

# When moon, Jupiter & Venus smiled

DH photo/Vishwanath Suvarna

## DH NEWS SERVICE

**BANGALORE:** Monday evening had a pleasant surprise in store for sky-watchers as the night sky sported a smiley, in the form of a crescent moon flanked by two bright planets Jupiter and Venus.

In Bangalore, passing clouds obscured a continuous clear view, but with a little patience, people could glimpse this fascinating formation.

"This is not a rare phenomenon, but it is at its most beautiful sight today. The two planets will remain close to each other for several days, but the moon will move away and you cannot see the same sight," said Prof R C Kapoor from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

"It is a very pleasant configuration and can be watched with binoculars and telescopes. Even with binoculars, you can see four satellites of Jupiter-Callisto, Ganymede, Io and Europa. Venus is very bright with 69 per cent illumination," he added. Telescopes can add to the viewer's de-



**Skywatchers had a celestial treat on Monday as two stars and moon positioned themselves to look like a 'smiley' in Mysore.**

lights, as the craters of the moon can also be observed.

In terms of illumination as characterised in scientific terms, Venus has a -4.4 magnitude and Jupiter a -2 magnitude during this phase. In common terms, it means that Jupiter is seven to eight times brighter than

what it usually is when viewed from earth. A similar configuration is not expected till 2012, when Saturn and Mars will be seen in a similar conjunction with the moon. The present conjunction of the planets does not mean that the planets are significantly closer to earth, but are relatively near. Venus is at a distance of 1 AU (astronomical unit=Mean Earth Sun distance of 150 million kms) and Jupiter is at a distance of about 5-6 AU from Earth.

The apparent relative positions of Venus, Jupiter and the Moon around the world, varied depending upon where people viewed the event. The variations were due to time and latitude, on the apparent position of the moon. The smiley effect could be seen in most parts of the world, including India, while some parts of Africa saw the crescent moon, clearly bisecting the two planets. In western parts of Europe, the moon eclipsed Venus for more than an hour, in an event termed as 'lunar occultation' by astronomers.