

UNIFICATION OF HIJRI CALENDAR UNDER ONE MAṬLA‘: A CASE STUDY OF MABIMS THROUGH THE LENS OF ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE AND ASTRONOMY

Muhammad Ridzuan Hashim*

Raihana Abdul Wahab**

Mohd Saiful Anwar Mohd Nawawi***

Nazhatulshima Ahmad****

Muhamad Syazwan Faid*****

*Secretary General, Islamic Astronomy Association (JUFAS), J2-09-02, PPAM JINTAN, Jalan Kandis, P16, Presint 16, 62100, Putrajaya, Malaysia. E-mail: ridzuan@jurufalak.com

**Senior Lecturer, Department of Fiqh-Usul and Applied Sciences, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (Corresponding Author) E-mail: raihanawahab@um.edu.my

***Associate Professor, Department of Fiqh-Usul and Applied Sciences, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. E-mail: saifulanwar@um.edu.my

****Senior Lecturer, Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. E-mail: n_ahmad@um.edu.my

***** Senior Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, Centre for General Studies and Cocurricular, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 86400 Johor, Malaysia. E-mail: mdsyazwan@uthm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of a unified Hijri calendar among MABIMS countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) reflects a long-standing goal of fostering regional religious cohesion. While these nations have reached technical consensus on the Imkān al-Ru'yah criterion, specifically a minimum lunar altitude of 3° and elongation of 6.4°, the calendar remains unstandardized due to persistent differences in national practice. Brunei emphasizes local ru'yah (moon sighting), Indonesia employs the wilāyah al-ḥukmi (legal authority) concept, Malaysia integrates both ḥisāb (astronomical calculation) and ru'yah, and Singapore relies solely on ḥisāb. This study investigates the central issue: the core barriers to unification are now less about astronomy and more about legal, religious, and administrative factors. Using qualitative methods, including literature reviews and interviews with MABIMS astronomy and administrative experts, the research analyzes data thematically. Key findings highlight three primary obstacles: robust adherence to state religious authority (ūlil amrī), which reinforces national sovereignty in calendrical decisions; limited infrastructure for real-time sharing of ru'yah data and harmonization of regional fatwas; and varying jurisprudential interpretations concerning maṭla' (local horizon) and crescent visibility, each rooted in distinct legal traditions. These factors influence both policy and public perception, hindering unified implementation despite shared astronomical standards. To overcome these challenges, the paper suggests extending the wilāyah al-ḥukmi concept regionally, establishing formal mechanisms for data exchange, and gradually aligning fatwa structures. By

synthesizing and organizing existing approaches, the study offers a practical roadmap for integrating fiqh and astronomy to achieve calendar unification within the MABIMS context.

Keywords: *Hijri Calendar, MABIMS, Imkān al-Ru'yah, Islamic Jurisprudence*

INTRODUCTION

The practice of determining the beginning of the Hijri months through *ru'yah* (moon sighting) has been a continuous tradition since the early Islamic period.¹ Over time, Muslim-majority countries formalised this process through legal frameworks, observatories, and national administrative structures, including the modern MABIMS (The Informal Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Republic of Singapore) mechanism used in Southeast Asia.² The process of moon sighting is typically conducted on the 29th day of the Islamic calendar. If the crescent moon is sighted on the 29th day, the following day is counted as the first day of the new month in the Islamic calendar.³ Conversely, if the crescent moon is not sighted, the current month is completed to 30 days.

MABIMS has adopted the *imkān al-ru'yah* method in their

¹ Mohd Saiful Anwar Mohd Nawawi, Mohammaddin Abdul Niri, and Mohd Zambri Zainuddin, "Kenampakan Anak Bulan Di Teluk Kemang: Analisis Mengikuti Pandangan Fiqh Oleh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi," *Jurnal Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2013): 63–74, <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/JS/article/view/22473>.

² Maskufa Maskufa, Sopa Sopa, Sri Hidayati, and Adi Damanhuri, "Implementation of the New MABIMS Crescent Visibility Criteria: Efforts to Unite the Hijriyah Calendar in the Southeast Asian Region," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2022): 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i1.22275>.

³ Mohd Saiful Anwar Mohd Nawawi, Muhamad Syazwan Faid, Mohd Hafiz Mohd Saadon, Raihana Abdul Wahab, and Nazhatulshima Ahmad, "Hijri Month Determination in Southeast Asia: An Illustration Between Religion, Science, and Cultural Background," *Heliyon* 10, no. 20 (2024): e38668, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38668>.

hijri calendar systems.⁴ Therefore, Malaysia officially uses the *imkān al-ru'yah* method for determining the start of Islamic months, having evolved from the *istilāhi* calendar method (1969-1986) to the *imkān al-ru'yah* calendar (1995-present.)⁵ In Indonesia, the government uses the *imkān al-ru'yah* method. The Nahdatul Ulama (PBNU), however, follows the MABIMS crescent visibility criteria but waits for actual moon sighting results, specifically for Ramadan and Shawwal.⁶ In Brunei, the practice of moon sighting is exclusively conducted for Ramadan, Shawwal and Dhu al-Hijjah while the *hisāb* method is being used for other.⁷ In Singapore, only astronomical calculations (*hisāb*) are used in determining the start of Islamic months.⁷

It is therefore appropriate that Muslims in this region to begin fasting and celebrate Eid on the same dates across member countries to foster unity. As occurred in the year 2022 CE, corresponding to Shawwal 1443 AH, there was a one-day difference in *Eid al-Fitr* between MABIMS member countries, where Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei celebrated *Eid* one day earlier than Singapore.⁸ Despite crescent sighting reports across MABIMS member countries, the id dates remained different, with Singapore celebrating on 3 May 2022 CE, while Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia celebrated on 2 May 2022 CE. In 2022 CE, the

⁴ Muhamad Syazwan Faid et al., "Islamic Historical Review on the Middle Age Lunar Crescent Visibility Criterion," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 1 (2022): 109-125, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no1.9>.

⁵ Mohd Saiful Anwar Mohd Nawawi et al., "Sejarah Kriteria Kenampakan Anak Bulan Di Malaysia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 10, no. 2 (2015): 61-75, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol10no2.5>.

⁶ Muhammad Rasyid et al., "Study Of The Falakiah Fatwas Of The Indonesian Ulema Council," *Journal of Law and Governance* 7, no. 1 (2024): 45-62, <https://unimel.edu.my/journal/index.php/JLG>.

⁷ Mohammaddin Abdul Niri et al., "Aplikasi Metodologi Mengenal Alam Oleh Daud Al-Fatani Dalam Isu Penentuan Kenampakan Anak Bulan," *Usuluddin* 44, no. 1 (2016): 141-62, <https://doi.org/10.22452/usuluddin.vol44no1.6>.

⁸ Muhamad Syazwan Faid et al., "Methods In Determining New Hijri Month: A Thematic Review From Islamic Jurisprudence Perspective," *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law* 13, no. 1 (2025): 75-99, <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol13no1.687>.

crescent moon was sighted in Labuan, Malaysia as confirmed by the Mufti of the Federal Territories, while Brunei confirmed its sighting using a theodolite⁹. Although all four countries agreed to adopted the criteria of an altitude of 3° and an elongation distance of 6.4°, these criteria were not consistently applied.¹⁰ This situation raises a key question for this study: Should the crescent sighting in Labuan, Malaysia be accepted for Singapore, despite their close geographical proximity?

ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE DISCUSSION ON MAṬLA‘

In *fiqh* discussions, the boundaries governing Eid celebrations between neighbouring countries are referred to as *maṭla‘*.¹¹ These boundaries are a critical consideration when the crescent moon is sighted in a specific country.¹² Notably, the four member countries in question share the same night and are geographically proximate. The concept of *maṭla‘* delineates the jurisdiction for crescent sighting within each country. The criteria for determining whether countries may celebrate Eid concurrently are referenced in the narration of the Hadith of Kuraib:¹³

⁹Yuniar Wayuningsih, “Implementasi Kriteria Neo-MABIMS Dalam Penentuan 1 Syawal 1443 H Di Indonesia,” *Azimuth: Journal of Islamic Astronomy* 5, no. 1 (2024): 65–82, <https://doi.org/10.15642/azimuth.v5i1.2233>.

¹⁰Ahmad Adib Rofuiddin and Ahmad Izzuddin, “Optimist And Pessimist Moon-Sighting: The Study Of Islamic Calendar Determination In Indonesia,” *Mu‘āṣarah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 4, no. 2 (2022): 119, <https://doi.org/10.18592/msr.v4i2.7543>.

¹¹Muhamad Zakuwa Rodzali and Sa‘adan Man, “Relevansi Takwim Uhadi Dengan Syarat-Syarat Ditetapkan Kongres Istanbul 2016 Bagi Takwim Hijri Global,” *Online Journal of Research in Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-37, <https://doi.org/10.22452/ris.vol8no1.1>.

¹²Hassan-Bello and Abdulmajeed Bolade, “Sharia and Moon Sighting and Calculation: Examining Moon Sighting Controversy in Nigeria,” *Al-Ahkam* 30, no. 2 (2020): 215–52, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2020.30.2.5635>.

