

What are the permitted ways of determining the beginning and end of Ramadan?

Scholars hold different opinions regarding the issue of sighting the new moon of Ramadan. Some say that sighting the new moon in one country is sufficient for all other countries to start fasting. Other scholars said It is binding for all countries, if two upright Muslims informed that another two upright Muslims sighted the moon.

Other scholars say that countries far away from each other cannot depend on each other's sighting of the new moon. Many scholars hold this opinion, which is based on a Hadith narrated by Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) in the Sahih Muslim (1087). Al-Nawawi commented on the Hadith saying: Each country should depend on its own sighting. Kuraib narrates that Umm Al-Fadl bint Al-Harith sent her son (Al-Fadl) to Mu`awiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) in Sham. Al-Fadl said, "I went to Sham and fulfilled her need. Then Ramadan was about to begin while I was there. I saw the new moon on Saturday night. Then I returned to Madinah by the end of the month. `Abdullah ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) asked me about the moon saying, 'When did you sight the new moon?' I replied, 'We sighted it on Saturday night.' He asked: 'Did you sight it yourself?' I said, 'Yes, and other people sighted it too. They observed fast and so did Mu`awiyah.' He said, 'But we sighted it on Sunday night and we will continue fasting until we finish thirty days or sight the next moon.' I asked, 'Do you not depend on the sighting of Mu`awiyah?' He said, 'No, that is what the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) commanded us to do.'" Based on this hadith, sighting the new moon in a country far away does not apply, especially if both countries do not share the same hours of night, the night ends in one country before it begins in the other.

The Islamic Fiqh Academy issued a decision that sighting the new moon is the only valid way, and that astronomical calculations based on the relation between the moon, the earth, and the sun can be only used as a guide.

A third opinion declares that astronomical calculations are decisive and dependable, and this is the opinion of the European Council for Fatwa and Research.

Some Muslims may start fasting with other countries, like Gulf or Middle-Eastern countries, as long as sighting the new moon was established according to Shari`ah. They may also seek to sight the new moon in their own country or in a nearby country, since long distances nullify the ruling. Astronomical calculations can also be of great help, especially in this age of scientific advances. It is said that if a needle is sent to space, it can easily be found, let alone the moon which has already entered into its new phase, as it can be seen two or three hours after entering it. Thus, there are various options for Muslims in your country and there is no need for them to disagree. Those who adopt the opinion that says long distances from a country prohibit one from following its timing of the new moon are adopting a strong opinion. Those who adopt the opinion that says sighting the new moon in one country is binding on other countries are also adopting a strong opinion. Those who depend on astronomical calculations to verify or establish the birth of the new moon are also on the right. In case the new moon was seen while astronomical calculations prove it can never have entered its new phase on that date, the sighting is given preference. Although the European Council gives preference to astronomical calculations, if a group of people sighted the new moon, their opinion is given preference over astronomical calculations.

This is a summary of opinions in this regard and we advise Muslims to avoid disagreements and disputes. Muslims should discuss the matter together and agree to adopt one of the methods we listed above, for all are opinions of great scholars.

ICOI follows the ISNA calendar. To read how *ISNA* and the *Fiqh Council of North America* determines dates, please [click here](#).