5842 - How to pray and fast in countries where the day or night is continuous

the question

Due to the inclination of the earth's axis of rotation, regions nearest to one pole experience continuous day for some months, for example, the trading city of Tromso (about 50000 inhabitants) in northern Norway (in which 0.4% of its population comes from islamic countries) where the sun is visible continuously from late May to late July, while regions nearest to the other pole experience continuous night during that same period. How do muslims living in Tromso do for maghrib and esha salaat as night never falls during these few monthes and also given that the month of Ramadhan falls during this period, how can they fast?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Fatwa no. 2769 was issued by the Council of Senior Scholars and the Standing Committee concerning an issue similar to the one you are asking about. This is the text of the question and answer:

alone and blessings and peace be upon the one after whom there will be no Prophet.

The Standing Committee for Academic Research and Issuing Fatwas has read the question that has been sent to the General Secretary by the Secretary the Union of Muslim Students in Holland, and which has been passed to them by the Secretary of the Council of Senior Scholars. The text of the question is as follows:

We hope that you can provide us with a fatwa concerning the way of determining the times of Maghrib, Isha’ and Fajr prayer, and also the first day of Ramadaan and the first day of Eid al-Fitr. That is because the way the sun rises and sets in the countries of Northern Europe that are close to the North Pole is different from the way it rises and sets in the eastern Muslim countries. The

reason for that has to do with the timing of the end of the red and white twilight. It may be noted that in summer the white twilight lasts almost the whole night, so it is difficult to determine the time of ‘Isha’ and the onset of the dawn.

They replied:

The Council of Senior Scholars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued a statement on the determining of the times of prayer, determining the start of dawn each day, and the end of the dawn in Ramadan, in countries such as yours. This is what it said:

After studying, researching and discussing the matter, the Council decided the following:

Whoever resides in a country where the night can be distinguished from the day by the onset of dawn and the setting of the sun, but the day is extremely long in the summer and extremely short in the winter, is obliged to perform the five daily prayers at the times known in sharee’ah. That is because of the general meaning of the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning):

“Perform As-Salaat (Iqamaat-as-Salaat) from mid-day till the darkness of the night (i.e. the Zuhr, ‘Asr, Maghrib, and ‘Ishaa’ prayers), and recite the Qur’aan in the early dawn (i.e. the — Fajr morning prayer). Verily, the recitation of the Qur’aan in the early dawn (i.e. the morning — Fajr prayer) is ever witnessed (attended by the angels in charge of mankind of the day and the night)”

[al-Isra’ 17:78]

“Verily, As-Salaah (the prayer) is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours”

[al-Nisa’ 4:103]

And because it was proven from Buraydah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that a man asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about the times of the prayers, and he said to him: “Pray with us for these two” meaning two days. When the sun passed its zenith, he told Bilaal to give the adhaan, then he told him to give the iqaamah for Zuhr. Then he told him to give the iqaamah for ‘Asr when the sun was still high and clear white. Then he told him to give the iqaamah

for Maghrib when the sun had set. Then he told him to give the iqaamah for ‘Isha’ when the red afterglow (twilight) had disappeared. Then he told him to give the iqaamah for Fajr when the dawn had appeared. Then on the second day, he told him to delay Zuhr until the extreme heat had passed and he did so. He prayed ‘Asr when the sun was high, delaying it beyond the time he had previously performed it. He prayed Maghrib before the twilight had vanished; he prayed ‘Isha’ when a third of the night had passed; and he prayed Fajr when there was clear daylight. Then he said: “Where is the man who was asking about the time of prayer?” The man said, “Here I am, O Messenger of Allaah.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The time for your prayer is within the limits of what you have seen.”

(Narrated by al-Bukhaari and Muslim)

It was narrated from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The time for Zuhr is from when the sun has passed its zenith and a man’s shadow is equal in length to his height, until the time for ‘Asr comes. The time for ‘Asr lasts until the sun turns yellow. The time for Maghrib lasts until the twilight has faded. The time for ‘Isha’ lasts until midnight. The time for Subh (Fajr) prayer lasts from the beginning of the pre-dawn so long as the sun has not yet started to rise. When the sun starts to rise then stop praying, for it rises between the two horns of the Shaytaan.”

Narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh.

