	19 July	<b>21 July</b>	19 July	<b>20 July</b>
2011/1432	31 July	1 August	31 July	1 August

**Table 2: Eid-al-Fitr Celebration dates in Malaysia and Thailand, 1432 AH to 1437 AH**

Year (AD/AH)	Malaysia		Thailand	
	New Crescent Moon Observation Date	Date of 1 Syawal	New Crescent Moon Observation Date	Date of 1 Syawal
2016/1437	<b>4 July</b>	6 July	<b>5 July</b>	6 July
2015/1436	16 July	17 July	16 July	17 July
2014/1435	27 July	28 July	27 July	28 July
2013/1434	7 August	8 August	7 August	8 August
2012/1433	<b>18 August</b>	19 August	<b>17 August</b>	19 August
2011/1432	29 August	30 August	29 August	30 August

Based on Table 1 and Table 2, the starting dates for Ramadhan fasting and Eid-al-Fitr Celebration have differed on the occasion during the past six (6) years. Specifically, Malaysia and Thailand had different starting dates for Ramadhan twice, in 1433 AH and 1437 AH. These differences in the Ramadhan starting dates resulted in different starting dates for Syawal in the two countries.

Two objectives must be achieved in order to answer the questions regarding the methods used in Malaysia and Thailand. The first one is to identify the method used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand. The second objective is to analyse that method. Primary data are collected through interviews with a sample of six respondents, representing the Provincial Islamic Councils of Thailand. The six respondents are Hj. Abdulbasit Cekmak (Qadi of Yala Province Islamic Council), Dr. Hj. Abdullah Abubakar (Committee Member of Amar Ma'ruf Department of Yala Province Islamic Council), Dr. Hj. Ahmed Kamel Hj. Wan Yusuf (Chief Deputy of Communications and Community of Pattani Province Islamic Council), Hj. Hussain Dumede (Committee Member of Welfare and Service of Yala Province Islamic Council), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Baharrudin Zainal (Lecturer of Falak Studies of Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UNISZA)), and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (Rector of Fatoni University in Pattani, Thailand). In addition, non-participatory observation was conducted in Bukit Yaha, Yala Province, on the evening of 5 June 2016, during the new crescent moon rukyah activity. Secondary data are obtained from documented research. Qualitative content analysis method is used to analyse the obtained data.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four main sections. The first one discusses the basis and the method of determining the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal. The second describes the basis and the method of determining the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal in the Thailand. The third section is the analysis and the discussion, and the fourth is the conclusion.

### **Basis and Method of Determining the Starting Dates of Ramadhan and Syawal**

From the Islamic perspective, the basis for determining the Ramadhan and Syawal starting dates is found in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Hussin, 2003). The differences in the understanding and the interpretation of the verses of Al-Qur'an and the related hadiths, as well as the decision-making according to the evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah led to the development of three methods used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, namely, the rukyah method, the hisab method, and the rukyah and hisab method (Hussin, 2003). The following evidence usually serves as the basis of determining the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal.

There is only one verse in Al-Qur'an that serves as evidence for using the rukyah method in determining the start of Ramadhan and Syawal. In the verse, Allah SWT said:

“So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan, i.e., is present at his home), he must observe Sawm (fasting) that month ...”

(al-Baqarah: 185)

Based on Surah al-Baqarah verse 185, Ibn Kathir (2000: 169) stated that it is mandatory (*wajib*) for a person to fast after he/she has seen the New crescent moon. As such, the word *syahida* (sights/witnesses) in the verse refers to the rukyah method.

Additional evidence cited by those using the rukyah method comes from several Hadiths (Hanapi & Hassan, 2017). In one such Hadith, Rasulullah (SAW) said:

“Fast according to its' (new crescent moon's) sighting and break your fast (celebrate Eid-al-Fitr) according to its' sighting. And if it is hidden from you by the clouds, then consider it (i.e. count it as thirty days).”

