

The Role and Effort by Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in Consolidation and Determining the Beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan and EID Celebrations in Indonesia

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i6/3057>

Published Date: 23 June 2017

Abstract

Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia is the designated agency of the Republic of Indonesia which administer religious affairs of the people in Indonesia. Every year, Muslims in Indonesia will celebrate the commencement of the holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. However, there are some Islamic social organizations in Indonesia which did not conform with the commencement of Ramadan and Eid celebrations as occurred in 2010, 2011 and 2015. The question is, what is the role of Ministry of Religious Affairs to ensure conformity in celebrating month of worships in Indonesia? Based on authority given to it, what efforts have been done to achieve uniformity among Muslims in celebrating months of worship in Indonesia? This paper was written to unravel on issues related to this matter. There are two main objectives. First, to identify practice procedure by Ministry of Religious Affairs in coordinating the commencement of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Second, to analyze the role and exert efforts in trying to gain uniformity in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. In order to achieve both objectives, a library and field studies were carried out on the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia. Results showed that the Ministry of Religious Affairs play the role of a mediator in order to achieve consensus for Muslims in celebrating the start of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Various attempts have been made to achieve this consensus. Among them are forming a special committee discussing ways to unite Muslims in celebrating the start of Ramadan and Eid celebration in Indonesia. This shows that the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia play an important role in

achieving consensus in celebrating the start of Ramadan and Eid celebrations throughout the country.

Keywords: Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia; beginning of holy month Ramadan; Eid celebrations

Introduction

'Falak', also known as Islamic astronomy is a science that is essential to Muslims to facilitate and boost their confidence when they perform their acts of worship. This science has been practiced since the days of the prophets such as in deciding direction of the *kiblat* (facing Kaabah), determining time of prayers, ship navigation and many other uses.

Indonesia is no exception. It is the largest country in Southeast Asia, with a large population which comprise of multiple races and religions. Thus, Indonesia becomes the world's attention pertaining to religious affair, be it among fellow Muslims or with others of different religions. In Indonesia, Muslims are formed in a variety of social organizations, political or religious organizations. The large religious organizations are Muhammadiyah established by N.H. Ahmad Dahlan (Amirulloh, 2013:1) and Nahdlatul Ulama, founded by N.H. Hasyim (Samson, 1968).

Historically, development in Islamic astronomy in Indonesia began with issue on determining direction of the *kiblat* (facing kaabah) raised by Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari. Upon his return from Mecca and Medina, he visited his friend, Sheikh Abdurrahman al-Misri in Jakarta. During his visit, he managed to correct the direction of *kiblat* in several mosques such as Pakodjan Mosque and Luar Batang Mosque in Jakarta Pasar Ikan (Rustam, 2012).

After Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari generation past, development of Islamic astronomy in Indonesia is pursued by Al-Alim Al-Alamah Sheikh Maulana Muhammad Salman Jalil Al-Banjari, better known as K.H. Salman Jalil or Tuan Guru Salman Jalil. He was dedicated in conveying religious knowledge gleaned from his teachers. Thus, Islamic astronomy is one of the discipline that his acquired. Evidence of his knowledgable in this field can be found through a book that he authored, i.e., *Mukhtasar Al-Awqat Fi Ilmi Miqat* (Summaries of Time in Science of Place) (Rustam, 2012).

Eventhough Islamic astronomical knowledge is growing rapidly, there is a problem that cannot be resolved easily, i.e. conflict to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations among Muslims in Indonesia. In Indonesian history, it has occcured a conflict to set the date to mark the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations among Islamic social organizations. For example in 2010, 2011 and 2015, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama has a conflict over this matter. The question arised, is there any action taken by government appointed body, namely the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to consolidate these involved Islamic social organizations in determining the date to mark the begining of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr? Is there a practices procedure used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations in Indonesia? What is the role and efforts played by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia? Thus, this paper was carried out with aims to unravel on those issues. There are two main objectives in this paper. First, to identify practices procedure by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in establishing the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Second, to

analyze the role and efforts exert by the Ministry in trying to consolidate the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations.

In order to achieve the set objectives, this qualitative study involve library research and field study. Library research involved secondary data, obtained from study results of other researchers. Field study involves interview of respondent, i.e. representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Once the data was collected, all data will be analyzed using content analysis method.

