

**DETERMINATION OF THE BEGINNING OF  
RAMADHAN AND SYAWAL IN INDONESIA  
(an Overview of Political and Historical Perspectives)**

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**Abstract**

*This research departs from the existence of differences in theory and opinion in determining the beginning of the lunar month at the theoretical and practical level, there are two methods, namely Hisab and Rukyat. The existence of these differences is caused by three main things, namely first, in terms of legal determination, second, in terms of systems and methods of calculation. Departing from these different interpretations, various mass organizations (Society organizations) emerged in the matter of reckoning rukyat Indonesia such as NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), Muhammadiyah and others. The various differences are the responsibility of ulil amri which is none other than the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Apparently the issue of determining the beginning of the lunar month is not only limited to the shariah level, but also the involvement of political elements in power at that time. Departing from that the researcher held a further overview of the ins and outs of the determination and its dynamics in each political era. This research is a qualitative research study of literature.*

**Keywords:** *Political History, the beginning of the Lunar Month, NU-Muhammadiyah, Hisab-rukayat*

**Introduction**

Some people say that the issue of determining the beginning of the month of qamariyah, especially the months of Ramadan and Shawwal is a classic problem but is always actual. It is said to be classic, because this problem since the early days of Islam has received special attention and thought. It is said to be actual, because almost every year, especially before the month of Ramadan and Shawwal arrives, the experts pay special and serious attention to knowing when the month of

Azmi Muttaqin

Ramadan arrives and when the month of Ramadan ends, which means the month of Shawwal arrives. Moreover, if it is predicted that there will be a difference in the determination of the beginning of the month. This is because it is very closely related to one of the obligations that must be carried out by every Muslim, namely fasting in the month of Ramadan.

From time to time, especially in Indonesia, the problem of determining the beginning of the month which is often also referred to as the "*Hisab - Rukyah* problem" seems to be seen as a process of perfecting the understanding and practice of Islamic law for the people. Islam in Indonesia in the life of society and the state, even in the association between nations and countries.

Therefore, this article will try to review these problems from time to time with the aim of describing the handling mechanisms and knowing the extent of the political elements in them.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Early Growth Time**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century AD, in line with the Indonesian National Awakening, the problem of reckoning and rukyah has been an inseparable part of the movement of Muslims towards progress and independence.

The return of the santri who had become young scholars after studying and living in the holy land, Makah, (thanks to the leniency of the validity period of the Hajj boat tickets for 5 years) brought about a renewal in *da'wah* and *ta'lim* in Indonesia by growing up madrasas, Islamic boarding schools and other *ta'lim* assemblies everywhere. It was during this time that they introduced the Science of *Hisab (Falak)* to the public, and even used it as a powerful tool to fight the stagnation in

people's lives under the feudalistic indigenous rulers. As a result, the Hijri calendar began to be used, while the Javanese calendar system (the ABOGE formula) began to be underestimated.<sup>1</sup>

However, because the indigenous government system in Indonesia in general and Java in particular is the embodiment of Imam al-Mawardi's theory, namely that the function of the state is a continuation of the prophetic task of maintaining religion and governing the world, an official called Qadi (*Pengbulu*) emerged. While the *pengbulu* at that time were mostly Makah alumni, the *falakeiyah* reform movement continued, namely by shifting the Qibla direction for mosques, especially state mosques in districts, with a slope of 10 to 15 degrees to the north. Even so, the Javanese calendar system is still used for religious ceremonies, such as Sekaten etc. as well as for the recitation of *selapanan* (once every 35 days on the same day and pasaran (five-day week))<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, the issue of *rukyyah* has come to their attention, for example, the Regent of Sukabumi (West Java) gave *waqf* land on the coast of Pelabuhanratu bay and built a coupling in that place as a place for *rukyyah*. It's just that the authority to determine (*isbat*) the beginning of the month of Ramadan, Syawal and Zul Hijjah for district areas is delegated (*tauliyah*) to the heads of the respective districts. May their steps be in accordance with the views of the scholars of the Shafi'i school.