¹³Sahih Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bāb Bayān anna li-kulli baladin ru’yatahum, idhā ra’aw al-hilāla bi-baladin lā yathbut ḥukmuḥu limā ba’uda ‘anhum*, no. 1087 (Riyāḍh: Bāit al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 1998), 421.

عَنْ كُرَيْبٍ، أَنَّ أُمَّ الْفَضْلِ بِنْتَ الْحَارِثِ، بَعَثَتْهُ إِلَى مُعَاوِيَةَ
بِالشَّامِ قَالَ فَقَدِمْتُ الشَّامَ فَقَضَيْتُ حَاجَتَهَا وَاسْتَهَلَّ عَلَيَّ
رَمَضَانَ وَأَنَا بِالشَّامِ فَرَأَيْتُ الْهِلَالَ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ ثُمَّ قَدِمْتُ
الْمَدِينَةَ فِي آخِرِ الشَّهْرِ فَسَأَلَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَبَّاسٍ - رضى
الله عنهما - ثُمَّ ذَكَرَ الْهِلَالَ فَقَالَ مَتَى رَأَيْتُمُ الْهِلَالَ فَقُلْتُ
رَأَيْنَاهُ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ . فَقَالَ أَنْتَ رَأَيْتَهُ فَقُلْتُ نَعَمْ وَرَأَاهُ النَّاسُ
وَصَامُوا وَصَامَ مُعَاوِيَةُ . فَقَالَ لَكِنَّا رَأَيْنَاهُ لَيْلَةَ السَّبْتِ فَلَا
نَزَالَ نَصُومُ حَتَّى نُكْمِلَ ثَلَاثِينَ أَوْ نَرَاهُ . فَقُلْتُ أَوْلَا تَكْتَفِي
بِرُؤْيَا مُعَاوِيَةَ وَصِيَامِهِ فَقَالَ لَا هَكَذَا أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى
الله عليه وسلم . وَشَكََّ يَحْيَى بْنُ يَحْيَى فِي نَكْتَفِي أَوْ تَكْتَفِي .

Translation: *Kuraib reported that Umm Fadl, daughter of Harith, sent him (Fadl, i.e. her son) to Mu'awiya in Syria. I (Fadl) arrived in Syria, and did the needful for her. It was there in Syria that the month of Ramadan commenced. I saw the new moon (of Ramadan) on Friday. I then came back to Medina at the end of the month. Abdullah b. 'Abbas (Allah be pleased with him) asked me (about the new moon of Ramadan) and said: When did you see it? I said: We saw it on the night of Friday. He said: (Did) you see it yourself? I said: Yes, and the people also saw it and they fasted and Mu'awiya also fasted, whereupon he said: But we saw it on Saturday night. So we will continue to fast till we complete thirty (fasts) or we see it (the new moon of Shawwal). I said: Is the sighting of the moon by Mu'awiya not valid for you? He said: No; this is how the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) has commanded us. Yahya b. Yahya was in doubt (whether the word used in the narration by Kuraib) was Naktafi or*

Taktafi.

There are several factors that need to be examined carefully in this study. The hadith presented above serves as the basis of the extent of a country's boundary regarding the commencement of fasting and *Eid* celebrations. Geographical data indicate that the distance between Syria (*Sham*) and Madinah is approximately 1886 km, whereas the distance between Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei is 2913 km. According to the Ḥanbali school, when the crescent moon is sighted, whether near or far and regardless of whether one personally sees it or not, the obligation to fast and celebrate Eid applies to all.¹⁴ The Māliki school holds the view that it is obligatory to fast or celebrate Eid for those who have sighted the crescent moon, regardless of distance, whether within the *masāfāt al-qaṣr* (the travel distance permitting shortened prayers), or even if there is a difference in *maṭla'* (local horizons).¹⁵ The Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools, meanwhile, acknowledge the existence of *maṭla'* differences but the Ḥanafī position is less strict than the Shāfi'ī school, which specifies a very close distance limit of 133 km (equivalent to 24 farsakh), as mentioned by Wahbah al-Zuhaili in his book.¹⁶ The diagram below illustrates the distance between the land of Syria and Madinah, and the distance between Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia.

¹⁴ Mansur Yūnus al-Buhūṭī al-Ḥanbalī, *Kashshāf Al-Qinā' 'an Matn al-Iqnā'*. (A Detailed Commentary on al-Iqna') (Saudi Arabia: Wizārah al-'Adl, 2001), 353.

¹⁵ al-Syeikh Muhammad 'Arafah Al-Dusuqi, *Hāshiah Al-Dusūqī 'ala Al-Syarḥ Al-Kabīr* (Iḥya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), 150.

¹⁶ Wahbah Al-Zuhaili, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa Adillatuhu* (Dār al-Fikr, 1985), 607.

Figure 1: The Geographical Positions of Syria and Madinah



Source: Openstreet Map Generated using Python

Figure 2: The Geographical Positions of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei



Source: Openstreet Map Generated using Python

Maṭla' is defined as the geographical domain where the moon is observed, as it pertains to determining the start of the Hijri month, and differentiate between *maṭla' ikhtilāf* (local constituencies) and *maṭla' ittihād* (a unified jurisdiction), noting that the latter reflects the notion of *wilayah al-ḥukmī*¹⁷. The *fuqahā'* (Islamic jurists) have unanimously agreed that the obligation to

¹⁷ Marwadi Marwadi et al., “The Fiqh of Hisab-Ru’ya in the Twentieth Century Indonesia: Study on the Thoughts of Hamka, Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, and Moenawar Chalil about the Unification of Hijri Calendar,” *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 17, no. 1 (2023): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v17i1.7902>.

fast in the month of Ramadan is based on the sighting of the crescent moon, as stated in the verse of the Qur'an:

فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

Translation: "So whoever among you witnesses the month, let him fast it." (al-Baqarah 2:185)

and in the *hadith* of the Prophet PBUH:¹⁸

صُومُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ، وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ

Translation: "Fast when you see it (the crescent) and break your fast when you see it (the crescent)."

Nevertheless, there are differences of opinion among them regarding the ruling when the crescent moon is sighted in one region while it is not sighted in another. To explain this matter, the researcher outlines four selected *qaul* (opinions) in this discussion.

First Opinion: Permissibility of Choosing Whether to Follow the Same *Maṭla'* or Not

When the crescent moon is sighted in one location, it becomes obligatory for those in nearby areas to fast, while it is not obligatory for those in distant areas. This is the opinion of the majority within the Shāfi'i school, and is also held within the Hanbali school, as well as by some scholars from the Ḥanafī and Māliki schools. There is textual evidence supporting this view, as presented below:

In the Shāfi'i school, as stated in the *al-Majmū'*¹⁹:

¹⁸ Sahih Bukhari, Kitāb al-Ṣaum, *Bāb Qawl al-Nabī Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam (idhā ra'aytumūhu)*, hadith no. 1909 (Dimashq: Dār Ibn Kathīr, n.d.), 459.

¹⁹ Abū Zakariyā Maḥyī al-Dīn bin Syaraf al-Nawāwī, *Al-Majmū' Syarḥ Al-Muhazzab*, ed. Luḡnah Min al-Ulama', 6th ed. (Kaherah: Idārah al-Ṭaba'ah al-Muniriyyah, n.d.), 273.

إِذَا رَأُوا الْهِلَالَ فِي رَمَضَانَ فِي بَلَدٍ وَلَمْ يَرَوْهُ فِي غَيْرِهِ فَإِنَّ
تَقَارِبَ الْبُلْدَانِ فَحُكْمُهُمَا حُكْمُ بَلَدٍ وَاحِدٍ وَيَلْزَمُ أَهْلُ
الْبَلَدِ الْآخَرَ الصَّوْمُ بِإِلَّا خِلَافٍ وَإِنْ تَبَاعَدَا فَوَجْهَانِ
مَشْهُورَانِ فِي الطَّرِيقَتَيْنِ (أَصْحُهُمَا) لَا يَجِبُ الصَّوْمُ عَلَى
أَهْلِ الْبَلَدِ الْأُخْرَى

Translation: “When the crescent moon of Ramadan is sighted in one country but not seen in another, if the two countries are close to each other, then the same ruling applies to both, making it obligatory for the other country to fast without dispute. However, if they are far apart, then there are two well-known opinions in the two methods, the stronger of which is that it is not obligatory for the other country to fast.”

Hanbali School’s View (as stated in *al-Inṣāf*):²⁰

قَوْلُهُ (وَإِذَا رَأَى الْهِلَالَ أَهْلُ بَلَدٍ لَرِمَ النَّاسَ كُلَّهُمُ الصَّوْمُ). لَا خِلَافَ
فِي لُزُومِ الصَّوْمِ عَلَى مَنْ رَأَهُ. وَأَمَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ: فَإِنْ كَانَتْ الْمَطَالِعُ مُتَّفِقَةً.
لَرِمَهُمُ الصَّوْمُ أَيْضًا، وَإِنْ اخْتَلَفَتْ الْمَطَالِعُ، فَالصَّحِيحُ مِنَ الْمَذْهَبِ:
لُزُومُ الصَّوْمِ أَيْضًا، قَدَمَهُ فِي الْفُرُوعِ ، وَالْفَائِقِ ، وَالرِّعَايَةِ، وَهُوَ مِنْ
الْمُفْرَدَاتِ. وَقَالَ فِي الْفَائِقِ : وَالرُّؤْيَى بِنَلْدٍ تَلْزَمُ الْمُكَلَّفِينَ كَافَّةً ، وَقِيلَ
: تَلْزَمُ مَنْ قَارَبَ مَطْلَعَهُمْ ، اخْتَارَهُ شَيْخُنَا يَعْنِي بِهِ الشَّيْخَ تَقِيَّ الدِّينِ
وَقَالَ فِي الْفُرُوعِ ، وَقَالَ شَيْخُنَا يَعْنِي بِهِ الشَّيْخَ تَقِيَّ الدِّينِ نَحْتَلِفُ

²⁰ Ala’uddīn Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin Sulaimān bin Aḥmad al-Mardawī, *Al-Inṣāf Fī Ma’rifah Al-Rājih Min Al-Khilāf*, ed. Dr ‘Abdullāh bin Abd al-Muhsin al-Turkī (Kaherah: Hijr li al-Ṭaba‘ah wa al-Nasyr wa al-Tauzīq wa al-I‘lān, 1995), 1.335-336.