The discussion on this paper consist of three parts. First, the background of Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, practice procedure used by Ministry of Religious Affairs to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Third, the role and efforts exert by the Ministry to consolidate uniformity among Islamic social organizations in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. The first part discusses the background of Ministry of Religious Affairs as a government body that administered the religious affairs of the people of Indonesia. Then, the second part will discuss on practices procedure used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. The last section discusses the role and efforts exert by Ministry of Religious Affairs to seek consensus in determining months of worship in Indonesia.

Background Of The Ministry Of Religious Affair Of The Republic Of Indonesia

According to Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2007), the Ministry, formerly known as Department of Religious Affairs was established on January 3, 1946, about five months after the independence of Republic of Indonesia. This designated body by the government is directly under the authority of the President of Indonesia (Interviews with Nurkhazin on April 20, 2017). Ministry of Religious Affairs not only manage the affairs of Muslims, but also the affairs of people of other religions. According to Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2007), the jurisdiction of Ministry of Religious Affairs among other is to cater for Muslims in Indonesia, including *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and *Umrah*, *Halal and Haram* (lawful and unlawful according to Islam), *Falak* (Islamic Astronomy) to determine the date of Eid celebrations and fasting in Ramadan and others matter.

As a ministry under the Republic of Indonesia, the vision and mission of Ministry of Religious Affairs was established in 2015. In the Decree of Minister of Religious Affairs, No. 39, 2015, it has been stated that the vision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is as follows:

“Creating Indonesian people who adhere to religion, peaceful, intelligent as well as physically and spiritually fit in order to realize Indonesia's sovereign, independent and good personality based on cooperation” (Decree of the Minister of Religion, No. 39, 2015)

In order to achieve the stated vision, at least seven missions must be accomplished. First, increase in understanding and practice among followers of a religion. Second, strengthen harmony among religious communities as well as with different religions communities. Third, provide equitable and quality services to all religious life. Fourth, improve utilization and quality management of religious economic potential. Fifth, established a quality and responsible Hajj and Umrah services. Sixth, improve access and quality of religious study

either in public education or religious education institutions. Seventh, establish good governance that is clean, responsible, and reliable (Decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, No.39, 2015).

Based on its mission and vision, it is wise for Ministry of Religious Affairs to take steps to bring together all involved parties in this dispute of determining the beginning of fasting and Eid in Indonesia. Eventhough it is not clearly stated, determining the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations is one of its duties, nonetheless with respect to above matter, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for the first and second mission as predetermined, i.e. to increase understanding and practice among followers of a religion and establish harmony among religious communities as well with other religions.

Practice Procedures In Ministry Of Religious Affair Of Republic Of Indonesia In Determining The Beginning Of Ramadan And Shawwal In Indonesia

Practice procedures is an important step to the authorities to ensure the following steps taken will enable them to achieve desired results. In determining the start of months of worship, usually the government uses a practice procedure as a guide line on actions to be taken. For example, in a study by Shahir Akram Hassan and Mohd Shukri Hanapi (2015), they present a detailed practice procedures performed by Brunei Darussalam in deliberating the beginning of Ramadan and Eid celebrations. According to Shahir Akram Hassan and Mohd Shukri Hanapi (2015), Chief Syarie Judge will do four things at the beginning of every month. First, a study will be conducted to determine dates that are suitable for (*rukyah*) sighting of new moons. Secondly, an investigation on particular days which *hilal* (new crescent moon) is visible. Thirdly, a decision is made and the confirmation of sighting of a new moon is endorsed by his signature. Fourthly, inform the results and confirmation of *rukyah* to Yang Di-Pertua Council (Minister of Religious).

Sado (2015) in his study in Indonesia, stated that base on *fatwa* (religious declaration) by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), No. 2, 2004, the Council verify a practice procedures used by the government of the Republic of Indonesia to establish the months of worship in Indonesia. Generally, the government of Indonesia, represented by Ministry of Religious Affair use *rukyah* (sighting new moon crescent) and *hisab* (astronomical calculation) to determine the initial months of worship in Indonesia. Ministry of Religious Affairs will cooperate and consult with the Council, Islamic organizations and institutions concerned. All decisions issued by the government must be followed by Muslims in Indonesia.

