Spectacle of a Lifetime!

Those who stayed up late on the night of 15 June, or say, the early morning hours of 16 June, were treated to a once in a lifetime spectacle—the longest lunar eclipse of the century. While the total lunar eclipse began at 12.52 am and continued till 2.32 am on Wednesday late night, the partial eclipse began at 11.52 pm and ended at 3.32 am. It was a great moment for millions of people across the world.

The eclipse that lasted for almost four hours was viewed by sky-watchers in Central Asia, East Africa, Middle East, Western Australia and some parts of the UK. In some Latin American countries like Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, the eclipse was somewhat visible. According to astronomers, only three lunar eclipses in the past decade have rivaled the beauty and duration of what people witnessed on Wednesday.

This was the darkest lunar eclipse in almost 100 years as the centres of the Sun, the Earth and the Moon were nearly in one straight line. In fact, the Moon and the Sun were on the opposite side of the Earth. Had you been on the Moon, perhaps you would have seen a solar eclipse. The earlier darkest lunar eclipse was observed on 6 August 1971 and the next one would be 47 years from now—on 6 June 2058.

Well, a lunar eclipse occurs when the Moon while orbiting around the Earth, passes into the Earth's shadow, as cast by the Sun. However, once in a while the orbital planes will align so that the Moon passes through the Earth's shadow, sometimes just grazing it, in which case we get a partial lunar eclipse, and at other times passing right through the shadow, when we get a total lunar eclipse.

While many avid sky-watchers enjoyed the rare spectacle, there were many others who chose to ignore the wonderful sight and instead spent time praying to god because they believed it to be an ill omen. While some went to bed early, others observed fast and were advised by priests not to sleep during the eclipse and pray to god since prayers during the eclipse yield many times more results than normal days.

It was a good time also for those who have a penchant for spreading doomsday fears on such occasions. A so-called astromoney guru predicted that the lunar eclipse might pull down crude oil in electronic trading. He even advised small traders to avoid big volume trading in bullion. There were many who predicted that the unusually long lunar eclipse would unleash natural calamities that would affect the routine life of the countrymen. One even ventured to be precise with the natural calamity that would afflict the earth—storms, earthquakes, mass disaster/death, and explosions were expected. Interestingly, the same person also predicted that the period would be bad for the ruling party, there could be problems from the neighbouring country and that there could be a war-like situation for the country. An astrologer, perhaps in an effort to sound more contemporary, predicted that the eclipse bodes ill for the Lokpall Bill.

Amidst all this, the message for the readers would be to enjoy such natural spectacles and try to unearth the reasons behind such phenomena. Natural phenomena should evoke curiosity and the urge to learn, not irrational notions.

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