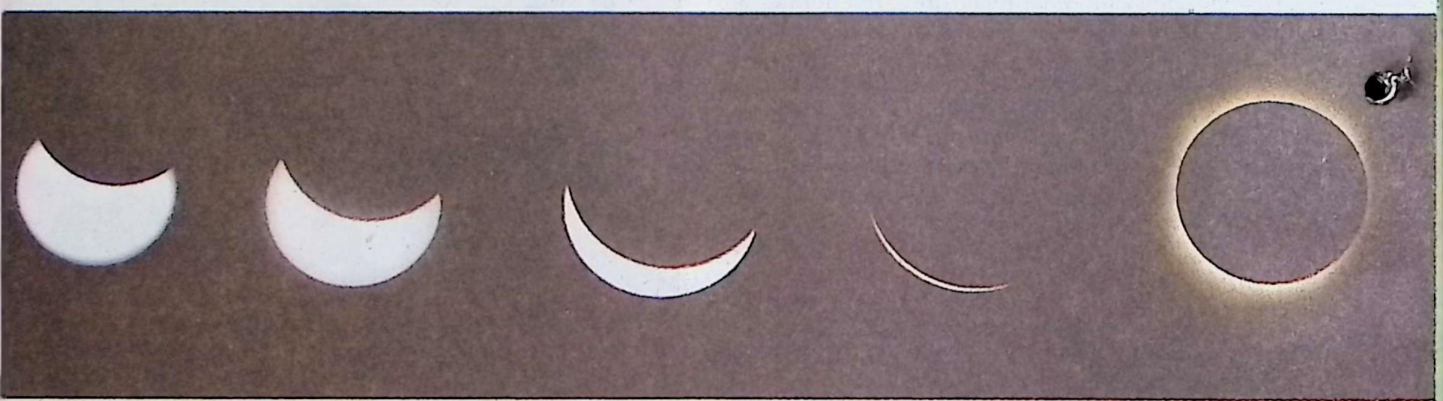
One Off



ALY ZAKER

Sun Struck and All That!



On the evening of 21st of July a friend of mine telephoned me from Thakurgaon and excitedly asked where I was going to be the following day. There was such an urgency in her voice that I thought that it must be something pressing. Naturally I was very keen to know what the matter was. She said, "Didn't you know that early in the morning tomorrow there is going to be a total solar eclipse?" I said, "Is that so?" She said, "Yes, and this is going to be a total eclipse that won't be seen in over a hundred years." (Or in other words, old as you are, you would become a part of mother earth) "And that the full eclipse could be seen from as close a place as Panchagarh". I asked her if she was going to see it from Panchagarh as it was quite a distance away from Thakurgaon. She said, 'Yes'. I was impressed. I was indeed half aware of this extraordinary event. A sense of regret took me over. Bangladesh was so close to such an historic event and yet I had no clue! However, I thanked my friend and promised to follow the progress toward the D-day. Though I could not go to Panchagarh, I managed to get up early and look out the window. I live on the 10th level of an apartment building with the sky open in the east. So I can see the sun rise literally from my bed room. By the time I could manage to get hold of a pair of dark glasses and look out, the sun was on its way out of the eclipse. I could catch a glimpse of the sun coming out of the spell looking like a crescent. Even this was also a glorious sight. I regretted that I did not follow the eclipse more closely to be able to actually try to go north and see the full eclipse. I consoled myself saying it was not possible for all to be equally interested in every kind of activity despite their importance. However, the next day news reports revealed the kind of excitement that was created by it. The small town of Panchagarh was overtaken by the congregation of sky watchers from all over the country. It was a deluge to say the least. In Dhaka, and elsewhere also, people thronged in thousands in open spaces with contraptions that brought everything situated at a distance far closer. These equipments ranged from home made reflectors to sophisticated binoculars and telescopes.

This excitement transported me back in time to my childhood and adolescence. I remember having witnessed Solar and Lunar eclipse a couple of times. These used to be eventful in a different way. We were usually under the tutelage of our house-helps. They told us that