(Muslim, Number 1080)

It was recorded from Abdullah bin Umar r.a. that the Prophet (SAW) had said:

“Fast according to its' sighting (Ramadhan's new crescent moon) and break your fast according to its' sighting (Syawal's new crescent moon). If it is obscured (unable to be seen due to clouds hiding it), then you must count (*fa 'uqdur*) for it.”

(al-Bukhariy, Number 1906)

It was recorded from Abdullah bin Dinar r.a. that the Prophet (SAW) had said:

“One month is equal to twenty-nine nights. You should not fast until you have seen the hilal (new crescent moon). If it is obscured, then complete the count of the month to be thirty.”

(al-Bukhariy, Number 1907)

Muhammad bin Ziyad said: I have heard that Abu Hurairah r.a. said that the Prophet (SAW) said:

“Fast when you see the hilal and break your fast (conclude Ramadhan) when you see the (next) hilal. If the moon is obscured, then complete the count of Syaaban at thirty days.”

(al-Bukhariy, Number 1909)

The phrases *li rukyatih* ("when you see it") (Muslim, Number 1081 and al-Bukhariy, Number 1909), *tarawhilal* ("see the hilal") (al-Bukhariy, Number 1906), and *taraw* ("see") (al-Bukhariy, Number 1907), are a clear indication that the rukyah method (sighting of the hilal) is used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal. Imam Muslim (1976: 524-525) also states that the beginning of the month of Ramadhan is determined by the phases of the moon, using the new crescent moon sighting.

Imam Muslim (1976:525), based on the phrase *faqdurulahu* ("count it") (Muslim, Number 1080) states that if the sky is clear, then the starting date of Ramadhan can be determined by the new crescent moon sighting. If the new crescent moon is sighted on the 29th day of Syaaban, then the following day marks the beginning of Ramadhan fasting. If, however, the new crescent

moon is not visible on that day (due to being hidden by the clouds, for example), then the month is 30 days long that given year, instead of the usual 29. According to Imam Nawawi (2010:510), the majority of the fiqh ulama agreed that the phrase *faqdurulahu* meant to complete the count at 30 days and could not be interpreted as counting based on astronomers' calculations. Making all of mankind responsible for making astronomical calculations would be a burden on them, because few of them have the knowledge necessary to make these calculations. However, some of the ulama, such as Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, have stated that the phrase *faqdurulahu* means that the sighting of the new crescent moon for determining the start of the fast can be done during a cloudy day as well (Imam Nawawi, 2010:509). This argument is used by the practitioners of the rukyah and hisab method to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal (Kusumastuti, 2015).

The ulama have formed three different opinions regarding the method used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, as stated before. The first group advocate using the rukyah method, citing the phrases, such as "*syahida*" (al-Baqarah: 185), "*lilru'yatih*" (Muslim, Number 1081 and al-Bukhariy, Number 1909), and "*taraw*" (al-Bukhariy, Number 1906, and al-Bukhariy, Number 1907). The second opinion, held by the practitioners of the hisab method, is based on the hadith containing the phrase "*faqdurulahu*" (Muslim, Number 1080). They believe that if the timing of the birth of new crescent moon can be calculated, there is no need for rukyah at all, especially when such calculation is precise, hence serving as solid evidence by itself (Kaamin, Surip & Abdul Rahman, 2014). The third opinion, held by the ulama who combine all the evidence from the Qur'an and the Hadith, is to use the rukyah and hisab method. These three methods, used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal throughout the Islamic world, are explained in detail below.

The first one, known as the "ruk yah" or the "ruk yah hakiki" (true ruk yah), method, entails new crescent moon sighting, with either unaided eyes or technological devices (Zainal, 1993). The new crescent Moon sighting process, to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, is carried out on 29 Syaaban and 29 Ramadhan, respectively (Zainal, 2002:128). Based on this ruk yah hakiki method, the thirtieth day is added to the month when the new crescent moon is not sighted on the 29th day (Zainal, 2002:129). Ramadhan and Syawal starting dates could differ in certain cases where the new crescent moon is sighted at some ruk yah sites, but not in others (Tahir, 1991:2). An example of a country that uses the ruk yah hakiki method to determine the start of Syawal is Brunei Darussalam (Hassan & Hanapi, 2016:157). Ruk yah hakiki in that country involves new crescent moon sighting with unaided eyes and does not rely on set criteria for that<sup>1</sup> (Hassan & Hanapi, 2016:157-159).