المَطَالِعُ بِاتِّفَاقِ أَهْلِ الْمَعْرِفَةِ ، فَإِنْ اْتَّفَقَتْ لَزِمَ الصَّوْمُ وَإِلَّا فَلَا

Translation: “When the crescent moon is sighted by the local people, it becomes obligatory for all of them to fast. There is no disagreement regarding the obligation of fasting upon those who have seen it. However, for those who have not seen it, if their *maṭla‘* (horizon) is the same, then fasting is also obligatory upon them. If there is a difference in *maṭla‘*, the correct view within the madhhab is that fasting is still obligatory. It is also stated that fasting is obligatory for those whose *maṭla‘* is near to that of those who sighted the moon. This is the view chosen by our Shaykh, al-Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn”

Furthermore, it is mentioned in *al-Furū‘* that our Shaykh, al-Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn, stated:

“The variation in *maṭla‘* is agreed upon by the scholars. If there is agreement (on the sighting), then fasting becomes obligatory; but if there is disagreement, then fasting is not obligatory.”

Hanafi School’s View (from *Tabyīn al-Ḥaqā’iq*)²¹:

قَالَ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ (وَلَا عِبْرَةَ بِاخْتِلَافِ الْمَطَالِعِ) وَقِيلَ يُعْتَبَرُ
وَمَعْنَاهُ أَنَّهُ إِذَا رَأَى الْهَلَلُ أَهْلُ بَلَدٍ وَلَمْ يَرَهُ أَهْلُ بَلَدَةٍ أُخْرَى
يَجِبُ أَنْ يَصُومُوا بِرُؤْيَا أَوْلِيكَ كَيْفَمَا كَانَ عَلَى قَوْلٍ مَنْ
قَالَ لَا عِبْرَةَ بِاخْتِلَافِ الْمَطَالِعِ وَعَلَى قَوْلٍ مَنْ اَعْتَبَرَهُ يَنْظُرُ
فَإِنْ كَانَ بَيْنَهُمَا تَقَارُبٌ بِحَيْثُ لَا تَخْتَلِفُ الْمَطَالِعُ يَجِبُ
وَإِنْ كَانَ بِحَيْثُ تَخْتَلِفُ لَا يَجِبُ وَأَكْثَرُ الْمَشَايخِ عَلَى أَنَّهُ

²¹ Uthmān bin ‘Alī al-Zaila ʿīy al-Ḥanafī, *Tabyīn Al-Ḥaqā’iq Syarḥ Kanz Al-Dakhā’iq Wa Ḥāsyiah Al-Syilbī* (Kaherah: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Kubrā al-Amīriyyah, 1314), 1.321.

لَا يُعْتَبَرُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا صَامَ أَهْلُ بَلَدٍ ثَلَاثِينَ يَوْمًا وَأَهْلُ بَلَدٍ
أُخْرَىٰ تِسْعَةً وَعِشْرِينَ يَوْمًا يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِمْ فَضَاءُ يَوْمٍ وَالْأَشْبَهُ
أَنْ يُعْتَبَرَ لِأَنَّ كُلَّ قَوْمٍ مُخَاطَبُونَ بِمَا عِنْدَهُمْ وَإِنْفِصَالُ الْهَلَلِ
عَنْ شُعَاعِ الشَّمْسِ يَخْتَلِفُ بِإِخْتِلَافِ الْأَقْطَارِ

Translation: “He (may Allah have mercy on him) said: ‘There is no consideration for the differences in maṭla’ (local horizons), although it has also been said that it should be considered.’ Its meaning is that if the crescent moon is sighted by the people of one land while the people of another land have not yet seen it, then it becomes obligatory for all to fast based on the sighting of those who have seen it, in every situation, according to the opinion that differences in maṭla’ are not considered.”

According to those who hold that maṭla’ differences are to be considered, it should be examined: if the two lands are close such that their maṭla’ does not differ, then fasting is obligatory for all; but if the maṭla’ differs, then it is not obligatory for the other to fast. Most of the scholars hold the opinion that maṭla’ differences are not to be considered, to the extent that if the people of one land fast for 30 days while the people of another land fast for only 29 days, then those who fasted 29 days are required to make up one day (qada’) or the like. However, it is more appropriate to consider maṭla’ differences, because each community is addressed according to what is apparent to them, and the separation of the crescent moon from the rays of the sun differs from one region to another.

Maliki School’s View (from *al-Tamhīd*)²²

²² Abū ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-Barr al-Namari al-Qurtūbī, *Al-Tamhīd Limā Fī Al-Muwatta’ Min Al-Ma’āni Wa Al-Masānīd Fī Hadīth Rasul Allāh - Salla Allāh ‘Alaihi Wa Sallam*, ed. Ḥasan Abd al-Mun‘in Syilbī and

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr mentioned in his book that some scholars uphold the consideration of *maṭla’* differences, while others do not. He then stated:

قال أبو عمر: إلى القول الأول أذهب؛ لأن فيه أثراً مرفوعاً،
وهو حديث حسنٌ تَلَزَمَ به الحجةُ، وهو قولٌ صاحبٍ كبيرٍ،
لا مُخَالَفَ لَهُ، وقال فيه طائفةٌ من فقهاء التَّابِعِينَ، ومع
هذا، إِنَّ النَّظَرَ يَدُلُّ عَلَيْهِ.

Translation: “*Abū ‘Umar said: I incline towards the first opinion (i.e., to consider maṭla’ differences), because it is based on a marfū‘ āthār (a narration traceable to the Prophet), and it is a good hadith that serves as evidence, and it is the opinion of a great Companion with whom other Companions did not disagree. It is also the opinion of a group of the jurists among the Tābi‘īn. Moreover, analytical reasoning indicates its correctness.*”

He further said:

وقال ايضاً: وقولُ ابن عباسٍ عندي صحيحٌ في هذا الباب،
والله الموفق للصواب

Translation: “*He also said: The opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās on this matter, in my view, is valid in this chapter, and Allah is the One who grants success in reaching the truth.*”

Second Opinion: Fasting Becomes Obligatory for All Without Considering *Maṭla’*

When the crescent moon is sighted in a particular region, it becomes obligatory for the entire region to act upon that *ru’yah*

Muḥammad Basyār ‘Awād (London: Mu’assasah al-Furqān Litturāth al-Islāmī, 2017), 9.246.

and to fast accordingly. This opinion is held by the Ḥanafī and Hanbali schools. It is also the view chosen by al-Layth ibn Sa'd, who stated:²³

إِذَا رُئِيَ الْهَيْلَالُ فِي بَلَدٍ لَزِمَ جَمِيعَ الْبِلَادِ الْعَمَلُ بِهَذِهِ الرُّؤْيَةِ،
وَالصِّيَامُ بِمُوجِبِهَا

Translation “When the crescent moon is sighted in a particular region, it becomes obligatory for the entire region to act upon that sighting and to fast accordingly.”

The Ḥanafī school holds the view that when the crescent moon is sighted in Egypt, then it becomes obligatory for all people to fast, and the apparent view of the madhhab allows the sighting by people in the west to be applicable for those in the east. This is supported by the text in *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr ‘alā al-Hidāyah* authored by Ibn al-Humām al-Ḥanafī, which states:²⁴

وَإِذَا ثَبَتَ فِي مِصْرَ لَزِمَ سَائِرَ النَّاسِ فَيَلْزِمُ أَهْلَ الْمَشْرِقِ
بِرُؤْيَةِ أَهْلِ الْمَغْرِبِ فِي ظَاهِرِ الْمَذْهَبِ

Translation: “When the crescent moon has been sighted in Egypt, then it becomes obligatory for all people to fast, and the people in the east are obligated to follow the sighting of the people in the

²³ Muwaffiq al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh bin Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Qudāmah al-Maqdisī al-Hanbalī, *Al-Mughnī Li Ibnī Al-Qudāmah*, ed. ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abd al Muḥsin al-Turkīy, ed. 3 (Riyādh, Mamlakah ‘Arabiyah al-Su‘ūdiyyah: Dār al-‘Alim al-Kutub Liṭṭaba ‘ah wa al-Nasyru wa al-Tauzīq, 1997), 4.328.