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<sup>1</sup>Muh. Wardan, *Hisab Urfi dan Hakiki* (Yogyakarta : tp, 1957), p.12-15. Departemen Agama RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyat* (Jakarta : Proyek Pembinaan Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, 1981), p.44-46.

<sup>2</sup> Muh. Wardan, *Hisab Urfi dan Hakiki* (Yogyakarta : tp, 1957), p.12-15. Departemen Agama RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyat* (Jakarta : Proyek Pembinaan Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, 1981), p.46

## Azmi Muttaqin

Because of this, there is an impossibility, because not all areas of the Regent allow rukyah to be obtained, while the distance between one area and another is not that far away, the problems that arise are **first**; whether one area of the Regent can follow the results of *rukyah* from the territory of another Regent, **second**; how far is a region called *Matla'*, **third**; Is it legal to report the results of *rukyah* by telephone, wire and radio.

The above problems can be overcome by the *penghulu* (headman) themselves. namely at the beginning of 1938 AD they joined in an association called Perhimpunan Panghoeloe And Its Employees (PPDP). Then through the PPDP Hoofdbestuur Circular dated October 25, 1938 AD, among other things stated that one *matla'* is an area of 8 degrees longitude or less, so that the entire territory of the islands of Java and Madura is one *matla'*. Meanwhile, the use of telephone, wire and radio is legal to report the results of rukyah. Opinions like this are based on, among other things, the book *Iqadun Niyam* by Sayid Usman Betawi, *Irsyadu Ahlil Millah Ila Isbatil Ahillah* by Sheikh Muhammad Bahit al-Azhari etc.<sup>3</sup>

Thus there was a kind of unity in the implementation of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal for all of Java and Madura. Then Hoofdbesturr PPDP based in Surakarta pioneered the reporting of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal through the SRI radio station in Surakarta on October 13, 1939 for the beginning of Ramadan 1358 H which fell on Saturday Pahing, October 14, 1939 AD, based on reports

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<sup>3</sup>Muhammad Bahit Muti' al-Azhari, *Irsyadu Ahlil Millah Ila Isbatil Ahillah* (Mesir : Matba'ah Kurdistan al-Islamiyah, 1329 H), p.248.

on the results of *rukyah* in Betawi and Pematang.<sup>4</sup> Even though such a union has been attempted, on the other hand, based on the opinion of the Shafi'i school which allows reckoning experts and those who believe in its truth to practice their knowledge in starting and ending their fast, Muhammadiyah circles encourage its citizens to fast and Eid al-Fitr based on the results of their reckoning<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, this issue gave rise to a very lively polemic, not only between movement organizations at that time, but also between ulama in Indonesia and in Mecca. Like the treatise *Maqasidut Tahkim* from Sheikh Ali al-Maliki (Makah) which refuted the views of Sheikh Mansur bin Abdul Hamid from Sawah village, Betawi, (author of the book *Sullamun Nayyirain*) in the treatise *Bahjatul Wasail*.

Regarding this problem, the Dutch East Indies government kept silent. Eventhough a High Islamic Court has been established based in Weltevreden (Jakarta), this Court has never issued any statement or *fatwa* in this matter of *rukyah* and reckoning. This is due to the fact that although this Court is the place of *al-qada al-isti'nafi* (Court of Appeal) with respect to the authority of *al-qada* from regional leaders, the issue of determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal is included in the *at-tahkim* area, where the Court does not given authority by the authorities. This kind of atmosphere continued during the Japanese occupation and was almost excluded by the revelry of the revolution for the war of independence.

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<sup>4</sup>Majalah Damai (majalah Islam dan swara resmi PPDP), Oktober-November, no.10-11, Tahun ke II, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> an-Nawawi, al-Majmu' Syarah al-Muhazzab (Madinah : Maktabah as-Salafiyah, tt), VI, p.280.