The second method, known as the hisab (calculation) method, uses astronomic data to predict the time when the new crescent moon will appear (Ilyas, 1997:57). This method is often practiced in Western countries, such as Australia, and several Islamic organisations, in addition to using "hisab-falak" data as a guideline to determine the start of the fasting month (1 Ramadhan) and the Eid-al-Fitr celebration (1 Syawal) (Tahir, 1991:2). According to Yusuf al-Qardawi this method is more appropriate today, because it is more accurate (Zainal, 2002:130; Kaamin, Surip & Abdul Rahman, 2014; Mohd Nawawi, Abdul Niri & Zainuddin, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup>An example of the set criteria mentioned are the criteria for New Crescent Moon sighting set by MABIMS.

The third method is the rukyah and hisab method. According to Zainal (2007), the rukyah and hisab method is a single, connected term, instead of two different methods. Rukyah and hisab is also defined by the usage of certain criteria for the new crescent moon sighting process (Zainal, 2007). According to Ilyas (1997:56), the moon sighting process, using this method, is as follows:

- i. A national authority calculates the estimated new crescent moon date (hisab), based on certain astronomic criteria.
- ii. During the evening on that date, an official representative will travel to a set location, at a specified time, to perform the new crescent moon sighting (rukyah).
- iii. If the new crescent moon is seen clearly, and the sighting satisfies the set criteria, it is considered successful. If the sighting is not successful, the new crescent moon will be declared "sighted" using astronomic calculations (hisab).

Malaysia is an example of a country where the rukyah and hisab method is practiced (Baharrudin Zainal, 2002:133).

The rukyah method is dependent not only on the new crescent moon sighting, physically or with technological aid, but also, on the new crescent moon's properties, including its 'mass and shape' (Zainal, 1993). Astronomers are able to calculate the new crescent moon's position and estimate the moonrise time, but they are still unable to pinpoint exactly when the new crescent moon will be visible (Zainal, 1993). As the result, the rukyah-hisab method, using the *Imkanur Rukyah* approach, is practiced in Malaysia, to ease the process of sighting and determining the starting dates of Islamic lunar months, especially Ramadhan and Syawal.

The members of the Islamic Ministries of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (MABIMS) agreed upon new crescent moon sighting criteria, thus standardizing the process in 1992(Nawawi, Abdul Niri & Zainuddin, 2014). Under these criteria, known as the *Imkanur Rukyah* criteria, a new crescent moon sighting is considered successful when it meets one of the following conditions on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of a lunar month (Zainal, 2002:133)

- i. When the sun is setting, the height of the new crescent moon is not less than 2° and
- ii. The moon-sun curve length is not less than 3°, or
- iii. The age of the new crescent moon is no less than 8 hours before it sets

The rukyah and hisab method does not combine the rukyah and the hisab methods into one, as many assume (Zainal, 2016). According to Zainal (2007), this method can be applied in two instances:

- i. Rukyah is carried out, and, if the new crescent moon is not seen, the hisab method is used instead, or
- ii. Rukyah is carried out, and, if the new crescent moon is seen, but its' features do not meet the criteria, then this sighting is still considered successful.

Instance (i) occurs regularly, but instance (ii) is considered impossible, because the sighting criteria are based on scientific rationalisation, rejecting all reports made with 'extrasensory

capabilities from extraordinary individuals', including those deemed 'kashf<sup>2</sup> and supernaturally keen' (Zainal, 2007).

### **The Method of Determining the Start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand**

The basis for the rukyah and hisab method is derived from the Qur'an, such as this verse:

"So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan, i.e., is present at his home), he must observe Sawm (fasting) that month ..."

