

Scientists' reasoning eclipses soothsayers' doomsday claims

BANGALORE: As a total solar eclipse (partial in Bangalore and Karnataka) is all set to be witnessed on July 22, the celestial phenomenon has divided opinions, so far as its repercussions go.

With soothsayers terming the astronomical event as a precursor to an imminent natural calamity or even doomsday, the scientific community has termed it as just a scientific phenomenon.

While astrologers in the City cite the war of Mahabharata, World Wars 1 and 2 and assassination of heads of various States including Indira Gandhi's, all of which followed solar eclipses, the scientific fraternity says fears of superstition must be set aside.

Prof Siraj Hasan, Director of the Indian Institute of Astro-

physics (IIA), said, "A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and the earth, thus blocking out the sun for the viewers from the earth. It's a scientific phenomenon and should be viewed only in that light."

A H Rama Rao, President of the Bangalore Science Forum, said the science fraternity in the City would be using the solar eclipse to dispel superstitious beliefs associated with the celestial phenomenon.

Sensitising people

"Superstitious beliefs have nothing to do with an eclipse. We will be trying hard to sensitise people on the scientific causes behind an eclipse and would ask them not to believe in any hearsay. Earlier we used to distribute sweets during eclipse

time. This time it will be hard for us to do so as the eclipse will be sighted at dawn in Bangalore," said Rao.

Wednesday's eclipse will be the longest solar eclipse of the century, lasting six minutes and 39 seconds, it would be visible across Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.

The eclipse also marks the celebration of the International Year of Astronomy globally. In Bangalore, the eclipse will begin at 5.38 am (before sunrise). Hence, the rising sun itself will be eclipsed.

The maximum eclipse will be at 6.21 am with 66 percent coverage, stated an official release from the IIA.

A bevy of scientists and research students from the IIA is planning to study the eclipse, which will last till 7.17 am, at

the Lalbagh Botanical Garden.

A large number of enthusiasts is also likely to join the science fraternity at the garden, where experts will tell laymen the science behind the eclipse. Another group of enthusiasts will also gather at Bannerghatta National Park to view the phenomenon.

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) will have arrangements to watch the eclipse live from 6 am.

Meanwhile, for the devout that still believe in the astrological over the scientific, various religious rituals are being lined up in temples across the city on Wednesday to mark the solar eclipse. They include *Maha Mrityunjaya japa* and *homa*, *Udaka Shanti* and *Nakshatra havana*.

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