The Nation

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Plenty of astronomical drama expected in Thai skies this year

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BOONRAKSA Soonthornthum, director of the National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand (NARIT), said yesterday that five astronomical sights will be observed in Thai skies this year. They include a total solar eclipse, Mars getting the closest to Earth in 11 years, Nasa's Juno spacecraft arriving at its destination, Mercury passing across the sun, a Supermoon appearing on Loy Krathong Day, as well as other interesting astronomical events such as planetary groupings and meteor sightings.

Boonraksa said there will be a total solar eclipse on March 9, but it will only be partly visible in Thailand and the sun will start orbiting in the Earth's shadow from 6.30pm to 8.40pm.

On May 31, Mars will be orbiting closest to the Earth for the first time in 11 years at the range of 75.29 million kilometres and it should be visible to the naked eye all night from May 22-31. Nasa's Juno spacecraft will land on Jupiter after five years of travelling, and a "Supermoon" will occur on Loy Krathong Day on November 14. Other interesting astronomical events like planetary groupings will occur on August 26-29 while Mercury will pass across the sun on May 9.

There will also be other interesting astronomical events such as meteor sightings in August, November and December.

Meanwhile, he said there were "10 other astronomical events that should not be missed in 2016", including the discovery of planets outside the solar system and Nasa's New Horizons exploration spacecraft now moving through the Kuiper Belt, which is expected to discover new asteroids and dwarf planets.

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