²⁴ al-Imām Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Sīwāsī al-Sakandarī, *Faṭḥ Al-Qadīr ‘alā Al-Hidāyah*, ed. Syamsu al-Din Ahmad, (Miṣr: Syarikah Maktabah wa Matba‘ah Masfā al-Bābi al-Halabī, 1970), 2.313.

west according to the apparent view of the madhhab.”

In the Hanbali school, there is a view recorded in *al-Mughnī* by Ibn Qudāmah, which is considered the preferred opinion within the Hanbali madhhab. This view is also held by some scholars among the *aṣḥāb al-Shāfi’ī*. As mentioned earlier in *al-Inṣāf*, whether a person has seen the crescent moon or not, all are required to fast. Alongside some *aṣḥāb al-Shāfi’ī* who adopt this view, it is also held by some Mālikis, as cited in *al-Masālik fī Sharḥ al-Muwāṭṭa’ Mālik*:²⁵

وإذا رأى أهل البصرة هلالَ رمضان، ثم بلغ ذلك أهل الكوفة والمدينة واليمن، فالذي رواه ابن القاسم وابن وهب في "المجموعة" لزمهم الصيام أو القضاء إن فات الأداء

Translation: “When the people of Basrah sight the crescent moon of Ramadan, and the news of this reaches the people of Kufah, Madinah, and Yemen, as narrated by Ibn Qāsim and Ibn Wahb in (*al-Majmū’ah*), then it becomes obligatory upon all of them to fast, or to make up the fast if the time for performing it has passed”

Among the *aṣḥāb al-shāfi’ī* who adhere to this opinion are al-Qadhi Abū Ṭayyib and al-Rūyānī. According to them, this ruling is based on Qur’anic verses, Prophetic hadith, and rational analysis, which serve as the primary evidence and basis for deriving this ruling.

Third Opinion: Fasting is Obligatory for all Regions, Whether Near or Far. Only Regions That are Extremely Distant are not Required.

²⁵ al-Qādhī Muḥammad bin ‘Abdullah Abū Bakr bin al-‘Arabi al-Mālikī, *Al-Masālik Fi Sharḥ Al-Muwāṭṭa’ Mālik*, ed. Muḥammad bin al-Husain al-Sulaimānī and A ‘isyah binti al-Husain al-Sulaimānī, c. 1 (Dār al-‘Arab al-Islāmī, 2007), 4.155.

The authoritative opinion within the Maliki school is that when the crescent moon is sighted in one region, it becomes obligatory for all nearby regions and even distant regions to fast. However, for regions that are extremely far away, this opinion does not need to be applied. The *Malikis* adhere to this opinion fully while excluding extremely distant countries by scholarly consensus *ijmā'*.²⁶

Fourth Opinion: Each country has its own method of moon sighting.

It is narrated from 'Ikrimah that each region has its own crescent observation and does not require the observation of others to determine the start of the month. They use the hadith of Kuraib as evidence for this view, as previously mentioned. This opinion is held by al-Qāsim ibn Muhammad and others.²⁷ While the schools of thought differ in their treatment of *maṭla'*, the tension primarily lies in reconciling textual fidelity with regional administrative practicality. These juristic differences, though deep-rooted, provide interpretive flexibility that could enable legal convergence within a defined *wilāyah al-ḥukmi* framework at the MABIMS level.

IMPLEMENTATION OF MAṬLA' WITHIN MABIMS

Malaysia, covering 330,534km², has established officially recognised reference points for crescent observation through JUPEM. The easternmost point is Tanjung Atiamu, Lahad Datu, Sabah while the westernmost point was redefined on 25 July 2022, when Pulau Perak in Yan, Kedah, was declared the new national reference location, replacing Tanjung Chinchin, Langkawi. This revision strengthens the national *ḥisāb* framework and invites further research among astronomers and *falak* experts to refine Malaysia's calendar system. Pulau Perak now serves as the official *ḥisāb* reference, while *ru'yah* practices remain active across 29

²⁶ Kitab Majma' Fiqh al-Islāmī, *Tawḥīd Bidāyat al-Shuhūr al-Qamariyyah*, accessed on 4 June 2025, <https://shameela.ws/book/8356/1642>.

²⁷ Muwaffiq al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abdullāh bin Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Qudāmah al-Maqdisi al-Hanbalī, *Al-Mughnī Li Ibnī Al-Qudāmah*, 328.

nationwide observation stations, reflecting Malaysia's hybrid methodology.

Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority nation within MABIMS, determines the start of the Hijri month using the principle of *maṭla' wilāyah al-ḥukmi*, whereby each region conducts local *ru'yah* and reports results independently for official confirmation. This system aligns with Indonesia's geographical diversity, climatic differences, and archipelagic administrative structure. Instead of relying on a single national outcome, multiple verified observations are considered across the country. *Ru'yah* teams comprising *falak* scholars, religious officers, and trained observers operate regionally to ensure accuracy.

Brunei practices *ru'yah* only for Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah, based on a State Mufti fatwa aligning with Shafi'i principles. It maintains a national *maṭla'* independent of neighbouring Malaysia or Indonesia, with Bukit Agok serving as the central reference point. Singapore, meanwhile, applies *imkān al-ru'yah* supported by *ḥisāb*, a system officially adopted since the 1990s and shaped by earlier observation records dating back to 1924. Although earlier practices depended fully on *ḥisāb*, the current model combines pre-calculation with conditional adjustment if scientific verification requires it. Singapore maintains autonomy and does not adopt sightings from other countries, considering its method sufficiently precise for its geographical context.

These differing approaches illustrate the broader juristic spectrum regarding *maṭla'*. While scholars agree fasting is tied to crescent sighting, they differ on whether *maṭla'* should be unified or localised. The four commonly cited positions include optional alignment, obligatory global unity, regional limitation, and independently applied *maṭla'*, as seen in the hadith of Kuraib. In practice, Malaysia uses a national *maṭla'*, Indonesia applies jurisdictional *wilāyah al-ḥukmi*, Brunei conducts selective *ru'yah*, and Singapore relies on *ḥisāb imkān al-ru'yah*. This divergence led to observable differences, such as the 2022 *Eid al-Fitr* variation between Singapore and the other MABIMS countries, highlighting gaps between regional aspirations and operational realities.

This study proposes that adopting the second juristic opinion, which obligates unity regardless of *maṭla'* differences, is the most viable path toward regional harmonisation, contingent on gradual legal and administrative alignment. To support this, recommended measures include standardised *imkān al-ru'yah* criteria, real-time data integration, and coordinated issuance of fatwas with contextual exemptions. This approach aligns with MABIMS's goals while respecting each nation's legal framework.²⁸ Therefore, this study assesses the feasibility of Hijri calendar unification by examining technical, fiqh, and policy considerations, focusing on the current barriers, which are primarily legal, religious, and administrative rather than astronomical. Using qualitative methods such as literature reviews and interviews with MABIMS astronomy and administrative experts, the research analyses data thematically.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Method

This research using both primary and secondary in data collection methods. Primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews and observations with experts in Islamic astronomy, religious administration, and related fields at the MABIMS level. Secondary data were obtained from Islamic texts, scholarly books, academic journals, and electronic databases.

The researcher has conducted the library research by critically and systematically evaluating texts, comparing the arguments presented by other authors, and organising the information obtained in a structured manner to produce accurate analyses. The data obtained through the library research were then analysed to develop the main themes of the study. In this study, the research methodology was constructed based on the themes identified through the literature review, namely:

²⁸ Maskufa Maskufa, Sopa Sopa, Sri Hidayati, and Adi Damanhuri, "Implementation of the New MABIMS Crescent Visibility Criteria: Efforts to Unite the Hijriyah Calendar in the Southeast Asian Region," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2022): 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i1.22275>.

i. Theme A: Understanding and Attitudes Towards the Concept of *Maṭla'*

This theme assesses the participants' level of knowledge and understanding of the *maṭla'* concept from the perspectives of Islamic jurisprudence and astronomy, as well as their perceptions of the importance of *maṭla'* in determining the beginning of the Hijri month.

ii. Theme B: Readiness for Hijri Calendar Unification at the MABIMS Level

This theme measures respondents' readiness and acceptance of efforts to unify the Hijri calendar at the regional level, including practical challenges and policy implementation issues.

iii. Theme C: The Role of Astronomy in Determining the Beginning of the Hijri Month

This theme focuses on the extent to which the use of *ḥisāb* and *Imkān al-Ru'yah* methods are accepted as support for *ru'yah* in efforts to unify the Hijri calendar, as well as the feasibility of using astronomical technology to aid in the consistent determination of the beginning of the Hijri month.

The researcher developed semi-structured interview instruments specifically designed to obtain qualitative data from expert informants in the fields of astronomy, and religious administration at the MABIMS level. The interview questions were designed based on Themes A, B, and C to ensure that each question directly addressed the research objectives systematically.

