

■ Hawa Mein Udta Jaaon

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HYDERABAD: The hot air balloon safari long ride kicked off in the city at Gachbowli Stadium at 5 am on Wednesday as part of the five-day Carnival ACT Fibernet Sky Fest. Although IT Minister K Tarakarama Rao was supposed to inaugurate it and there was also a buzz that Superstar Shahrukh Khan would also be there, neither turned up. However, the hot air balloons and the para jumping did grab all the attention.

A set of 28 people took off the first flight in five different balloons for a long ride of 45 to 60 minutes. They landed near Tallapur after travelling 12 km (distance on land). Different balloons landed at different places. They travelled at a height of 800 to 1,200 feet height. "This is the maximum height we are allowed to go," said Paul from Sky-Waltz, the company which was roped in for the festival.

"In some locations we can go up to 3,000 feet, but it is a fly zone here, so we restrict to 1,100 feet," he said.

Those who took the first hot air balloons paid ` 15,000 each and reserved their booking online long ago. They were picked up in a luxury car from their home and dropped back in the same car. The lucky ones include Jayesh Ranjan, IT Secretary, Ruchi Ranjan, Ishika Ranjan, Dr. Subrahmanyam, Dr. Prananth Reddy, Suresh, Rajitha, Dorababu, Sandeep Agni, and others. The fest is in aid of Sparsh Hospice, an initiative of Rotary Club of Banjara, Hyderabad to raise funds to construct own 50-bedded hospital to provide palliative care to the terminally ill patients, informed Jagadish Ramadugu, organising secretary of the festival.

“It was amazing experience. Though I had once experienced similar ride in Kenya 15 years ago, this was something unique and one of its kind. Though we know city, by exploring it through skies is totally different. Seeing Hyderabad from 1,200 feet is amazing. I could notice so much greenery in the city at least for first half of my balloon ride”, said Ruchi, wife of Jayesh Ranjan, IT Secretary. “We have also spotted deer, peacocks and monkeys,” she said.

The journey of the hot air balloon depends on weight and wind. Early morning is the best time for the hot air balloon ride. Each day, depending on the wind conditions, these balloons will take off from different places and land in different places too. Sky Waltz has identified six safe take off and landing places in the city.

About 150 people have already registered for the hot air balloon safari long ride experience, informed Rakhi Kankaria of Rachnoutsav. These 150 will have experience of hot air balloon in next four days.

However, those who can not have long ride, can try tethered balloon joy ride at the stadium at 4 pm every day by buying a donor pass of ` 2,500.

It will be a short journey of 25 minutes. It will just go up, stay there at a same place and come back after 30 to 25 minutes, depending on the wind conditions.