

City

Reaching for the stars

Astronomy enthusiasts in Pune are preparing themselves for the rare opportunity when four planets in a bunch will be visible to the naked eye at dawn from April 30 to May 8 this year

Neelambari Bhoge

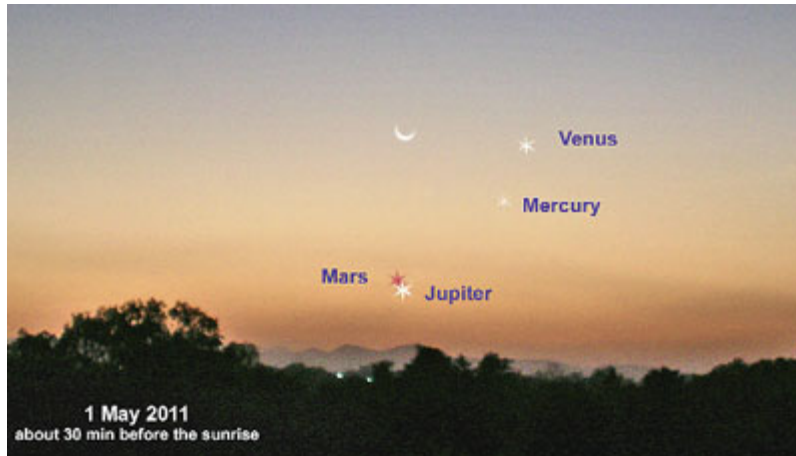
Saturday, April 30, 2011 at 01:37:26 AM

There's good news for astronomy enthusiasts. From April 30 to May 8, 2011, four planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars and Jupiter, in close proximity to each other, will be clearly visible to the naked eye at dawn. This rare opportunity has resurfaced after almost two to three years.

Arvind Paranjpye, in-charge of public outreach programme, the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) said, "Grouping of stars is not very rare but this a very good opportunity to observe Mercury. It is a good time to locate Jupiter as well."

Pune Mirror got in touch with a few astronomy buffs who plan on taking advantage of the rare opportunity. Mayuresh Prabhune, secretary of Khagol Vishwa said, "Our group is going to Lonar to watch the planets. We have begun observing the sky since last night and in my opinion, Venus and Mercury will be clearly visible but I feel Jupiter will be a little difficult to locate." He also added that this is a good opportunity to watch all four planets at the same time.

Another enthusiast and an IT professional, Devdatta Urankar, plans to go to Pusane village — around 20 km from Hinjewadi. His team, comprising him and two others, will stay the night so that they will be able to watch other planets like Neptune and Uranus as well. "We are carrying our cameras and binoculars.



This is how the sky will appear on May 1, 2011 around 30 minutes before sunrise

It is going to be a great sight and must be captured on camera as this phenomenon is very rare.” He further added, “Mercury is usually not visible as it is closer to the sun but we now have the opportunity to view Mercury clearly.” Devdatta says that pollution in the sky might block the view of the planets hence it is also a matter of luck if the planets are still visible in these conditions.

Places one can go

Arvind Paranjpye mentioned a few locations where one would have ample access to the sight. “The best places in Pune would be Parvati, Hanuman Tekadi near Symbiosis and I would also suggest Chandni Chowk.”

Paranjpye also stated that if one goes for an early morning walk in the University of Pune (UoP) campus near Jayakar Library one would get a clear view of the phenomenon. One should begin their search for the planets by about 5.20 am till 5.50 am. If one is flying at about 5.20 am then he/she should take a window seat on the left side of the plane.

“These are naked-eye events and you do not have to go to any particular location if you can see the Eastern horizon,” says Paranjpye. As for other cities, one has to check the local sunrise time (one day before) and start looking for the planets about 45 minutes before sunrise.

“The crescent Moon and Venus below it will be very easy to see and to locate Mercury, one will have to look just below and a bit to the left of Venus. Jupiter and Mars might be difficult to locate — one would have to be high above ground level,” Paranjypte concluded.

URL: <http://www.punemirror.in/index.aspx?page=article§id=2&contentid=20110430201104300137422335be1e9e4>