Beside this, according to Maskufa & Widiana (2012), the establishment of the start of Ramadan and Eid celebrations in Indonesia is decided in *ithbat* (asserting) conference. However, if the government agrees on the results of *hisab qat'i* (astronomical calculation), i.e. new moon can be sighted without *rukyah al-Hilal* in all parts of Indonesia, then obviously there is a difference in determining the start of Ramadan and Eid celebration between government and followers of *rukyah al-hilal bi al-fi'il* (sighting of new moon crescent). Similarly, if the new moon crescent elevation obtained by the government is well within *imkan ar-rukyah* and the government chose to do *istikmal* (complete the month for 30 days) methods, the opinions of the government would be in conflict with the opinion of the adherents to *mazhab hisab wujud al-hilal*.

Let see and turn to practice procedures of Ministry of Religious Affairs of Republic of Indonesia. To carry out practise procedures at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal in Indonesia, at least four parties are involved. First, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which provides guidance in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal in this country. Secondly, Ministry of Religious Affairs, which involved representatives of the Islamic Astronomy which is vital during the process of determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal. Third, representatives of Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdatul Ulama and Persatuan Islam (PERSIS). Fourth, certain individuals who has expertise in the field of Islamic astronomy. A flow chart of the process carried out by Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal is as shown below.

Flow Chart	Officer/Person in Charge
<pre> graph TD Start([Start]) --> Meeting[First Meeting of the Year] Meeting --> Letter[Letter of Instruction on Sighting is Released] Letter --> Observation[Observation activities conducted] Observation --> Summit[Summit result of sighting to the Headquarters of Ministry of Religious Affairs, RI] Summit --> Discuss[Collected data is discuss during Ithbat Conference] Discuss --> Report[Conference Report carried out and the results verified] Report --> Announce([Announce through media]) </pre>	<p>Islamic Astronomer Expert (Ministry of Religious Affairs, RI) Representative of Islamic Organisations Single individual</p> <p>Ministry of Religious Affairs RI</p> <p>Representative of Ministry of Religious Affairs Representative of Islamic Organisations Related individual</p> <p>Representative of Ministry of Religious Affairs</p> <p>Ministry of Religious Affairs, RI Muslim Scholar Academician Representative of Islamic Organisations</p> <p>Minister of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia</p> <p>Minister of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia</p>

Based on the flow chart above, a practice procedure is carried out by Ministry of Religious Affairs to determine the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal in Indonesia. This Ministry used MUI *fatwa* (religious ruling) as a guideline in implementing all processes involved. At the beginning of the year, a meeting among *Falak* (Islamic astronomy) experts and leader representative of Islamic organizations in Indonesia as well as individual, was held. In this

meeting, all procedure to be carried out during the process of determining the start of months of worship will be discussed in detail, including location where the sighting of new moon taken placed (Interviews with Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016).

As Ramadan approaches, Ministry of Religious Affairs will issue a directive to do *rukya* (sighting of new moon crescent) in selected provinces in Indonesia. Among those involved in this process are representatives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, representatives of Muslim organizations and related institutions. Among the equipment used to perform this *rukya* process are telescope, theodolite, *rubu' mujayyab* (Quadrant Sinus) and other modern and traditional equipment (Interviews with Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016).

After sighting new moon has been done, representative of the Ministry in these regions report the results to central Ministry of Religious Affairs. When all data has been successfully obtained from each regional representatives, it will be discussed at an asserting (ithbat) conference. The data will be analysed, thus date for beginning of Shawwal will be established in this conference. A report will be issued and approved by the Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia and once it is signed, will be announced in various media for public announcements (Interviews with Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016).

Therefore, based on the above discussion, we can observe that practice procedures has an important role in ensuring that appropriate steps are taken in order to obtain the desired result.

Effort By Ministry Of Religious Affair, Republic Of Indonesia In Ensuring Uniformity In Determining The Beginning Of Months Of Worship In Indonesia

Every year, Ministry of Religious Affairs as an appointed body by the government of Indonesia manage the religious affairs of the people of Indonesia. It has attempted to ensure a consensus in establishing the beginning of months of worship in Indonesia.

Various attempts have been made by Ministry of Religious Affairs since 2004. First, introduce a practice procedures in 2004 by seting No. 2 fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council as a basis of practice in *Falak* (Islamic Astronomy) section of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2004 reads:

"FIX: FATWA ON THE DETERMINATION OF BEGINNING OF RAMADAN, SHAWWAL AND DHU AL- HIJJAH

First: Fatwa (religious ruling)

1. Determination of the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al- Hijjah is carried out by *ru'yah* (sighting of new moon) and reckoning method by the Indonesian Government, i.e., Minister of Religious Affair and this applied nationally.
2. All Muslims in Indonesia must comply with the provisions of the Government of Indonesia regarding determination on the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah.

