

When Moon took a bite, then blocked Sun

Neelam Raa | TNN

Male: Just after breakfast on Friday, India's first eclipse cruise dished out a moment to eclipse all others. A shipload of homegrown eclipsophiles, who had gathered on the sundeck of the MV Aquamarine, watched entranced as the Moon first kissed the sun at 10.45 am and then took a bite out of it. Two hours and a lot of anxious moments later, the Moon was entirely silhouetted against the disk of the Sun and the millennium's longest annular eclipse was under way.

"It was the most amazing sight," said Rashmi Rao, a doctor from Salem who had come on the cruise with her family. Sporting goggles to protect their eyes, the Raos kept their gaze glued to the skies the entire morning. The reward: a celestial spectacle that left even the most blasé moved. After all, when the gorgeous

TOP-DECK VIEW

blue seas of the Indian Ocean are reduced to a supporting act, you can be sure something special is written in the stars.

Preparations to watch this miraculous coincidence of celestial geography began in the morning. With Louis Cruises, which operates Aquamarine, dropping anchor just off Male, passengers who had boarded at Kochi were sure of a vantage viewpoint. A mobile observatory soon sprang up on deck as tripods with multiple arms holding telescopes, binoculars, cameras and videos were set up, checked and tested. Eclipse jargon — first contact, Baily's beads, sunspots — began flying back and forth as four astronomers from SPACE, a Delhi-based organisation that promotes astrotourism, gave first-time chasers a crash course on the basics of eclipses. "I've seen eclipses before," said Amit Verma, CEO of SPACE, "but each time it's different. And I want everyone to enjoy it."

First contact — the beginning of the eclipse — generated a flurry of excite-



BRINGING THE EVENT CLOSER: (Clockwise from top) Students watch the solar eclipse on a special projection screen at Nehru Planetarium in Mumbai on Friday; A devotee witnesses the eclipse at Mahakumbh Mela in Haridwar; A jawan uses a DVD to see the eclipse in Jalandhar; A man watches the spectacle through an X-ray in Ranchi

beads, an effect caused when the last remnants of the Sun's rays shine through the mountains and valleys on the Moon. Suddenly there it was — the perfect "ring of fire" as the Moon blocked the centre of the Sun, but not its edges. Despite the

the ranks as clouds obscured the object of our veneration and a light shower began. Just five minutes to go, and to whoops of relief, it slowly cleared.

Bhavna Mehta, a gynaecologist from Chennai, could barely stop herself from

Earth is closest to the Sun and the Moon is farthest from the Earth. This is why the annularity lasted over 10 minutes," said astronomer Shubham Garg.

The eclipse-chasers are already counting down to next year's total solar eclipse, July 22, 2010. The only place from which



SOURCE:-

TIMES NATION
16th January

Bangalore.