And there are other ahaadeeth which have been narrated concerning the definition of the times of the five daily prayers through the words and actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). It makes no difference whether the night and day are long or short, so long as the times of the prayers can be distinguished by the signs which were identified by the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

This is with regard to the timings of the prayers. With regard to the timings of their fast in Ramadaan, those who are accountable should refrain from food, drink and everything else that invalidates the fast each day of Ramadaan, from the time of dawn until sunset in their countries,

so long as the night can be distinguished from the day, and when day and night together add up to twenty-four hours. It is permissible for them to eat, drink, have intercourse, etc during the night only, even if it is short. The sharee'ah of Islam is universal and applies to all people in all countries. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"and eat and drink until the white thread (light) of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread (darkness of night), then complete your Sawm (fast) till the nightfall"

[al-Baqarah 2:187]

Whoever is unable to complete the fast because the day is so long, or who knows from experience or from the advice of a competent. trustworthy doctor, or thinks it most likely that fasting will lead to his death or make him severely ill, or will make his sickness worse or impede his recovery, may break his fast and make up the days that he misses in a month when he can make them up. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), he must observe Sawm (fasts) that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number [of days which one did not observe Sawm (fasts) must be made up] from other days"

[al-Baqarah 2:185]

"Allaah burdens not a person beyond his scope"

[al-Baqarah 2:286]

"Allaah does not want to place you in difficulty"

[al-Maa'idah 5:6]

Secondly:

Whoever lives in a land in which the sun does not set during the summer and does not rise during

the winter, or who lives in a land in which the day lasts for six months and the night lasts for six months, for example, has to perform the five daily prayers in each twenty-four hour period. They should estimate their times based on the nearest country in which the times of the five daily prayers can be distinguished from one another, because it was proven in the hadeeth of the Isra' and Mi'raaj (Prophet's Night Journey and Ascent into Heaven) that Allaah enjoined on this ummah fifty prayers each day and night, then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) kept asking his Lord to reduce it until He said, "O Muhammad, they are five prayers each day and night, and for each prayer will be the reward of ten, that is fifty prayers…"

And it was proven in the hadeeth of Talhah ibn 'Ubayd-Allaah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that he said: A man from Najd with unkempt hair came to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and we heard his loud voice but could not understand what he was saying, till he came near and then we came to know that he was asking about Islam. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "(You have to offer) five prayers each day and night." The man asked, "Do I have to do anything else?" The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "No, unless you want to offer voluntary (naafil) prayers"…

And it was proven in the hadeeth of Anas ibn Maalik (may Allaah be pleased with him) that he said: We were forbidden to ask the Messenger of Allaah (S) (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about anything, so we used to like it when an intelligent man from among the desert people came and asked him a question in our hearing. A man from among the desert people came and said, "O Muhammad, your messenger came to us and said that you claim that Allaah sent you." He said, "He spoke the truth." … The man said, "And your messenger claimed that we have to offer five prayers each day and night." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "He spoke the truth." The man said, "By the One Who sent you, has Allaah enjoined that upon you?" He said, "Yes." …

It was proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told his companions about the Dajjaal (antichrist). He was asked how long he would stay on earth, and he said, "Forty

days, one day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week and the rest like your days." It was said, "O Messenger of Allaah, the day which is like a year, will the prayers of one day be sufficient for us then?" He said, "No, estimate them." So the day which will be like a year is not regarded as one day in which only five prayers will be sufficient, rather we are obliged to offer five prayers in each twenty-four hour period. He commanded them to offer the prayers at intervals as on a regular day.

So the Muslims in the country mentioned in the question have to define the times of prayer in that land, basing those times on the closest country in which the night and day can be distinguished from one another and the times of the five daily prayers are known according to the signs described in sharee'ah, within each twenty-four hour period.

Similarly they also have to fast Ramadaan. They can set the time for their fast and determine the beginning and end of Ramadaan and the times of starting and breaking the fast each day by the dawn and sunset each day in the closest country in which night can be distinguished from day. The total period must add up to twenty-four hours, because of the hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about the Dajjaal mentioned above, in which he told his companions how to determine the times of the five daily prayers. There is no difference in this regard between fasting and prayer.

And Allaah is the Source of strength. May Allaah send blessings and peace upon our Prophet Muhammad and his family and companions.

Al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah li'l-Buhooth al-'Ilmiyyah wa'l-Ifta'.