

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

The new moon for Zul Hajj 1440 AH will most probably be visible next week on Friday 2nd August. However, the Saudi Authorities will proclaim the days for Hajj once the moon is visible. For that we will have to wait for next week. Last year, there were 2,371,675 Hajeers who performed the Hajj including 612,953 from Saudi Arabia itself. To accommodate so many people the Saudis have been spending billions and billions of dollars over the years to make life easy for the pilgrims and to keep them safe and well protected. In order to have an idea of the logistical support that has been put in place to receive all these pilgrims and to help them to accomplish all the rites of Hajj, the following facts and figures are very revealing:

To ensure their safety, pilgrims wear electronic identification bracelets, connected to GPS. There is a comprehensive electronic agenda for every pilgrim and many apps are provided that offer guidance. A fleet of more than 18,000 buses, all of them linked to a control system that tracks their path.

The Saudi Ministry of Health alone has employed nearly 30,000 physicians, pharmacists, nurses and technicians to provide health care to the pilgrims.

The Saudi Red Crescent is operating 127 emergency centers, 361 ambulance cars and 20 emergency motorcycles, with nearly 2,000 staff on duty in Makkah and Madinah.

There will be 22 operational hospitals in Madinah and the holy sites, and 15 temporary emergency centers, supported by a fleet of nearly 90 ambulances and more than 650 paramedics.

In addition to that, the Saudis have put in place a light rail system which will ferry passengers between Mecca and Medina (distance of about 450KM) and back as from September last year. In between there are three other stations. Starting from Mecca there is Jeddah, then King Abdul Aziz International airport and then King Abdul Aziz Economic city and then Medina. Construction on the project began in March 2009 and was officially inaugurated on 25 September 2018. The line was **opened** to the public on 11 October 2018 with the first two **trains**, each carrying 417 passengers, departing from Makkah and Medina at 8 AM. The journey between these two cities takes only two hours and twenty minutes with three stops in between. The railway is capable of transporting 60

million passengers onboard a fleet of 35 trains, each one consisting of 417 seats, annually. The trains, which can travel up to 300km per hour, are equipped with the latest technology to ensure comfort and safety.

Now compare this development with the usual hajj journey on foot and camels since the time of the Holy Prophet (saw) which usually took about 11 days. This is an important development for Hajis but it is also a further proof of the truthfulness of Hazrat Masih Maood (as). In his book Nozool e Masih he said:

"Words of Quran and Hadith are telling that during the time of the Promised Messiah camels will be abandoned, which means that an alternative ride (mode of travel) will replace them. This hadith is in Muslim and the words are same and Quran has words (*Wa izal ishaaro outtelat* (Surah Takwir: ayat 5). In books of Shia, this Hadith is also present still no one cared about this sign. Now sooner a beautiful scene of this prophecy is going to appear, where a long line of camels is going to be replaced by the train (rail cars and a revolution in the rides of 1300 past years will come."

In the time of the Promised Messiah in 1900, the Ottomans were expanding their railway system and a railway line (the Hijaz Railway) was proposed to connect Damascus, with Istanbul and reach all the way to holy cities of Makkah and Medina. The project was started in 1900 at the behest of the Ottoman Sultan. It reached Medina in 1908. But the initial declared goal of laying the tracks all the way to Makkah was never achieved. In fact, it never reached farther south than Medina, 400 kilometers (250 miles) short of Mecca. Our opponents said that what the Promised Messiah (as) said did not happen. But by Allah's Grace, 101 years after his death, a new project was launched and it was accomplished nine years later, that is, last year, and now railways are running between Mecca and Medina as we have just said. Those who can think should take the lessons that such an event tells us.

The Promised Messiah (as) has spoken extensively on this matter, that is, the arrival of trains as a means of transport but these texts have to be translated and it might take some time. Nonetheless, here is what he said in *Shahadatoul Quran*, which is available on the website of our brothers Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore:

"It is to be remembered that regarding the same age, in connection with the Promised Messiah, the Holy Prophet has also given the news, recorded in Sahih Muslim in the words: *la-yutra-kanna lqalaso fala yous'a alayha*. That is to say, in the time of the Promised Messiah, travel by camel will cease, so that no one will ride them at fast pace. This is a reference to the railway train, by the

introduction of which no need will remain to make camels run. The camel has been spoken of because it is the largest animal used for transport by the Arabs, upon which they could travel with all the contents of their small homes. And the mention of the largest includes smaller things by implication. Thus, the meaning was that in that age a form of transport would emerge which would surpass even the camel, and as you see after the invention of the railway all the work which camels used to do is now being done by trains. Could a prophecy be clearer and more manifest than this! The Holy Quran has also given news of this age, as it says: i.e. the latter days are those "when camels will be abandoned" (81:4). This, too, is a clear reference to the railway train, and so the hadith given above and this verse contain the same prophecy. And as the hadith plainly makes this statement in connection with the Promised Messiah, it must certainly be concluded from this that this verse is also speaking of the time of the Promised Messiah and making an implicit reference to him. However, despite these clear verses which are shining like the sun, people have doubts about these prophecies. Fair-minded persons can judge whether it is anything but folly to doubt those prophecies the hidden matters disclosed by which have been seen to be fulfilled in front of one's eyes. I am sure that what I have written here regarding the prophecy about the Promised Messiah contained in Hadith is sufficient to satisfy the person who, after finding the truth, would not wish to continue unjust opposition.....”