(al-Baqarah: 185)

According to Ahmed Kamel Wan Yusuf (interviewed on 6 June 2016), the use of the rukyah and hisab method to determine the starting date of the fasting month in Thailand has been agreed upon by the Ulama.

"The Ulama have agreed that in this area of Falak studies, we should apply the two things and execute them fully. Both should be done, and not one or the other."

The "two things" mentioned by the Ulama are a reference to the use of the rukyah and hisab method in determining the start of Ramadhan in Thailand. This method was adopted in order to prevent disagreement within the community, has been approved by the *Syarie Qadi*, and has been in practice for generations (Ahmed Kamel Wan Yusuf, interviewed on 6 June 2016). The rukyah and hisab method, as applied in Thailand, is based on the term *syahida* (witness) and considers the opinions of the ulama that the process followed, in order to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, must be based on the two methods.

According to Abdulbasit Cekmak (interviewed on 5 June 2016) and Ahmed Kamel Wan Yusuf (interviewed on 6 June 2016), the method used to determine the start of Ramadhan in Thailand is based on the rukyah and hisab method, as is done in Malaysia. In Thailand, the hisab method rukyah (Abdulbasit Cekmak, interviewed on 5 June 2016). Ahmed Kamel Wan Yusuf stated (interviewed on 6 June 2016):

"So, in order to perform the calculations for this year, we see the hilal first. Starting in the month of Rejab, we will observe it during the entire month, and then we will observe it for the entire month of Syaaban. After we have sighted the moon in Syaaban, then we would do the calculations accordingly."

In Thailand, the hisab method is used to calculate the new crescent moon sighting dates, in order to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal. This calculation begins during the month of Rejab, and the calculation made in Rejab will determine the start of Syaaban (i.e. the next month), and the calculation in Syaaban will then determine the new crescent moon sighting date for Ramadhan. Once the new crescent moon sighting date is determined, the Sheikhul Islam

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<sup>2</sup> Uncovering, revealing (what is hidden), such as the secret or hidden meaning of the Quran, through a mystical approach to revelation and seeking a vision of God as ultimate reality.



office releases an official statement letter, disclosing the sighting date and the location where the new crescent moon is expected to be visible, based on the hisab (calculation).

The new crescent moon sightings for determining the start of Ramadhan and Syawal take place on the evenings of 29 Syaaban and 29 Ramadhan, respectively. However, starting in the year 1437 H (2016), the calculations to determine the new crescent moon sighting dates are set to start during the month of Muharram (Husain Dumede, interviewed on 5 June 2016).

Even though the hisab method is used in conjunction with the rukyah method, the latter takes precedence in determining the new crescent moon sighting if the new crescent moon is seen on a given the evening, and that differs from the data obtained using the hisab method (Abdulbasit Cekmak, interviewed on 5 June 2016). For example, if the hisab method calculation data predict that the new crescent moon should not be visible during the evening of the rukyah, but there are witnesses claiming to have sighted the moon, those witnesses will be questioned and take an oath in what is known as the *ithbat Ceremony*, in order to verify their claims.

“And so, from there, we go back to the rukyah method. Or, this new crescent moon may be clearly visible. So, we will use the *imkannur rukyah* method. After using the method then we conduct the *ithbat*. If we do not have to resort to the *imkannur rukyah* method, then we won't carry out the *ithbat*” (Abdulbasit Cekmak, interviewed on 5 June 2016)

Thailand also takes into account the new crescent moon sighting criteria based on the *imkannur rukyah* criteria. Thus, Thailand's method is a combination of the rukyah and the hisab methods, not the rukyah and hisab method. This is based on a statement by Abdulbasit Cekmak (interviewed on 5 June 2016), that *imkannur rukyah* criteria are taken into account during new crescent moon sighting, and this is in line with the rukyah and hisab method. Meanwhile, the rukyah and hisab method in Thailand involves two separate processes, due to the rukyah element being more dominant and having precedence over the hisab element, and the fact that the rukyah element became the deciding factor in determining the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand.