This study employed purposive sampling to identify informants who possess specialized knowledge in Hijri calendar implementation across MABIMS member countries. The informants were selected based on the following criteria:

- i. Active involvement in national or regional *hilāl* observation committees
- ii. Technical expertise in astronomy (e.g., observatory staff, university researchers)

- iii. Shariah advisory role in national fatwa councils or Islamic affairs departments
- iv. Representation from at least three MABIMS countries to reflect diversity

The researcher interviewed 11 informants from 2024 to 2025 as follows Table 1:

Table 1: List of Research Informants with Positions and Areas of Expertise in MABIMS Countries

Label	Position and Field of Duty
Informant 1	Senior Assistant Director, Islamic Astronomy Section, Shariah Research Branch, Research Division, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)
Informant 2	Senior Assistant Director, Islamic Astronomy Section, Shariah Research Branch, Research Division, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)
Informant 3	Senior Assistant Mufti
Informant 4	JAKIM Astronomical Expert Panel
Informant 5	Retired Officer, Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia
Informant 6	Lecturer in Astronomy, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo, Indonesia
Informant 7	Head of Planetarium and Observatory, UIN Walisongo
Informant 8	Head of Hisāb Rukyat Subdivision, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia
Informant 9	Research Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia
Informant 10	Deputy Secretary, Lajnah Falakiyah, Nahdhatul Ulama, Indonesia
Informant 11	Surveyor, Geodetic Division, Ministry of Development, Brunei Darussalam

Source: Author

The informants were selected based on their background and credibility to ensure that the findings obtained from the study have a high degree of reliability.

1. Informants 1 and 2 are federal administrators at JAKIM with over 10 years of industry experience and expertise in Islamic governance.
2. Informant 3, a state administrator at the Penang State Mufti Department, applies over 10 years of astronomy experience as an advisor for the department's astronomical initiatives.
3. Informant 4, a member of the JAKIM Astronomical Expert Panel, brings over 30 years of astronomy experience to expert guidance.
4. Informant 5 is a surveying expert who formerly served at Malaysia's Department of Survey and Mapping and is now developing astronomical software, including Falak Suite_V3_2021 and the planned Falak Syar'i_V2.
5. Informant 6 is an astronomy lecturer at UIN Walisongo. Informant 7 is also an astronomy lecturer at the same university and serves as Head of the Planetarium and Observatory, combining administrative and academic expertise.
6. Informant 8, Head of the Hisāb Rukyat Subdivision at Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, applies governmental and astronomical expertise to manage astronomical calculations and observations specifically supporting religious affairs.
7. Informant 9, a Research Professor at Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), leverages academic research to provide scientific expertise in astronomy and astrophysics.
8. Informant 10, Deputy Secretary of the Nahdatul Ulama Astronomical Council (LF PBNU), brings administrative and domain knowledge to council operations.
9. Informant 11, a Surveyor in Brunei's Ministry of Development Geodetic Division, applies surveying skills and geodetic expertise to government operations.

Informants were from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, representing religious authorities, astronomical councils, and academic institutions involved in formulating the Hijri calendar and *hilāl* observation. Singapore was excluded because relevant secondary sources were already included in the analysis, and it relies on *ḥisāb* rather than *ru'yah*, making *ru'yah-based* themes inapplicable to its context.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected were categorised into primary and secondary data. These data were then carefully, deeply, and systematically evaluated using descriptive analysis. The analysed data were processed using an inductive approach, in which the understanding of the research problem and the search for its solution occurred in a generative, continuous manner, with information gathered repeatedly until the problem became clear or its solution was formulated. This method is based on drawing general conclusions from specific information. In the science of *usul fiqh*, this method is referred to as the method of *istiqrā'* (inductive reasoning).

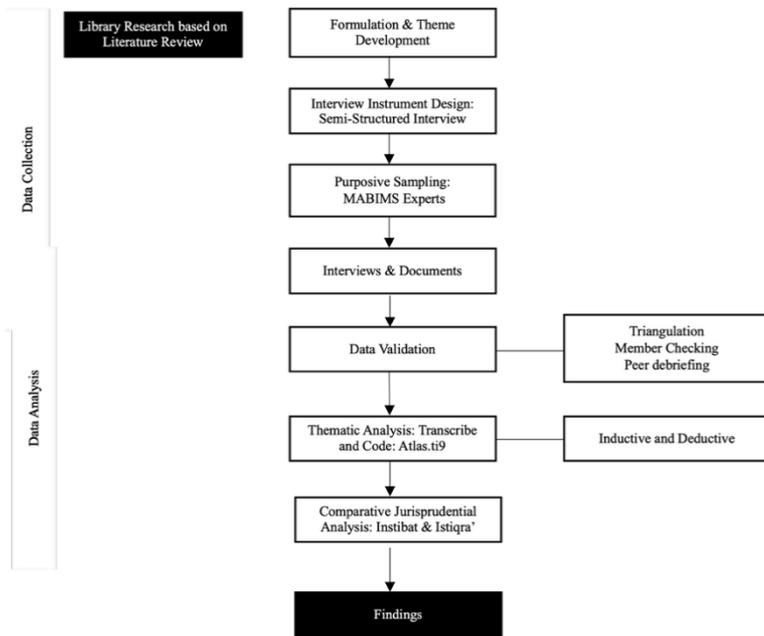
This study used limited, separate data, requiring the researcher to carefully examine, study, and collect the data to gain a deep understanding so that the problem under study could be clearly comprehended. The deductive method was also employed in this study. In the deductive approach, existing theories are used to address the research problem. Through this method, conclusions are drawn from the available information and facts. In *usul al-fiqh*, this method is known as *istinbāt* (deductive reasoning).

Additionally, the comparative method was utilised, which involves drawing conclusions by comparing the data obtained. This comparison enables the data to be analysed effectively, yielding accurate and precise findings.

The data obtained through the interview method were analysed using the ATLAS.ti 9 software. These data were then analysed using thematic analysis to achieve the study's objectives and to draw conclusions based on the research themes, ensuring that the study's scope was met and that the research objectives were successfully achieved. The aim of the interview data in this study

does not merely echo prevailing narratives, but offers grounded insights into how legal, scientific, and administrative interpretations of *maṭla'* differ by country. These findings shape the construction of the feasibility matrix and inform policy pathways, particularly where institutional constraints outweigh theological consensus. Figure 3 below shows the research framework for this study.

Figure 3: Research Framework



Source: Author

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of *Maṭla'* within MABIMS from the Perspective of Islamic Jurisprudence

It has been found that Islamic jurisprudence is a critical scope in achieving the objective of *maṭla'* unification. In seeking consensus within MABIMS, Islamic jurisprudence considerations must be deeply examined, as Islamic jurisprudence forms the core

foundation for the unification of the Hijri calendar and *maṭla'* at the MABIMS level. For instance, Informant 9 stated that Indonesia, at the national level, considers the entire country as a single *maṭla'* based on the concept of *maṭla' wilāyah al-ḥukmi*. In elaborating on this Islamic jurisprudence theme, several codes were identified from the analysis, namely: Issues Related to Worship Months, Territory and Testimony. The explanation of these codes under the Islamic jurisprudence theme is as follows:

Issues Related to Worship Months

Informant 11 explained that the unification of *maṭla'* is quite complex to implement. Representing Brunei Darussalam, Informant 11 noted that Brunei strictly adheres to *ru'yah* (moon sighting) while Singapore continues to use calculations (*ḥisāb*). He added that in Brunei, moon sighting is under the authority of the ruler, i.e., the Sultan. As a result, there could be instances where Eid is celebrated earlier or later in different places. He further explained that Brunei initially agreed to a unified *maṭla'*, but upon review, found it inconsistent with *ḥadīth* related to *ru'yah* and the directives of the ruler. This, according to him, is due to an act within the Syariah Court system stipulating that the new moon must be sighted every month.

Territory

Informant 3 initially highlighted the need to consider the concepts of *maṭla'* and *ūlil amrī* for each territory, emphasising that each country is a sovereign state with its own rulers responsible for its territory. In Malaysia, for instance, Pulau Perak is used as the observation and benchmark point for the country's westernmost boundary, whereas Aceh presents challenges in serving as a *maṭla'* due to its location outside Malaysia.

Informant 6 stated that for Indonesians, establishing a unified *maṭla'* is not an issue since Indonesia has the largest territory compared to other countries in the region. The westernmost parts of Indonesia encompass Malaysia and Singapore. Informant 7 shared a similar perspective, noting that as the westernmost territory among MABIMS members, Indonesia should be prioritised in implementing *maṭla'* for MABIMS.

Without including Indonesia, the *maṭla'* within MABIMS would not be robust enough to be effectively implemented, considering the geographical layout of the member countries. The western region referred to here is Indonesia itself, and not distant western regions such as Saudi Arabia.

Informant 8 raised questions regarding the territorial boundaries and benchmarks for implementing a calendar aimed at establishing a single *maṭla'* for the entire MABIMS region, pointing out the challenges posed by the many western regions within Indonesia in determining a specific benchmark point.

Informant 9 added that this territorial issue had already been addressed in the Jakarta Recommendations in 2017, during which the *maṭla'* issue was raised with the criteria of 3° altitude and 6.4° elongation. They proposed elevating the issue to a global level by designating the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as the primary authority for its implementation to establish a global calendar. For regional matters, they suggested that the Ministry of Religious Affairs should act as a collective authority overseeing the implementation, with Aceh identified as the westernmost benchmark for the criteria, although discussions are still ongoing.

