

All looked up when the moon covered the sun

By **Abhishek Shukla** In New Delhi

THE HIDE and seek of clouds couldn't prevent thousands of star-gazers from catching a glimpse of the solar eclipse on Friday. Though India was not in the path of totality, partial solar eclipse was visible in several parts of the country.

Though the clouds parted soon, a downpour made it impossible to use the telescopes to view the celestial event.

But rain, too, failed to dampen the spirits of the enthusiasts who had converged at different spots across the Capital to watch the astronomical event.

The total solar eclipse started in Canada at 1.34 pm IST when the moon began moving between the earth and the sun, creating a patch of shadow-known as totality. The path of totality



CELESTIAL WONDER: A girl looks at the partial solar eclipse in Delhi.

stretched from Canada to China.

In Delhi, the eclipse began at 4.03 pm and reached its peak at 5.02 pm, when 53 per cent of the sun was overshadowed by the moon. Just before the moon's

shadow was going to make first contact, the clouds cover cleared, rains stopped and the sun appeared in its full glory.

The first contact of the moon's shadow — umbra — with the sun was received with an applause from the people at the India Gate, where public viewing of the eclipse had been arranged by the Science Popularisation Association of Communicators and Educators.

Similar events were organised by the Nehru Planetarium at Teen Murti Bhavan and Jantar Mantar. Some telescopes were mounted on boxes to project the image of eclipse on the screen, while some were fitted with special filters. This was done to avoid any unprotected viewing of the sun. A giant screen was set up at the planetarium to project images using special cameras.

"Though no great scientific importance is attached to the partial eclipse, such public events help in cultivating a scientific bent of mind in children and alleviating superstitions," said N. Rathnasree, director of Nehru Planetarium. She even ate and distributed sweets and cold drinks to counter the age-old superstition that one should not consume anything when an eclipse takes place.

When the event was about to reach its peak, dense cloud reappeared. But despite this not-so-great show, enthusiasts were upbeat about the complete solar eclipse next year. "I could not see the peak of the eclipse due to the clouds. Maybe next year, I will see the event in its full glory," said Alfia, Class V student of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Bangalore.

abhishek.shukla@mailltoday.in