Also, according to Abdullah Abubakar (interviewed on 5 June 2016,) the method used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand is based on a hadith, which states that if the new crescent moon is visible, then the rukyah method or element should prevail. In the hadith, Rasulullah (SAW) said:

“When you see the hilal, then fast, and when you see it again, break your fast (celebrate Eid-al-Fitr). If it is hidden (by the clouds) from your sight, then complete your fast as 30 days.”

(Muslim, Number 1081)

It was recorded from Abdullah bin Umar (R.A.) that the Prophet (SAW) had said:

“Fast according to its' sighting (Ramadhan's new crescent moon) and break your fast according to its' sighting (Syawal's new crescent moon). If it is obscured (unable to be seen due to clouds hiding it), then you must count (*fa 'uqduru*) for it.”

(al-Bukhariy, No Hadith:1906)

Based on these hadiths, the start of Ramadhan and Syawal is determined by new crescent moon sighting (*rukyah*). In addition, the *rukyah* and hisab method, as practiced in Thailand, relies more heavily on the *rukyah* element, based on the following reasoning, as explained by Abdullah Abubakar (interviewed on 5 June 2016):

“When people dispute about *rukyah*, the Prophet said that the eyes of certain special individuals can see”

Based on that statement, the *rukyah* method will always be the deciding factor, even if its' results differ from the hisab data. This is because the witness authentication concept for the new crescent moon sighting, which is practised in Thailand, is a *Qadi* (judge) concept.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

According to Abdulbasit Cekmak (interviewed on 5 June 2016), Abdullah Abubakar (interviewed on 5 June 2016), and Lutfi Ismail Japakiya (interviewed on 4 June 2016), the method of determining the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand is the *rukyah* and hisab method. The evidence used to support this relies on the words *syahida* and *li rukyatih*, which leads to *ihthimal* (either one), where either the *rukyah* and hisab method or the *rukyah* hakiki method can be used.

From the procedural perspective, the determination of the start of Ramadhan and Syawal begins when the Sheikhu'l Islam office releases an official statement letter with the confirmation of the new crescent moon sighting date, to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, to all the Islamic Councils in Thailand. Then, the observation is carried out at a selected location, for example Bukit Yaha in the Yala Province.

After the *rukyah* process, if there are witnesses claiming to have sighted the new crescent moon on the evening of the *rukyah*, they will be questioned in a ceremony known as the *Ithbat Ceremony* (Abdulbasit Cekmak, interviewed on 5 June 2016). This is usually handled by the Yala Province Islamic Council (Hassan, 2016:177). If there are no reports of a visible new crescent moon, then the questioning will not take place.

After the witnesses are questioned, a meeting is held, to be attended by the representatives of the Islamic Councils of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat (Abdulbasit Cekmak, interviewed on 5 June 2016). This meeting's objective is to discuss new crescent moon sighting results, which will be passed on to the Sheikhu'l Islam office in Bangkok. Afterwards, when the Sheikhu'l Islam office has received the information from all the Islamic Councils in Thailand, the starting dates of Ramadhan and Syawal will be declared.

The new crescent moon was not visible at Bukit Yaha, Yala Province, on the evening of 29 Syaaban 1437 AH. In practice, the method used to determine the start of Ramadhan in Thailand is the *rukyah* hakiki method. There are three facts proving this. First, the *rukyah* method would still be used if the results of the *rukyah* and the hisab differed, according to Abdulbasit Cekmak (interviewed on 5 June 2016). Even though the hisab data state that the new crescent moon will not be visible on the evening of the *rukyah*, if there are witnesses who report having seen the

new crescent moon, then the results of the rukyah take precedence. This method matches the definition of the rukyah with hisab method, which was discussed earlier, and is not the same as the rukyah and hisab method.

The *imkannur rukyah* hisab data for the start of Ramadhan 1437 AH are the second piece of evidence supporting this claim for. Table 3 shows the rukyah data for the Yala Province, Thailand, on 29 Syaaban 1437 AH.