Testimony

Informant 7 shared the view by raising the question of whether the testimony regarding the sighting of the is accepted. For him, if the testimony is credible and without doubt, it is accepted. Once the testimony is verified, the Minister of Religious Affairs will determine the date for Eid to be celebrated based on the witness reports of the crescent moon sighting. The final decision will be made during the *Sidang Isbat* (Official Confirmation Meeting), and the outcome will be announced to the public through media channels. Meanwhile, Informant 11 explained that in Brunei Darussalam, the issue of testimony is also significant as outlined in its legal framework. In Brunei, testimonies regarding crescent sightings are provided by officials specifically appointed to conduct the *ru'yah* (crescent observation). For him, testimony is a critical component in the country's process. There are five designated observation sites in Brunei Darussalam: Taman

Rekreasi Tanjung Batu, Menara Bangunan TSJ, Bukit Agong, Bukit Ambog, and Bukit Dungun. All of these sites are located on elevated ground, while Tanjung Batu is situated near the coastline.

Discussion on the Islamic jurisprudence Theme

The concept of *maṭla' wilāyah al-ḥukmi* currently applies only in Indonesia and has not yet been implemented in other MABIMS countries. At the regional level, this concept has not been realised. Therefore, it is essential for MABIMS member countries to urgently find a viable solution to establish a unified *maṭla'* that can be utilised across all member states. This aligns with Informant 9's earlier statements in his writings.²⁹

In this context, the dynamic and evolving nature of Islamic jurisprudence must be considered, following the principle:

لَا يُنكَرُ تَغْيِيرُ الْأَحْكَامِ بِتَغْيِيرِ الْأَزْمَانِ

Translation: "Do not deny the change of rulings with the change of times."³⁰

This principle should be leveraged as an opportunity to advance towards better practices that meet the aspirations of a united *ummah*. Previously, the Islamic jurisprudence theme also highlighted various codes relevant to this discourse, including the issue of Issues Related to Worship Months. In Brunei, worship months are defined specifically as the months of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah, as these months contain acts of worship related to fasting and religious celebrations for Muslims nationwide. In the pursuit of *maṭla'* unification, Informant 11

²⁹ Abdul Mufid and Thomas Djamaluddin, "The Implementation of New Minister of Religion of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore Criteria towards the Hijri Calendar Unification," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8774>.

³⁰ Muḥammad Ṣidqī bin Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Āli Burnū, *Kitāb Al-Wajīz Fi Ḍāh Qawā'id Al-Fiqh Al-Kulliyah* ed. 4 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1996), 310.

noted during the previous interview that challenges will arise specifically during these worship months due to Brunei Darussalam's firm adherence to its established practices.

Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that the primary basis for *ru'yah* in Brunei is *ru'yah al-hilāl*. It is mandatory to conduct crescent sightings during these worship months. This aligns with the discussion presented by Shahir Akram Hassan and Mohd Shukri Hanapi, who, in their interviews with the Acting Chief Registrar of the Syariah Court of Brunei Darussalam, confirmed this practice. Outside of these worship months, Brunei Darussalam has no significant issues concerning *ru'yah al-hilāl*.³¹

The *ru'yah al-hilāl* process is conducted based on the principle that if the crescent moon is not sighted, the current lunar month should be completed to 30 days. In this context, the *ḥisāb* (astronomical calculation) method is used only as a guide for estimation and is not employed to establish the official start of the new lunar month, even if the moon's position has already met the *Imkān al-Ru'yah* criteria.³²

Additionally, Informant 11 explained that there is a legal provision within the Syariah Court of Brunei Darussalam stipulating that the crescent moon must be sighted physically. Based on this explanation, it is evident that Brunei's Syariah Courts Act explicitly uses the term *ru'yah* (sighting) rather than

³¹ Shahir Akram Hassan and Mohd Shukri Hanapi, "Standard Operating Procedure (Sop) in Determining the Arrival of Shawwal in Brunei Darussalam," *Social Sciences and Humanities Journal* 10, no. 10 (2015): 27–36,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313439779_STANDARD_OPERATING_PROCEDURE_SOP_IN_DETERMINING_THE_ARRIVAL_OF_SHAWWAL_IN_BRUNEI_DARUSSALAM.

³² Hanapi and Hassan, "Basis for Using the Rukyah Method for Determining the Arrival of Ramadan and Syawal in Brunei Darussalam," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2015): 13-22, 10.15640/jisc.v3n2a2

ḥisāb (calculation). This can be seen in the *Syariah Courts Act, Chapter 184, under Section 29*,³³ which states:

1. It shall be the duty of the Chief Syar'ie Judge, at or about the beginning or end of each lunar month, to conduct an enquiry to determine the dates of the new moons on which *ru'yah* may occur, and to conduct an enquiry on any specified day the new moon may be sighted, thereafter determining and confirming the *ru'yah* results under his authority.
2. After the enquiries mentioned in subsection (1), the Chief Syar'ie Judge shall immediately inform the President of the Majlis, who will then submit the determination and confirmation of *ru'yah* to His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan.
3. The determination and confirmation made by the Chief Syar'ie Judge regarding *ru'yah* shall be final.

Based on the provisions within this Syariah Court Act, it is clear that the matter of *ru'yah* has been codified into Brunei Darussalam's national legislation, and thus, it is not within the discretionary power of the nation to change this practice arbitrarily. Consequently, the implementation of a unified *matla'* among MABIMS countries becomes increasingly challenging, as each nation's priorities are guided by its domestic laws. Compared to the non-binding nature of MABIMS resolutions, the outcomes of MABIMS meetings do not legally compel member states to implement them. Therefore, it is the priority of each nation to enforce its established decisions over adopting a collective resolution that may not be practically enforceable.

Apart from the *Issues Related to Worship Months*, the *Territorial Boundaries* code also requires attention. The size of a country's territory plays a crucial role in the *matla'* issue. The question arises: where do the territorial boundaries for *matla'*

³³ "Laws of Brunei Chapter 184 Syariah Courts," Law of Brunei Revised Edition 2000, Accessed 28 April 2024, <https://www.agc.gov.bn/AGC/Images/LOB/pdf/Chp.184.pdf>.

begin and end? In the Malay Archipelago, the boundaries are primarily maritime, meaning the region consists of vast islands separated by large bodies of water. According to Shāfi'i Islamic jurisprudence, as previously discussed in Chapter Three, there is a limit on the distance beyond which the *qasar* applies, set at 81 km by fatwas issued in some Malaysian states. However, this distance is considered minimal for sovereign states in the contemporary era.

While the matter of *qasar* and *jama'* in prayers is not problematic, and is, in fact, a permissible concession for a *mukallaḥ*, the area under discussion here refers to the geographical span where the crescent moon sighting can be observed. For example, Malaysia's span ranges from Tanjung Atiamu in Sabah to Pulau Perak in Kedah, while Indonesia extends from Papua in the east to Aceh in the west. Brunei is separated only by the Limbang district in Sarawak, and Singapore is a small island situated south of Peninsular Malaysia. From a geographical projection, the entire main areas mentioned above fall within the longitudinal expanse of Indonesia, meaning that all these countries lie within Indonesia's territorial extent from east to west.

According to Informant 6, Indonesia faces no significant issues regarding the *maṭla'* matter, as the country's geographical span is the largest among the MABIMS countries. In his interview, Informant 6 reinforced this statement, affirming that Indonesia is indeed the most expansive among the MABIMS member states. Geographically, the westernmost region within MABIMS is Aceh, which means the westernmost point lies within Indonesian territory. Similarly, Informant 7 shared the same view as Informant 6, agreeing that Indonesia, as the westernmost country within MABIMS, should naturally play a primary role in implementing the MABIMS *maṭla'*. Excluding Indonesia from this implementation would render the MABIMS *maṭla'* insufficiently robust, given the overall geographical considerations of the MABIMS region.

Given that a territory of such size possesses its sovereignty, it is only natural that governance over these territories has been established, typically rooted in the post-independence history of each region. These territories have long had their own governance structures due to their sovereignty. The *maṭla'* concept

under discussion must therefore encompass the concept of *ūlīl amri* (those in authority) within sovereign territories. This is because each territory has its own governing authorities responsible for managing these regions. The *ūlīl amri* concept is also central to Islamic jurisprudence discussions, as the Qur'an commands obedience to Allah, His Messenger, and those in authority (*ūlīl amri*) among you.

Informant 8 raised questions regarding the territorial boundaries and reference markers when implementing a unified *maṭla'* calendar for the entire MABIMS region. As an administrator representing the Indonesian government, he questioned the policy aspect, specifically how such an implementation would be operationalised and the necessity of establishing clear boundaries and limits. The policy to be implemented in the future is crucial and must consider the factors already highlighted, as these falls under matters requiring consensus (*ijtihād jamā'ī*) when executing such initiatives.

In contrast, Informant 9 added that any territorial determination in this matter must be established through mutual agreement. Informant 9 stated that this territorial issue was addressed during the Jakarta Recommendation in 2017, at which time the *maṭla'* issue was raised using the criteria of a 3° altitude and a 6.4° elongation. The matter was elevated to a global level, designating the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as the highest authority to oversee its implementation.