### **The Time After The Proclamation**

After Indonesia's independence was proclaimed on August 17, 1945 AD, the authority of the Dutch East Indies government in the religious field, which used to be in the Department of Van Binnenlandse Zaken (Internal Affairs) and The Department of Van Onderwijaen Eeredienst (Teaching and Religion), as well as the authority of the Regents as heads of the indigenous government, was handed over to the Department of Religion which was formed on January 3, 1946.<sup>6</sup>

With the formation of the United States of Indonesia (RIS), almost simultaneously the authority in the field of religion from the states, including the authority of the Kings and Sultans outside Java and Madura in the issue of the early isbat of Ramadan and Shawwal, was handed over to the Minister of Religion. Thus, the decree of the Minister of Religion for the start of Ramadan and Shawwal applies to the entire territory of the Republic of Indonesia, an area that extends more than one-eighth of the Earth's circle, which is approximately 49 degrees or more than six *matla'*.<sup>7</sup>

From this fact arises the notion that the territory of Indonesia is made into one *matla'*. At the same time, it should be noted that the determination of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal is included in the task of the Minister of Religion as well as to determine holidays whose implementation does not only involve worship, but has civil and criminal consequences (for example regarding overtime wages, traffic

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<sup>6</sup> Depag, Almanak,p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Depag, Almanak,p.22.

regulations, etc.). This is where the nature of *at-tabkim* looks different from *al-ifta* (appeal).<sup>8</sup>

### **1950's Period**

In the early 1950s, where telecommunications equipment was very limited and not many people had radio (there was no TV), the announcement of the Minister of Religion about the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal was eagerly awaited by people in all corners of the country. , both from the village and sub-district gathered at the Regency Religion Office to listen to the broadcast of the Minister of Religion on the radio. If an announcement is received by RRI Jakarta, they will immediately return to their respective places to convey the news of the *ruk'yah* to the community and that the next morning they will fast or celebrate Eid<sup>9</sup>.

The names of places, such as Pelabuhanratu (Sukabumi), Gapura Muka (Bekasi), Rawa Buaya (West Jakarta) are known as *ruk'yah* places, as well as the names of figures, such as Kyai Badruddin (Sukabumi), Kyai Hasbiyallah (Kender) became famous as well. This shows that to start or end the fasting worship requires other people who do *ruk'yah* in other places as well. Likewise, the implementation of *ruk'yah* is increasingly being carried out more intensively.

At the same time, those who focus on the determination of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal based on the results of reckoning

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<sup>8</sup> Also, compare it with the form of "al-qada" which, although limited in the fields of munakahat, inheritance, and other huquq as-syahsiyah, has actually existed in Indonesia for a long time and is now confirmed by the Law on Religious Courts, where the ulema consciously consider themselves not authorized. to meddle with it, let alone do it yourself.

<sup>9</sup> Sekretariat Jendral PBNU, Pedoman Hisab dan Rukyat NU (Jakarta : 1944),p.15

## Azmi Muttaqin

are also increasing their activities, so that the polemic about rukyah and reckoning in this country is increasingly felt more sharply.

For this reason, the Minister of Religion held meetings/deliberations with representatives of Islamic organizations in preparing decisions regarding the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal. Even so, such polemics cannot be controlled, because coincidentally, the position of Minister of Religion from the 1950s to the 1960s was mostly occupied by NU figures (Nahdlatul Ulama) who in the initial determination of Ramadan and Shawwal used *rukyah* as the previous Ministers.

As a consequence of adhering to *rukyah*, NU continues to perform *rukyah* in the field, even though according to the reckoning the *hilal* (moon crescent) is still below the horizon, which according to experience the *hilal* will not be visible. This was done so that the taking of the istikmal decision was still based on *rukyah* in the field which failed to see the new moon, not on the basis of reckoning. Likewise, if according to the reckoning, it is possible to see the condition of the new moon or it has been *imkanurrukyah*, but it turns out that none of the reports of the new moon have been successfully verified, then NU will standardize the age of the month concerned. (Pedoman PBNU, hlm.35)<sup>10</sup>

This became a confrontation between the Minister of Religion and Non-NU groups, especially Muhammadiyah, which is based their determination on the results of reckoning, namely if *ijtima'* occurs before sunset then that night and the next day will be a new moon, on the

