

Natural wonder: (From top left to bottom right) A combination photograph showing the total solar eclipse from beginning to end as seen from the Ternate beach in the Maluku Islands, Indonesia. — Reuters

Eclipse leaves many in awe

Thousands across Asia turn out to watch rare spectacle

Star 10/3/2016 89.26
TERNATE: A total solar eclipse swept across the vast Indonesian archipelago, marked by ecstatic sky gazers cheering the spectacle, devout Muslims kneeling in prayer and tribespeople performing rituals.

The moon began to move between the Earth and the sun at 6.19am (7.19am Malaysian time) yesterday, and about an hour later a total eclipse became visible in western parts of the country.

The sun then went entirely dark in a broad arc right across the world's biggest archipelago nation, which straddles three time zones, before the eclipse swept out across the Pacific Ocean.

Partial eclipses were also visible over other parts of Asia and Australia, and astronomy enthusiasts across the region gathered on rooftops, beaches and in observatories to witness the phenomenon.

Tens of thousands of foreign and Indonesian tourists flocked to the best viewing spots and special events were organised, from a festival to fun runs and dragon boat races.

In Ternate in the eastern Maluku Islands, thousands of people yelled "Glory to God" as the total eclipse became visible, while on the small Mentawai archipelago in the west of the country, hundreds cheered, prayed and hugged one another during the spectacle.

The whole eclipse lasted around three hours in Indonesia, but the total eclipse was visible for between just one-and-a-half and three minutes, depending on location.

For some of Indonesia's tribes, the eclipse is viewed with apprehension. In Palangkaraya on Borneo island, Dayak tribesmen performed a special ritual to ensure that the sun, which they view as the source of life, did not disappear entirely.

As the total eclipse hit, the tribal chief - dressed in a traditional costume - began to chant loudly and was answered by even louder chants from other members of the tribe.

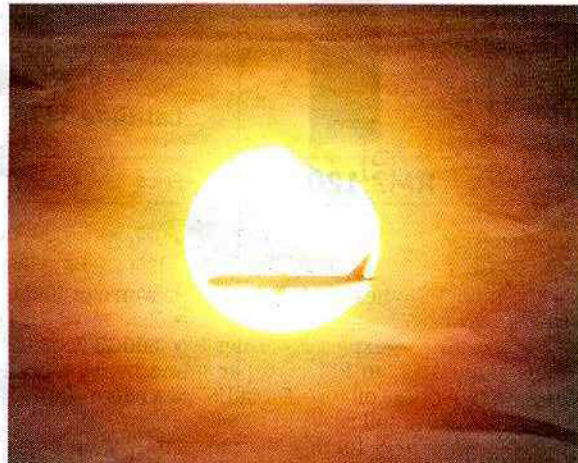
For many in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, it was a spiritual experience, and large numbers flocked to mosques to say special prayers.

Foreign scientists also descended on Indonesia. A four-strong team from Nasa was in Maba, a small town in the Malukus, to observe the eclipse.

Other parts of South-East Asia saw substantial partial eclipses,



Special experience: People watching the solar eclipse near the Ampera Bridge along the banks of the Musi River in Palembang, South Sumatra province, Indonesia. — Reuters



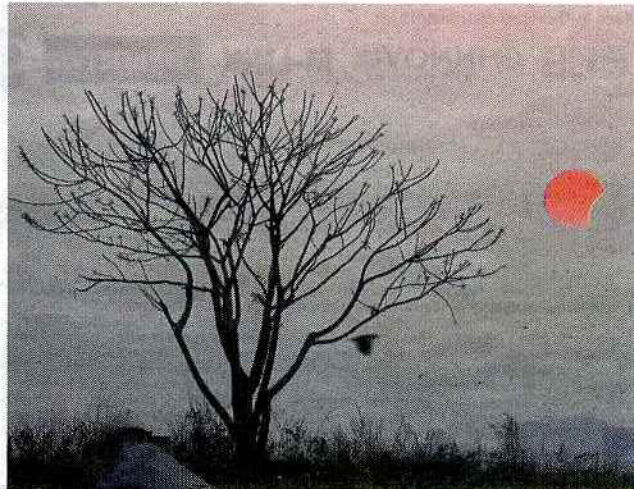
Breathtaking views: An aeroplane flying past the sun as it goes into a partial solar eclipse in Singapore. (Right) A labourer working at a construction site in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, amid a backdrop of the eclipse. — Reuters

including Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. A partial eclipse was also visible in northern Australia.

The total eclipse swept across 12 out of 34 provinces in Indonesia, which stretches about 5,000km from east to west, before heading across the Pacific.

It passed over the major islands of Sumatra, Borneo and Sulawesi, before sweeping over the Malukus and out into the ocean.

The last total solar eclipse occurred on March 20, 2015, and was only visible from the Faroe Islands and Norway's Arctic Svalbard archipelago. — AFP



Red sun: The partial solar eclipse as seen from Dhaka, Bangladesh. — AP