Additionally, the "*Testimony*" code appears within this Islamic jurisprudence theme, as testimony plays a crucial role in the crescent moon-sighting process. Testimonies from crescent moon observers are critically important for determining the actual sighting of the moon.³⁴ Imam al-Shāfi'i stipulated that the testimony of two or more witnesses is required for the crescent moon sighting. This testimony carries significant weight, as it is

³⁴ Muh. Arif Royyani, Abdul Mufid, M. Ihtirozun Ni'am, Alfian Qodri Azizi, and Achmad Azis Abidin, "Shahadah 'Ilmy; Integrating Fiqh and Astronomy Paradigm in Determining The Arrival of Lunar Months in Indonesia," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 16, no. 2 (2021): 503-524, <https://doi.org/10.19105/AL-LHKAM.V16I2.5320>.

responsible for the entire Muslim community once verified by the relevant authorities.

As Informant 7 noted, it is also necessary to examine whether the witnesses are knowledgeable or otherwise, ensuring there is no doubt about their testimony so the crescent-sighting committee can make accurate determinations based on their statements. In Malaysia, crescent moon sightings are only accepted from members of the appointed committee and must be witnessed by two individuals.

In Brunei, there are also specific procedures regarding testimony, where not just anyone's testimony is accepted. The testimony must come from individuals who are part of the committee involved in crescent moon sighting activities for determining key Islamic dates, such as Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah.

In contrast, Indonesia accepts testimony from anyone who claims to have sighted the crescent, but such claims must be verified by the *Sidang Isbat* (Confirmation Council). The final determination is made during this *Sidang Isbat*. Although Indonesia adopts this approach, in which anyone who sees the crescent may step forward as a witness, the country practices *musyawarah* (consultation) within the *Sidang Isbat*, relying on assessments by local *fuqaha* (Islamic jurists) during the decision-making process. If the sighting is deemed invalid or if the crescent is not verifiable, the testimony is rejected. Therefore, in evaluating testimonies within the *maṭla'* context, as Informant 9 explained, *maṭla'* essentially involves "the validity of testimony within a territory." Hence, agreement on the territorial boundaries for the *maṭla'* should be carefully established to align with the evolving standards of Islamic jurisprudence.

Additionally, within this Islamic jurisprudence theme, there is also a code concerning *Time-Based Maṭla'* as raised by Informant 4. In addressing the issue of *maṭla'*, he proposed that it could be determined based on time alignment. He recalled that there was once a time synchronization between Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Thus, Informant 4 suggested that *maṭla'* could be established based on official time zones,

considering that Malaysia's time has undergone changes in the past.

Currently, Malaysia uses a time zone 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), while New York, in the United States, is 5 hours behind GMT. This difference arises because Malaysia is east of the 0° longitude, while New York is west of it. In 1880, the time in the Federated Malay States was set at 7 hours ahead of GMT, calculated along the 105° East meridian. In 1933, this was adjusted to 7 hours and 20 minutes ahead of GMT, based on the 110° East meridian. In 1941 (1360H), it was changed again to 7 hours and 30 minutes ahead, aligned with the 112.5° East meridian. In 1942, during the Japanese military occupation, the time was advanced by 2 hours, making it 9 hours and 30 minutes ahead to align with Japan's time zone. After World War II ended, it was reverted to 7 hours and 30 minutes ahead. In 1982, Malaysia added another 30 minutes, making it 8 hours ahead of GMT, using the 120° East time zone meridian. This change was implemented by Malaysia's Prime Minister at the time, precisely at 11:30 PM on December 31, 1981, aligning with 12:00 midnight on January 1, 1982.

Furthermore, there is also a code within this Islamic jurisprudence theme discussing the *Nationwide Maṭla'*. Informants 9 and 10 explained during their interviews that the concept of a nationwide *maṭla'* can have both regional and national scopes. The regional aspect refers to the entire MABIMS region, including ASEAN, while the national aspect applies locally within individual countries. If it meets agreed-upon criteria and is enforced by a competent authority, such a *maṭla'* could be implemented.

In Indonesia, this practice is based on the principle of *wilāyah al-ḥukm*, as mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. The *wilāyah al-ḥukmi* ruling applies nationwide, regardless of where the crescent moon is sighted within the country. As a sovereign nation, Indonesia has unified its *maṭla'* under the *wilāyah al-ḥukmi* framework, which refers to its legal territorial boundaries. However, this concept does not yet apply within other MABIMS member countries. When Informant 10 was asked whether this *maṭla'* could be applied to other countries, he responded that, for now, this *maṭla'* is only applicable within

Indonesia. The *maṭlaʿ* implementation in each MABIMS country could be summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: *Maṭlaʿ* Implementation in MABIMS Countries

Country	Islamic Jurisprudence School & Authority	<i>Maṭlaʿ</i> Concept	Operational Method	Crescent Visibility Criteria	Regional Coordination
Brunei	Shāfiʿī; Ulil Amri : Sultan & Syariah Court	National <i>Maṭlaʿ</i>	Ruʿyah-only for <i>worship months</i> (Ramadan, Shawwal, Zulhijjah); ḥisāb used only as guide	Ruʿyah regardless of Imkān al-Ruʿyah; must complete 30 days if not seen	Does not accept sightings from other countries (even within MABIMS)
Indonesia	Shāfiʿī; Wilayah al-ḥukmi via Ministry of Religious Affairs & Ormas (e.g., NU)	Wilayah al-Ḥukmi <i>Maṭlaʿ</i>	Ruʿyah + ḥisāb; 124 sites; result via <i>Sidang Isbat</i> (confirmation meeting)	MABIMS: 3° altitude & 6.4° elongation (geocentric since 2025)	Accepts sightings within Indonesia only ; not cross-national
Malaysia	Shāfiʿī; Federal-State Mufti system (JAKIM & State Mufti)	National <i>Maṭlaʿ</i>	Ruʿyah at 29 official sites + ḥisāb (hybrid system); uses Imkān al-Ruʿyah	MABIMS: 3° altitude & 6.4° elongation (topocentric)	Historically hesitant to accept cross-border sightings except near-border
Singapore	Shāfiʿī (minority Muslim state); MUIS (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura)	Fixed Calendar (Ḥisāb)	Fully uses Ḥisāb; no ruʿyah conducted	Imkān al-Ruʿyah (Ḥisāb) aligned with MABIMS	Does not follow ruʿyah in other countries despite proximity

Source: Author

Therefore, after carefully examining the discussions in this Islamic jurisprudence theme, the researcher concludes that the concept of *maṭla'* *wilāyah al-ḥukmi* could be expanded to other MABIMS member countries, provided it is adapted to their local Islamic jurisprudence.

Astronomical Aspects of *Matla* Within MABIMS

From the interviews conducted with the informants, the researcher concludes that there are five key elements identified by the informants regarding the implementation of *maṭla'* in the MABIMS context.

1. The Position of the Moon
2. Agreed Criteria of Lunar Crescent Sighting
3. Comprehensive Visibility
4. The Interpretation of defining *Maṭla*.
5. Geocentric and Topocentric Perspectives

The Position of the Moon

Informant 6 stated that the moon is more frequently located within Indonesian territory. However, there is a possibility that the moon could reach a higher altitude in the northern areas, such as Malaysia. Nevertheless, when considering the elongation factor, it is unlikely for Malaysia to qualify. From the perspective of elongation, the western regions, namely Indonesia, are more favourable.

Agreed Criteria

Informant 7 explained that the criteria issue has already been agreed upon, specifying a minimum altitude of 3° and an elongation of 6.4°. Scientifically, these conditions fulfil the necessary requirements; however, further discussion is still needed to refine the implementation. Informant 10 added that the *imkān al-ru'yah* criterion has been accepted by Nahdatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia. This acceptance was based on the consideration that this criterion has been recognised by astronomical experts at the international level, not just within Indonesia. The decision to adopt the agreed criteria was made with slight adjustments.

Comprehensive Visibility

Informant 5 stressed the importance of comprehensive visibility, using the example of a 3.64° measurement within the horizontal coordinate system to illustrate how a visibility criterion can be established systematically.

The Interpretation of defining *Maṭla'*

Table 2 refers to the views of Informant 9 and Informant 11 on the definition of *maṭla'*. Informant 9 hopes for a regionally agreed interpretation of *maṭla'* in terms of elongation. In the agreement among the Ministers of Religious Affairs, elongation referred to both geocentric and topocentric elongation, as understood by astronomers. However, some *ḥisāb* scholars within Nahdatul Ulama (NU) have opposed the use of geocentric elongation.

Meanwhile, Informant 11 explained that, from a historical perspective, MABIMS had once implemented a unified *maṭla'* criterion. However, during implementation, issues arose when the *hilāl* was visible in Indonesia but not in Brunei. As a result, Brunei followed Indonesia's *maṭla'*, causing confusion among the Bruneian public, who had already performed *tarawih* prayers that evening. Consequently, the unified *maṭla'* criterion was discontinued, and Brunei returned to its *ru'yah*-based method.

Geocentric and Topocentric Perspectives

According to Informant 5, Indonesia previously utilised geocentric elongation as a criterion. However, many studies in Indonesia have discussed topocentric perspectives extensively. He noted that during the unexpected Eid celebration in 2022, the criterion met was geocentric elongation, whereas the topocentric elongation did not meet the required criterion.

Informant 9 explained that although Indonesia had previously agreed to use the topocentric elongation criterion, it has since switched to using geocentric elongation. According to him, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia has discussed the matter with other MABIMS countries to define geocentric and topocentric elongation clearly, and Indonesia has agreed to adopt the geocentric criterion for the year 2025 CE (1446 AH).