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<sup>10</sup> al-Majmu' an-Nawawi, Juz VI, p. 270. Bughyatul Mustarsyidin, p 108. Ithafus Sاداتil Muttaqin, Juz IV,p 197. Fathul Bari, Juz IV,p 104-108. Bidayatul Mujtahid, Juz I,p 207

contrary if *ijtima'* occurs after sunset (*gurub*), even if it's only for a few seconds, that night and the next day are still that month (last month), while the report on the results of *ruk'iyah* doesn't have to be like that. That is one of the factors that causes a difference in starting the fast or ending it at that time.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the calculation results and taking into account the provisions as mentioned above, in the explanation of the Minister of Religion regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan in 1380 (February 1961), among other things it is stated that the beginning of Shawwal in 1381 H (1962 AD) will occur *musykil*, because *ijtima'* will occurred around sunset time for regions in Indonesia, namely for areas in the eastern part it occurred after sunset, while for western areas it occurred earlier. This means that there is a date line that is located in places where *ijtima'* occurs right at the *Gurub* of the Sun.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Period Of 1970's**

On March 18, 1970 the Minister of Religion (KH.Muhammad Dahlan) inaugurated the use of a Moon Observation Post in

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<sup>11</sup> Departemen Aghama RI, Pedoman Perhitungan Awal Bulan Qamariyah, (Jakarta : Proyek Pembinaan Administrasi Hukum dan Peradilan Agama, 1983), p.9.

<sup>12</sup> The Meteorology and Geophysics Institute shows the date line through Pontianak, Banjarmasin, Ampenan, and Kupang. The Office of the Religious Courts stated that the height of the new moon for Jakarta was 0.34 degrees and the date line occurred in Kendari. Muhammadiyah in its circular letter dated January 29, 1962 number 111/IV.A/1962 stated that for areas to the west of Makassar, Eid al-Fitr in 1381/1962 fell on Pahing Wednesday, March 7, 1962, because on Wednesday night the new moon was already existed. As for Makasar and the areas to the east it fell on Thursday Pon, March 8, 1962, because on Wednesday night for these areas the new moon had not yet existed. See also: Depag, Pedoman Perhitungan, p.42-43.

## Azmi Muttaqin

Pelabuhanratu, Sukabumi (about 1 km north of the coupling built by the Regent of Sukabumi before the war of independence) as a means to improve the practice of *rukyah*. It is hoped that the Moon Observation Post in Pelabuhanratu will be the first to be built after Indonesia's independence, which then at the Commission for the Unification of the VII Hijriyah date in Jakarta (June 1987) it was agreed upon a recommendation stating that every Islamic country should build a Lunar Observation Post to improve the implementation of *rukyah* and while increasing the accuracy of calculation calculations<sup>13</sup>.

KH. Muhammad Dahlan was the last Minister of Religion who came from the NU circle, who firmly based the policy on determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal on reports on the results of *rukyah*. Likewise, the ministers after him did not differ in their policies. This matter implied from the sound of decisions whose patterns and formulations follow the decisions of the previous Ministers of Religion<sup>14</sup>.

It's just that in the last two cabinet terms (Munawir Sadzali and Tarmizi Tahir) it was felt by NU circles that the policies of the two ministers of religion regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal were different from those of the previous ministers, namely that the two ministers based their decisions on the results of reckoning, not *rukyah*. Therefore, among NU circles, the formulation of the Situbondo MUNAS decision in 1404 (1983 AD) which was detailed by the Cilacap MUNAS 1408 (1987 AD) was then strengthened by the Decision of the XXVII Congress in Yogyakarta 1410 (1990 AD) which among other things emphasized that if the initial

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<sup>13</sup> Depag, Pedoman Perhitungan,p.56-70

<sup>14</sup> Depag, Pedoman Perhitungan,p.59

determination Ramadan or Shawwal is based solely on reckoning, so NU citizens are not obliged to follow and obey it<sup>15</sup>.

