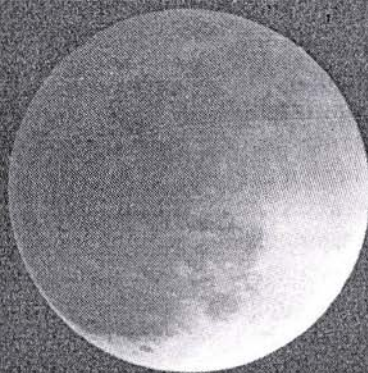


# Lunar eclipse coincides with winter solstice after 372 years!

**New Delhi:** After a wait of 372 years, sky gazers are in for a special celestial treat as winter solstice coincides with total lunar eclipse today.

The last time the two astronomical events coincided was on December 21, 1638, Geoff Chester of US Naval Observatory said. The eclipse cannot be seen in the country as it will occur during day time but astro-lovers can see the full moon turning into a delightful shade of coppery-red from Europe, west Africa, the Americas, the Pacific Ocean, eastern Australia, the Philippines and eastern and northern Asia.

Also, today is the shortest day of the year as people living on the northern side of the equator will celebrate winter solstice. "It is a day when the Earth's axis tilts the farthest from the sun and is called winter solstice, a term derived from Latin words 'sol'



(sun) and 'sistere' (to stand still)," Science Popularisation Association of Communicators and Educators (SPACE) President CB Devgun said.

A solstice is an astronomical event which happens twice each year, when the tilt of the Earth's axis is most inclined toward or away from the sun, causing the sun's apparent position in the sky to reach its northernmost or southernmost extreme, he said. On the day of winter solstice, North Pole points directly away from the sun and South Pole points directly towards

the Sun, he said, adding the sun shines at lowest heights in northern skies and at maximum heights in southern skies. This results in the shortest day in the Northern Hemisphere, but at the same time it is the longest day in Southern Hemisphere.

The winter solstice will be at 5.08 am on December 22. In Delhi, sunrise will be at 7.09 am and sunset at 5.29 pm making it a day with about 10 hours duration, Devgun said.

The total lunar eclipse will occur at 13:47 pm today, Prof RC Kapoor of Indian Institute of Astrophysics said.

Earlier, on June 26, a partial lunar eclipse was witnessed. The next lunar eclipse will be seen on June 15, 2011, which will be total, and visible from India. The next time the two events will coincide will be on December 21, 2094, Devgun said. PTI