

Millions in Asia watch as moon darkens the sun

Longest total solar eclipse of 21st century sweeps across half the globe

VARANASI/WUHAN: A total solar eclipse on Wednesday swept across a narrow swathe of Asia, where hundreds of millions of people watched the skies darken, though in some places thick summer clouds blocked the sun.

The longest total solar eclipse of the 21st century cut through the world's most populous nations, India and China, as it travelled half the globe. It was visible along a roughly 250 km-wide corridor, U.S. space agency NASA said.

In India, where eclipse superstitions are rife, people snaked through the narrow lanes of Varanasi and gathered for a dip in the Ganga, an act believed to bring release from the cycle of life and death.

The eclipse next swept through Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and over the crowded cities along China's Yangtze River, before heading to the Pacific.

In Hindu-majority Nepal, the government declared a public holiday and thousands headed for water.

In central China, crowds gathered along the high dykes of the industrial city of Wuhan, roaring and waving goodbye as the last sliver of sun disappeared, plunging the city into darkness, although clouds cheated them of part of the spectacle.

"As soon as the totality happened, the clouds closed in, so we couldn't see the corona. That's a pity," said Zhen Jun, a man whose work unit had given him the day off to enjoy the spectacle.

But eclipse viewers in central China were luckier than those in the coastal cities near Shanghai, where overcast skies and rain in some places



LIKE A DIAMOND IN THE SKY: A diamond ring is formed as the moon covers the sun during the rare total eclipse — as seen from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. — PHOTO: PTI

blocked the view of the sun entirely.

It lasted up to a maximum of 6 minutes, 39 seconds over the Pacific Ocean, according to NASA.

The dark shadow of the moon — the conical shaped umbra — made its landfall in Gujarat at 6.30 a.m. and raced

across the country within a span of a few minutes spreading darkness in the path of totality.

Disappointed

In Taregna, Bihar, touted as the best place to watch the eclipse, thousands of astro-enthusiasts were disappoint-

ed as clouds refused them a glimpse of the completely eclipsed sun. However, in Taregna, and most parts of the northeast where clouds obscured the view of the sun, sky-watchers were able to experience the eclipse as day-break turned to night for a few minutes. — Reuters, PTI