Thus it seems that if the Minister of Religion is held by NU circles, Muhammadiyah circles are in the opposition; And vice versa, if the person in office is not from the NU circle, then the Nu community is in opposition. Even so, these two groups of course base their respective opinions on the principles of *naqli* and *aqli*<sup>16</sup>.

Among the reckoning experts there was a development of thinking about the date line, by reviewing the old formula of *ijtima'* before sunset towards the point of the new moon and even increasing to *imakurrukyah*. The new moon point is 0 (zero) degrees, like the year 1381 (1963 AD) used to be. This kind of thinking is actually closer to the position of the *rukayah* expert. that is, the new moon can be seen when according to the reckoning it is possible to see the new moon, because even though the new moon is already in existence, but in a relatively short height (not yet *imkarurrukyah*), according to the experience of *rukayah* experts, the new moon cannot be seen.

### ***Hisab-Rukyah In The Age Of Globalization***

With the increasing relations of the Indonesian nation and Muslims with nations and Muslims abroad, the problem of reckoning and *rukayah* inevitably enters the era of globalization. By the 1970s, Muslims in Singapore, through their embassy in Jakarta, had asked for instructions on the possibility of unifying the initial determination of Ramadan and Shawwal for Singapore and Indonesia. Likewise, Rabitah 'Alam Islami once invited an Indonesian astronomer (DR. Bambang

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<sup>15</sup> Pedoman Hisab dan Rukyat NU, p.16

<sup>16</sup> Pedoman Hisab dan Rukyat NU, p.17

## Azmi Muttaqin

Hidayat, chairman of the Boscha Lembang Institute, Bandung) to conduct an effort to unify the *hijri* calendar. Furthermore, the issue of the unity of the *hijri* calendar has become a permanent part of the Organization of Heads of Islamic State as al-Lajnah at-Taqwim al-Hijriy al-Muwahhid (The Commission on the Unified Hejri Calendar) where Indonesia as one of its members always sends envoys (from elements of the Ministry of Religion and hisab-rukyah experts) to attend the sessions it holds. On the other hand, from NU circles who put *hisab* as a tool for carrying out *rukyah*, it appears that there is a development of understanding and thinking about reckoning, namely no longer using classical reckoning (*Fathu Ra'ufil Mannan*) but has switched to modern and contemporary reckoning. This can be seen in the preparation of the NU calendar, namely the formation of a team to handle it, with reference to the reckoning systems of al-Khulasatul Wafiyah, Badi'atul Misal, Hisab Hakiki, Nurul Anwar, Nautika, New Comb and Ephemeris Hisab Rukyah whose completion uses spherical triangle formulas (Spherical Trigonometry) with Calculator and Computer tools.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it is said that the testimony of the results of the ruyatul *bilal* may be rejected if according to the reckoning it is stated that the *bilal* is not possible in ruyah.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, for the future, it seems that between the ruyah (NU) and the reckoning expert (Muhammadiyah), there will be differences in the determination of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal, unless the individual mental attitude of each social organization does not want to invited to unite. This is different topic.

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<sup>17</sup> Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, Pedoman Rukyah dan Hisab NU (Jakarta : tnp, 1994), P.53-54.

<sup>18</sup> Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, Pedoman Rukyah dan Hisab NU,p.36.

## **Sources of Differences in Determining the Beginning of the Lunar Month**

In determining the beginning of the lunar month in Indonesia, there are often differences in the determination. This is because there are different methods in determining the beginning of the lunar month. If a careful study is carried out, the differences in determining the beginning of the lunar month are caused by two main things; aspects of legal determination (Shari'ah, aspects of systems and methods of calculation (*falakiyah*), social aspects of *ijtima'iyah* (mass organization)<sup>19</sup>.