**Table 3: Rukyah Data on 29 Syaaban 1437 AH at Yala Province, Thailand<sup>3</sup>**

Time <sup>4</sup>	Azimuth	Altitude	Setting <sup>5</sup>
18:21:00	287° 36' 40"	+04° 43' 03"	18:44:37
18:24:00	287° 40' 33"	+04° 03' 22"	18:44:37
18:27:00	287° 44' 34"	+03° 24' 01"	18:44:37
18:30:00	287° 48' 45"	+02° 45' 05"	18:44:37
Conjunction time: 10:01 o'clock			

As Table 3 indicates, when the moon sets at 18:44, the new crescent moon age<sup>6</sup> is 8 hours and 43 minutes. This new crescent moon fulfils the *imkannur rukyah* visibility criteria, established by MABIMS. Based on the MABIMS criteria, Ramadhan should start on 6 June 2016, the same date as that set by Malaysia, which uses the rukyah and hisab method. However, these visibility criteria were not used, because the official report released by the Sheikhul Islam Office of Thailand stated that the new crescent moon was not seen on the evening of 29 Syaaban 1437 H, and the start of Ramadhan was set to 7 June 2016.

Finally, the rukyah hakiki method seems to be used consistently in Thailand, as demonstrated by the differences between the hisab data and the new crescent moon sighting data, which also happened in the year 1433 AH, and their roles in determining the Ramadhan starting date in the country. The new crescent moon sighting was reported in Thailand on the evening of 29 Syaaban 1433 AH (Office of Sheikhul Islam, 2012a), while in Malaysia, the new crescent moon was determined not to be visible, because it did not meet the *imkannur rukyah* visibility criteria (Office of the Keeper of the Rulers' Seal, 2012). Thus, scholars in Thailand did not use the *imkannur rukyah* visibility criteria, relying on the rukyah hakiki visibility criteria instead.

Thus, based on the three points above, the religious authorities in Thailand appear to be using the rukyah hakiki method consistently. The phrases "*syahida*" from the Qur'an, and "*ru'yatih*" from the Hadiths, are used as evidence for applying the rukyah hakiki method when determining the start of Ramadhan and Syawal, not the rukyah and hisab method. The evidence used in Thailand did not follow the "*faqdurulahu*" interpretation, which is found in several hadiths, and is cited as evidence for the use of the rukyah and hisab method, as has been

<sup>3</sup>Rukyah data obtained from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Baharrudin Zainal, Falak expert involved with the observation at Bukit Yaha on 5 June 2016.

<sup>4</sup>Current time.

<sup>5</sup>Time when moon is no longer visible.

<sup>6</sup>Calculation to determine the "age" of the New Crescent Moon is = Setting time - conjunction time (Baharrudin Zainal, 2003:117).

mentioned earlier. According to the ulama, "*faqdurulahu*" means to count it or to determine or estimate when new crescent moon hidden by the clouds (i.e. the rukyah and hisab method). However, the rukyah with hisab method practised in Thailand considers the rukyah element and the hisab element as two separate systems, and not as one composite, interconnected method (Zainal, 2007).

Each component of the rukyah and hisab method is practiced separately in Thailand, with the hisab method being used to determine the new crescent moon sighting date of the only, and not in the sighting itself. The new crescent moon is not observed technically<sup>7</sup>, but witness accounts and oaths are taken into account and processed during the *Ithbat Ceremony*. This allows the rukyah method to prevail over the hisab method, which is consistent with the rukyah hakiki method.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the rukyah hakiki method is used to determine the start of Ramadhan and Syawal in Thailand, relying only on human eyes, unaided by any observational devices. In addition, the rukyah hakiki method is practiced without using the new crescent moon visibility criteria.

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### Corresponding Author

#### Shahir Akram Hassan

Centre for Islamic Development Management (ISDEV)

Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang

Email: shahirakram@usm.my

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<sup>7</sup>The meaning of "observed technically", as intended by the observer, is that the new crescent moon's visibility is not measured scientifically based on its' visible features.

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