

Jamal Shahid

Eidul Azha to be celebrated on July 31, predicts minister

ISLAMABAD: The nation will celebrate Eidul Azha on July 31 (Friday), according to Science and Technology Minister Fawad Chaudhry.

The minister said in a tweet on Monday the Zilhaj moon would be visible over Karachi and nearby areas on July 21. "The Ruet app may also be used to ascertain the exact location of the moon," Fawad Chaudhry tweeted.

About three weeks ago, the minister had yet again triggered a controversy over moon sighting by suggesting a week before Eidul Fitr that the Shawwal moon would be sighted on May 24, implying that the crescent would not be visible on the 29th of Ramazan, which corresponded to May 23.

But soon after Iftar on the 29th, he claimed that the Eid moon had been sighted. He had made the claim hours before the announcement by the Ruet-i-Hilal committee.

Fawad Chaudhry has been critical of previous governments for "always trying to please religious parties and groups".

In a tirade directed at clerics, he said at a news briefing on the eve of Eid: "The state should be above controversies and sectarian issues. The state does not favour groups. It runs its affairs according to the law and constitution of the country."

He said religious elements had become so strong that they "try to impose their will" in matters of the state.

"In various matters, including the issue of moon-sighting, the will of religious elements prevails instead of logic, law and science and technology," he said.

Pakistan celebrated Eidul Fitr with the rest of the Muslim world on May 24, an uncommon occurrence.

Fawad Chaudhry said the government had set up a committee of experts to settle the controversy surrounding sighting of the Eid moon.

"Islam is a forward-looking religion and encourages its followers to acquire knowledge, adopt technology and apply logic. We dismiss contrary opinions that discourage adopting science for progress," he emphasised.

However, the minister's "interference" in the moon-sighting business infuriated Mufti Muneebur Rehman, the Ruet-i-Hilal committee chairman, as well as its members.

The Ruet-i-Hilal committee, in a statement on Chand Raat (eve of Eid), called upon the prime minister to leave the moon-sighting issue for the committee to decide as it had been carrying out this obligation for years now.