

## Weather ●●● world Cities in degree centigrade

	max	min		max	min		max	min
Bangkok	33	24	Hong Kong	30	24	Moscow	16	10
Beijing	20	16	Islamabad	33	24	New York	28	17
Colombo	29	24	Karachi	33	28	Paris	18	13
Chicago	22	13	London	16	12	Singapore	30	25
Dubai	39	29	Los Angeles	22	14	Tokyo	17	15

NY reins in the cranes — p16



15...

*The Enchantress of Florence* is already being seen as a contender for this year's Man Booker

## Rushdian romp in Akbar's court, via Florence

**Uttara Choudhury.** New York

Several newspapers have gossiped wildly about Salman Rushdie, squiring Padma Lakshmi-lookalikes around Manhattan but *The Enchantress of Florence*, which came out in the United States on Tuesday, finally returned the spotlight to Rushdie's sweeping new novel instead of tittle-tattle.

Rushdie, who has studied history, draws on more than seven years of research to bring together two seemingly different cities — the hedonistic Mughal capital Fatehpur Sikri, in which Emperor Akbar wrestles daily with questions of belief, desire and the treachery of his sons, and the

sensual city of Florence, where another historical character Niccolo Machiavelli takes a starring role.

In many ways the *Enchantress* is also the story of a woman attempting to command her own destiny in a man's world. There is also the odd inclusion, for a novel, of an 83-book bibliography to ward off "smart aleck accusations" of plagiarism.

"If people like the book and want to continue the journey; read up on some historical details then the bibliography just says — go this way. I don't know why people have got so exercised about the bibliography. It comes at the end of the wretched book," Rushdie said



at a book reading organised by the Indo-American Arts Council, which drew Indian authors Kiran Desai, Suketu Mehta, Anita Desai and Shashi Tharoor. "This book and *Shalimar* were both quite research-intensive and as a student of history I enjoyed it, but it has given me

an enormous desire to write a book that requires no research at all," Rushdie quipped.

Rushdie agrees with scholars who have long-argued that Akbar's Hindu wife Jodha never existed. In the novel, Akbar dreams his ideal mistress into existence and Jodha is portrayed as one of the book's many enchantresses. Jodha also serves as a metaphor to caution those madly in love who think they know the person they love till they are jolted or jilted. "There is no Jodha except in movies and in the minds of some Indians on the street. She didn't exist. Aishwairya Rai does exist, unfortunately," Rushdie joked.

When Tharoor asked Rushdie

how his own thinking about Islam had evolved in the last 19 years after his novel *The Satanic Verses* prompted Ayatollah Khomeini to lay a death sentence on his head in 1989, Rushdie turned pensive and said he saw the Muslim world scarred by self-inflicted wounds.

"There is historical Islam and there is living Islam. I do think that anyone who has grown up in the culture of India cannot deny the Muslim contribution. There are many, many centuries of Muslim contribution. Certainly, the so-called radicalisation of Islam would find the kind of Akbar project anathema. There are many different ideologies lurking under the same umbrella of