66891 - Can we rely on Ramadan timetables?

the question

We live in the al-Qunfudhah Governorate. For a long time we have relied on the Umm al-Quraa timetable for the times of beginning and ending the fast, and the times for prayer, following the same times as Makkah al-Mukarramah. But a year or more ago, the brothers in the cooperative office distributed a timetable specifically for the al-Qunfudhah Governorate, in which there is a difference of ten minutes, sometimes less and sometimes more. The problem now is that the people have become divided into two groups: some villages are following the timetable for Makkah al-Mukarramah and others are following this new timetable that is specifically for our governorate. Now our problem with fasting is: is the fast of those who follow the timetable for Makkah al-Mukarramah, which is ten minutes later than the timetable for al-Qunfudhah, regarded as not valid, because in this case they are regarded as having started to fast after the adhaan, if the new timetable for the governorate is correct?

We hope that you can explain the issue clearly, because the people are arguing and disputing.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is not permissible to rely on the timetables that are widespread among people unless two conditions are met:

1. That the organisation that issues a timetable should be people of knowledge and experience.
2. That the time for beginning the fast should be specific to the town for which the timetable is issued. It is not permissible for someone who is living far away from a town to rely on its timetable, because of the differences in timings between the two towns.

If someone does not have a timetable that he can rely on for the times of beginning and ending the fast, then he can check for himself the times of the true dawn and sunset by observing them himself, or he can follow a trustworthy mu'adhdhin who knows the proper times. If it is known that the mu'adhdhin only gives the adhaan at the time of the true dawn, then he must stop eating and drinking as soon as he hears his adhaan. If it is known that he gives the adhaan after sunset, then it is permissible for the fasting person to break the fast, and no attention should be paid to the adhaan of one who gives the adhaan some time before dawn or after sunset so as to be on the safe side.

Secondly:

In the answer to question no. 8048, we quoted Shaykh 'Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Barraak as saying: These timetables have become a means for people to know the times for the prayers to the hour and minute, and we should pay attention to that.

But this does not mean that there are no mistakes in those timetables. In the answer to question no. 26763, we quoted from Shaykh al-Albaani an explanation of the mistakes in some timetables, particularly with regard to the time of Fajr, and this was based on his investigation into the issue (may Allah have mercy on him).

It is well-known that the Umm al-Quraa timetable is very accurate and highly credible. Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn 'Abdillah Aal ash-Shaykh, the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom, President of the Council of Senior Scholars and President of the Standing Committee for Academic Research and Issuing Fatwas affirmed – in a Friday khutbah – that the Umm al-Quraa timetable is precise, in accordance with shar'i rules, and authenticated, and it cannot be doubted.

And he said:

The scholars of this ummah have deemed this timetable to be trustworthy. It has been tested, applied and proven that it is in accordance with the timings prescribed in sharee'ah. Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn 'Abdullah ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) issued a statement in 1418 AH in which he confirmed that the Umm al-Quraa timetable is trustworthy. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) also stated that there is only a slight difference, five minutes, with regard to Fajr.

See the answer to question no. 66202.

Thirdly:

With regard to the city of al-Qunfudhah, it is located on the coast of the Red Sea, halfway between Makkah and Jeddah to the north and Jazan to the south. It is 380 km south of Makkah and Jeddah, and is located at the intersection of the line of longitude 41.5 degrees east, and the line of latitude 19.8 degrees north.

With regard to Mecca, it is located at the line of latitude 21.27 degrees north and the line of longitude 39.49 east.

By studying the times of the prayers according to the Umm al-Quraa timetable, we see a difference in the times, that is in accordance with the distance between Makkah and al-Qunfudhah. Therefore it is not valid for the people of al-Qunfudhah to rely on the timetable and adhaan of Makkah.

On this day – 30 Rajab 1426 AH – for example, the times of the prayers are as follows:

City	Fajr	Shurooq	Zuhr	‘Asr	Maghrib	‘Ishaa’
Makkah	4.44	6.04	12.19	3.44	6.34	8.04
Al-Qunfudhah	4.34	6.01	12.15	3.37	6.28	7.58

It becomes clear that what the brothers in the cooperative office have distributed to you, of a timetable that is specific to your region, is valid, and the differences that you mention are in fact correct. So you must pay attention to this. We ask Allah to help you and guide you to do that which pleases Him.

And Allah knows best.