As I have just said these new trains are in operation since last year. But this year it will be used for the pilgrims for Hajj and so this is a landmark development which I wished to share with you all.

Now coming back to the Hajj itself, I will briefly remind you what are its most important rituals.

State of Ihram: This is considered the first step for any pilgrim wishing to perform hajj. To enter the state of Ihram, a pilgrim has to recite an intention to perform hajj called the *Talabiya*. This is when a pilgrim prepares one's soul, mind and body for journey to the Almighty God. Entering the stage begins from the *Miqat*, or a place that is outside the pilgrimage area. There are several such places for people coming from different places around the Kaaba. But these days pilgrims enter this state when they enter the planes for the journey to Saudi Arabia. While in the state of Ihram one enters so to say in a state of purity and some deeds are forbidden such as putting on perfume, cutting hair or nails and hunting.

The next step is for the pilgrim to make the tawaf of the Kaaba 7 times. This Kaaba was originally rebuilt by Hazrat Ibrahim and Hazrat Ismail some 4000 years ago.

The next step is the **Sa'ey**: To traverse the distance between the hills of Safa and Marwah seven times, this is what is called Sa'ey. The term in Arabic means to walk or move quickly. This commemorates the journey by Prophet Ibrahim's wife to find water for her infant prophet Ismail, after they were left in the desert of Mecca at God's command.

Departure to Mina: On the eighth day of Zul Hijja. Pilgrims proceed to the tent city of Mina on the first day of Hajj. They converge to Mina for prayer, which lies roughly five kilometers away from Mecca and which is about 20Km². Pilgrims are required to remain in Mina until the sunrise of the second day of hajj, where they leave for Arafat. In Mina there are 100000 airconditioned and fire-resistant tents which accommodate all the pilgrims. Areas are assigned by country. This year they have put in place one-storey tents to accommodate more pilgrims. Pictures of these tents are available on the net.

Mount Arafat: After the dawn prayers in Mina, pilgrims start their journey to the desert planes of Arafat. Dubbed as the "most important day of hajj," Muslims spend the day of Arafat in the vicinity of the mountain, praying and repenting. It was here that the Holy Prophet (saw) delivered his famous last sermon. The rituals of this day end at sunset, when pilgrims move to Muzdalifah.

After descending from Arafat, pilgrims arrive to the open land of **Muzdalifah**, southeast of Mina. People gather in makeshift tents and are required to perform Maghrib and *Isha* prayers. It is also considered the best place to collect pebbles for *Ramy al-Jamarat*.

Ramy-al-Jamarat: The symbolic stoning of the devil, where pilgrims fling pebbles, called *jamarat*, at three walls, in the city of Mina. The stoning marks the third day of hajj or Eid al-Adha.

Eid-al-Adha: The Eid al-Adha festival, or the Feast of Sacrifice, is celebrated by Muslims who are not on pilgrimage by slaughtering animals to mark Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail upon the command of God. Pilgrims spend the three days of Eid stoning pillars that represent the devil. On the tenth day after stoning the pillars they shave their head and purchase tokens to have a sheep slaughtered in the Mecca neighborhood of Mina. They temporarily exit their state of ihram. Whatever was previously forbidden is

again allowed except sexual intercourse. They then go to circle the Kaaba and do the *sa'ye* again and they return to Mina. In the two following days that is on 11th and 12th they will stone the pillars again and before leaving Mecca they have to circle the Kaaba again and they exit their state of ihram completely.

Hence, we see that Hajj is the occasion for the Muslim to repent. This is what is done on the day of Arafat which is the most important day for Hajj. If one misses the Day of Arafat, one misses the Hajj. Furthermore, the Hajeess stay for at least three days in Mina with the only purpose of stoning the Pillars. Here also the idea is to fight and reject Satan and not allow it to deter us from our firm intention to sincerely obey Allah. Although we cannot go for Hajj, at least we have an idea what it is and what it would have meant for us. We should all strive to repent of all our misdeeds and do our best to fight evil and have the hope that Allah will forgive us and admit us among His Best servants through His Mercy.

May Allah help all Hajeess to travel safely and to perform hajj safely and may they all come back safely to their relatives in their respective countries with their efforts accepted by Almighty Allah. Ameen.