

11-minute spectacle enthralled millions

Millennium's longest annular solar eclipse covered 1,000 km

DANUSHKODI (TAMIL NADU): A pall of darkness enveloped this region and a golden ring of fire appeared in the sky as seen from here and other parts of India's southern tip as the millennium's longest annular solar eclipse covered a swathe of 1,000 km.

The rest of India only witnessed a partial solar eclipse. The devout thronged the seas of Rameswaram and Kanyakumari and rivers such as the Ganga for a holy dip they believed will wash away the "ill effects" of the celestial event, which coincided with 'Mauni Amavasya' after 565 years.

Over this southern tip, the eclipse, the like of which is expected again only in 3043, began at 11.14 a.m. and ended a little after 3 p.m. It was a spectacular sight when the photosphere of the sun was covered by the moon, forming a ring of fire in the sky for about 11 minutes and eight seconds.

"It was less than dark but more than twilight," said B. Dasgupta from Madhya Pradesh, who led astronomers observing the event.

A similar event, but of a smaller duration, is expected to occur in 2019 which will be visible in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

During the annular solar eclipse, the sun appears as a very bright annulus, which in Latin means ring, surrounding the outline of the moon.

In Varkala town in neighbouring Kerala, located on the edge of the eclipse path, a team of astronomers photographed the event using three telescopes.

Notwithstanding efforts by science associations and rationalists to remove the scare among the people based on superstitious beliefs, major temples remained closed throughout the country during the eclipse. Believers refrained from eating and

expectant mothers confined themselves to their homes during this time.

In Haridwar, where the three-month long Maha Kumbh began on Thursday, tens of thousands of people thronged the ghats of the Ganga for a dip. Kurukshetra in Haryana also witnessed a heavy rush.

Streets deserted

In the IT city of Bangalore, streets were deserted, people preferring to stay indoors. Skywatchers in major metros and towns watched the event from planetariums through telescopes and special projection devices.

As the moon started covering the sun, astronomers captured the phenomenon, nicknamed "Bailey's Beads," from Varkala.

A total of 10 rockets were fired on Thursday and Friday from Thumba and Sriharikota to collect data. — PTI