Judging from the legal determination system, in Indonesia it can be divided into four major groups (*madzhab*), namely the *Rukyah* group, the group that holds *ijtima'*, the group that views the ultimate horizon as a criterion for determining the appearance of the *hilal*, the last group is the group that adheres to the *hilal*. the position of the *hilal* above the *mar'i* horizon, namely the horizon that can be seen directly by the eyes of the head as a criterion in determining the beginning of the lunar month.<sup>20</sup>

Of all the schools above, all of them use two approaches in determining the beginning of the lunar month. The approach is the *Rukyah* and *Hisab* approach. Both schools are both based on the hadith of the Prophet which explains the problem of *Hisab Rukyah*<sup>21</sup>.

## **Unification Efforts by the Government**

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<sup>19</sup> Badan Hisab dan Rukyah Depag RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyah*, Jakarta, Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, p.34

<sup>20</sup> Badan Hisab dan Rukyah Depag RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyah*, Jakarta, Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, . 36.

<sup>21</sup> Badan Hisab dan Rukyah Depag RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyah*, Jakarta, Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, p. 40-42.

## Azmi Muttaqin

Responding to the problem of differences that occur in Indonesia regarding the determination of the beginning of the lunar month, the Indonesian government has taken several ways to unite these differences. For this reason, the government (Ministry of Religion) always tries to find experts from each school to gather and conduct deliberation. After holding several meetings which were attended by Islamic organizations, Meteorology and Geophysics Institute, Planetarium, I.A.I.N / UIN from the Ministry of Religion, the Rukyah Reckoning Body (BHR) was formed<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to establishing the Hisab Rukyah Agency of the Ministry of Religion, the government also made other efforts to unite the existing differences with the *Imkan al-ru'yah* school with the format of the government's *isbat* strength. This government effort is basically based on efforts to achieve uniformity, benefit, and unity of Indonesian Muslims. This is as basic: *bukm ial-bakim ilz'amun wa yarfa'u al-khilaf* (the judge/government's decision is binding and resolves differences of opinion).<sup>23</sup>

### Itsbat Session

The *isbat* trial is a method used by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia in order to accommodate and ratify the results of reporting claims for witnessing the success of seeing the new moon. The *isbat* assembly has the following objectives; To obtain legal legitimacy and certainty, to prevent confusion and doubt in the reporting system, to unite the people and eliminate

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<sup>22</sup> Badan Hisab dan Rukyah Depag RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyah*, Jakarta, Badan Peradilan Agama Islam, p.45

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Izzuddin, *Fiqh Hisab Rukyah "Menyatukan Nu dan Muhammadiyah dalam penentuan awal Ramadhan, Idhul Fitri dan Idhul Adha"*, Jakarta, Erlangga, 2007, p. 151.

differences of opinion. The principles and basis used in the *istbat* session are the *fiqhiyah* rules *الحاكم لزام الخلف* (Government decisions are binding (must be obeyed) and eliminate disagreements)<sup>24</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

From the information above, it appears that between *rukyyah* experts and reckoning experts in Indonesia there has been a very sharp polemic. However, with the awareness of the dangers of such a polemic if allowed to drag on, the government cq. The Minister of Religion, and the figures of the relevant organizations hold hearings to create a unity of the people and maintain Indonesian National Stability. Among the efforts made is to provide guidance and direction for the implementation of *rukyyah* in addition to trying to improve the accuracy of reckoning calculations. In principle, differences in ideas or ideas about the method of determining the beginning of the month of the month of Ramadan, especially the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal and Dzulhijjah, are commonplace. However, there needs to be a brake in terms of conveying these ideas if later it will result in the emergence of divisions or a disaster. There is a political portion that cannot be avoided in determining the beginning of the lunar month. This is none other than because there is authority given to the government or policy makers. Even in the realm of community organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, they play their respective political roles in order to achieve ideas in determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal in Indonesia.

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<sup>24</sup> Mudzakir, “*Kebijakan Pemerintah Tentang Hisab Rukyyah*” makalah disampaikan pada Seminar Nasional Penentuan Awal Bulan Qamariah di Indonesia Merajut Ukhuwah di Tengah Perbedaan, Yogyakarta, 27-30 November 2008.

Azmi Muttaqin

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*Determination of the Beginning of ...*

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