This decision was made to prevent a recurrence of the issues experienced in 2022 regarding Eid determination. During that year, when Indonesia used the topocentric elongation criterion, only a few small islands met the criterion, while North Sumatra barely met it, compared to when using the geocentric elongation criterion.

Discussion on the Theme of Astronomy and *Falak*

In the aspect of *falak* and astronomy, the researcher found that the position of the moon sometimes appears in the northern sky and at other times in the southern sky. These occurrences happen because the moon is sometimes far from the sun and at other times close to it. The position of the moon plays an important role in *hilāl* sighting efforts.

The member countries of MABIMS are significantly distant from each other. Indonesia alone stretches from Marauke to Sabang, spanning over 5,245 km, which constitutes a vast territorial expanse. The researcher found that this distance is equivalent to the distance from London to Tehran, as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 4: Location of London, United Kingdom to Tehran, Iran



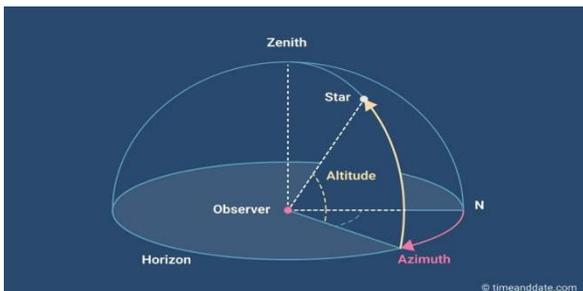
Source: Openstreet Map Generated using Python

Compared to these two major cities, the distance is vast and would require a long travel time. Additionally, the latitudes and

longitudes differ, and thus, the time zones also vary. In contrast, Singapore and Brunei are small nations and are not as large as Indonesia, while Malaysia ranks second in size after Indonesia. From Figure 4 above, the distance from Marauke to Sabang represents an east to west orientation, while the north to south orientation involves Malaysia in the north and Indonesia in the south. According to Informant 6, the fact that the moon at times is located in the north and at other times in the south indicates that the moon is constantly moving and not static in one place. He added that when the moon is in the north, Malaysia is positioned higher, meaning the moon is higher in Malaysia than in Indonesia. However, in terms of elongation, the moon will always remain within Indonesia's domain. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the westernmost point should be determined based on the moon's position. Once the moon's position has been examined in detail, the criteria should then be discussed.

For the findings in this study, most informants agreed with the current MABIMS criteria, namely a minimum altitude of 3° and an elongation of 6.4° . Informant 5 stated that comprehensive visibility within the horizontal coordinate system is necessary for observers. This is explained in the figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Horizontal Coordinate System



Source: timeanddate.com

This system, also known as the altitude-azimuth system, describes that the position of an object in the sky must be fully within the observer's field of view. This ensures that the observer remains vigilant towards the object, particularly in the case of the moon as in this study.

In addition, the study found that there is a need to re-examine the definition of *maṭla'*. Some informants expressed the desire for *maṭla'* to be redefined, as there have been recent discussions about the meaning of *maṭla'* without an official definition yet. The researcher found that the term *maṭla'* does not exist within the Malaysian Malay lexicon, and therefore, further studies are necessary to identify and appropriately define the term to align with the contexts of MABIMS member countries.

Regarding geocentric and topocentric perspectives, member countries need to revisit discussions to accurately define these terms, as some Indonesian astronomers have advocated for the use of geocentric criteria in moon sighting studies. Although topocentric criteria are commonly used in astronomy, in certain cases such as during Eid in 2022, geocentric criteria were fully utilised to define the visibility of the moon during that time. The researcher found that if this issue is not resolved promptly, MABIMS may face disputes over *hilāl* sightings in 2025, similar to the situation that occurred in 2022.

Path to a Regional *Maṭla'* Among MABIMS Countries

The findings of this study focus on three core aspects: Islamic jurisprudence, astronomy and administrative considerations. Achieving a unified *maṭla'* for *hilāl* visibility within the MABIMS region requires a comprehensive and holistic framework, as alignment cannot rely on astronomy alone. Jurisprudential positions, administrative authority, and sovereign legal structures all influence the regional decision-making process and currently prevent full standardisation.³⁵

From the Islamic jurisprudence perspective, Brunei maintains a fixed legal stance requiring *ru'yah* for religious months, while Malaysia and Indonesia apply a hybrid *ḥisāb-ru'yah* model based on the MABIMS *Imkān al-Ru'yah* criteria.

³⁵ Ahmad Musonnif, Ahmad Gelora Mahardika, Nuril Farida Maratus, and Muhammad Ngizzul Muttaqin, "Government Position in Religious Authority Contestation in Indonesia: Reviewing the Government Authority in Determining the Beginning of Islamic Months," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 16, no. 2 (2024): 336–62, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v16i2.27517>.

Singapore relies entirely on *ḥisāb*. Since MABIMS resolutions are non-binding, each country prioritises national law, which limits regional synchronisation. The researcher concludes that resolution is not immediately achievable and depends on continued dialogue, cooperation, and structured mechanisms to prevent repeated inconsistencies that impact public religious observance.

Geographically, the region's archipelagic nature makes maritime boundaries and jurisdictional reach an important factor. The classical Shafi'i guideline of 81 km for *maṭla'* boundaries is considered too limited for modern nation-states. Therefore, a wider regional framework is needed, and the concept of *wilāyah al-hukmi maṭla'* is proposed, stretching across the MABIMS zone. Under this model, reports of *hilāl* sightings from any member country would be validated and recognised regionally to maintain unity, coherence, and shared authority. Time-zone-based *maṭla'* divisions were analysed but found impractical due to vast territorial spans, particularly in Indonesia.

Administratively, sovereignty remains the strongest barrier to unification. Each country holds independent authority over its religious affairs, making an enforcement mechanism beyond recommendation unlikely in the short term. Brunei's Syariah Court Act mandates physical sighting; Indonesia's decentralised governance allows regional consensus-building; Malaysia and Singapore apply centralised, state-driven approval systems. These institutional differences mean that practical implementation defaults to national alignment rather than regional synchronisation. While MABIMS facilitates collaboration, execution is ultimately the responsibility of each government's appointed authority.

In the astronomy domain, five central elements frame the discussion: lunar position, agreed visibility criteria, comprehensive visibility zones, *maṭla'* redefinition, and geocentric-versus-topocentric frameworks. The study identifies the Lhoknga Observatory in Aceh, Indonesia, as the most suitable westernmost reference point for a unified *maṭla'* due to geography, infrastructure, and community support. This site can also function as a research hub, education centre, and potential scientific tourism location, enabling international collaboration. However, climate variability and long-term environmental

change must be considered to maintain reliability.

In conclusion, while technical astronomical criteria have been unified such as minimum altitude (3°) and elongation (6.4°) the greatest challenges lie in authority, governance, and jurisprudential differences. A unified *maṭla'* may be feasible by expanding the *wilāyah al-hukmi maṭla'* concept, supported by strengthened MABIMS governance, shared data systems, policy harmonisation, and formal scientific assessment of geocentric versus topocentric frameworks. Significant challenges remain, but coordinated refinement and progressive implementation may enable the long-term realisation of a unified Hijri calendar for the MABIMS region.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that unifying the Hijri calendar under a single *maṭla'* among MABIMS member countries is strategically important but remains challenging due to differences in administrative authority and Islamic jurisprudence. Although there is technical consensus on astronomical criteria of the *hilāl*, such as a minimum altitude of 3° and elongation of 6.4° , each country applies different methods: Brunei maintains a legally mandated *ru'yah*, Malaysia and Indonesia combine *hisāb-ru'yah* with the MABIMS *Imkān al-Ru'yah* criteria, while Singapore relies solely on *hisāb*. The Ḥanafī and Mālīkī approaches to cross-border *ru'yah* suggest theoretical compatibility, but practical implementation requires mutual agreement to avoid discrepancies, as seen in 2022. Astronomically, designating the Lhoknga Observatory in Aceh as a reference point is appropriate, yet debates on geocentric versus topocentric evaluations highlight the need for further scientific standardisation. From the administrative perspective, progress is hindered by the sovereign control each country holds over religious affairs. Brunei's Syariah framework requires physical sighting, Indonesia's *maṭla' wilāyah al-ḥukmi* functions effectively due to regional scale, and Malaysia and Singapore apply hybrid and computational systems reflecting national contexts. However, at the regional level, unification remains limited by the absence of a binding legal mechanism obligating MABIMS countries to adopt collective decisions.

Therefore, this study recommends strengthening the concept of *maṭla' wilāyah al-ḥukmi* in the MABIMS countries through gradual implementation, continuous dialogue, harmonised fatwas, shared *ru'yah* databases, and coordinated policy frameworks to ensure cohesion. If successful, this unification would strengthen regional Muslim unity in determining the dates of Ramadan and Eid, improve the administrative management of public holidays and religious affairs, prevent public confusion, support accurate data sharing through modern astronomical and GIS technologies, and enhance MABIMS's international credibility. This study emphasises that integrating astronomy, jurisprudence, and administrative cooperation offers a realistic pathway towards a unified *maṭla'* that positions MABIMS as a global reference for harmonizing Hijri calendar determination.

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