3. In determining the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah, Religious Affairs Minister must consult with the Indonesian Ulema Council, heads of Islamic organizations and other institutions concerned.
4. The results of *rukyat* from regional area where *hilar rukyat* (new moon crescent can be sighted) eventhough outside Indonesia but of the same *mathla'* (place for sighting new moon crescent) with Indonesia can be used as guidelines by Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Second: Recommendations

Indonesian Ulema Council undertake particular criteria in determining the start of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah and used it as guidelines by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in deliberation with leaders of Islamic organizations and other related experts.”

Begins with the fatwa that has been issued, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia will held a meeting every year with heads of Muslim organizations in Indonesia such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and PERSIS in order to discuss the establishment of the start of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah. This process takes into account the involvement from representatives of various organization involved, such first meeting of the year with Ministry of Religious Affairs, and *rukyat* (new moon crescent sighting) process and *Ithbat* (asserting) Conference (Interviews with Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016).

Secondly, Ministry of Religious Affairs has established an *Ithbat* (asserting) conference involving academicians, representatives of Indonesian Ulema Council, representatives of Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia and representatives leaders of Indonesian Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and PERSIS. Every year, the conference will be held to discuss data results of new moon sighting at particular locations in Indonesia. During the conference, the date of the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah will also be discussed and determined (Interviews with Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016).

The third attempt made by Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia can be recognize through the establishment of a special comittee known as Ministry of Religious Affairs Hisab Rukyat Committee a few years back. Every year, this comittee will hold a meeting to discuss efforts towards achieving a consensus among all organizations pertaining the setting of the start of months of worship in Indonesia.

For example, on December 20, 2016, a meeting by Hisab Rukyat Committee has taken place at the office of Ministry of Religious Affairs. The ministry has invited *Falak* experts, Islamic organization chairman or its representative that differ in opinion in this matter such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and PERSIS. In addition, academic representatives were also involved in the discussion. Based on direct observation conducted by the researcher, there was tolerance between all parties involved to reach an agreement to determine the start of months of worships in Indonesia. Nevertheless, Ministry of Religious Affairs Hisab Rukyat Committee has not reached an agreement on the selection of criteria to determine the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah which is agreed by all parties.

Through all efforts that have been exerted, obviously Ministry of Religious Affairs is more likely to act as an intermediary to organizations and institutions involved in order to gain consensus in determining the beginning of month of worship in Indonesia. It was stated by the Chairman of Sub Directorate of Hisab Rukyat and the Sharia Construction, i.e., Mr. Nurkhazin on December 20, 2016.

Most likely these organizations and institutions have great influences in executing any decisions made, thus this will affect any homogenous decision set by them. This shows Ministry of Religious Affairs understand local situation and it does not exercise its powers. However, it is undeniable, differences in ideological among them, to some extent post an obstacle for them to reach a homogenous decision soon. Nevertheless the biggest stumbling block in this matter is lack in agreeing on criteria for determining the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah which is used as guidelines by Ministry of Religious Affairs in their discussion with leaders of Islamic organizations and related experts. The right criteria for this matter is an issue that is not solve yet, either in Indonesia or at international level.

Conclusion

Based on interviews and research findings, there are at least three particulars that can be inferred or concluded. First, Ministry of Religious Affairs of Republic of Indonesia has played a vital role consolidating in establishing the beginning of month of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah in Indonesia. Among its efforts, is get the involvement of every Islamic organizations in implementing practice procedure to determine the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah every year. In addition, *Ithbat* conference is carried out annually and Hisab Rukyat Committee of Ministry of Religious Affairs is formed. Secondly, Ministry of Religious Affairs of Republic of Indonesia acts as an intermediary between disputing parties in trying to get consensus to determine the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah in Indonesia. Third, the biggest obstacle in getting a consensus in this matter is selecting a criteria which can be used to sight new moon crescent.

Appreciation

This paper is part of the research entitled *Pengaplikasian Rukyah dan Hisab di Asia Tenggara* (Rukyah and Mathematics Applications in Southeast Asia) [(RUI) 1001 / CISDEV / 816,269] and was funded by the University Grants of Individual Research (RUI), Universiti Sains Malaysia (2015-2017).

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Interviews with Nurkhazin, Head of Sub Directorate Hisab Rukyat dan Pembinaan Syariah (Hisab Rukyat and the Sharia Construction), Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, on April 28, 2017, via mobile phone applications.