

Sarita Choudhury transforms into MOTHER INDIA

Ayub Din-Khan's hit play *Rafta, Rafta* to get a cinema release

Uttara Choudhury, New York

Give her a good script and Sarita Choudhury can totally transform. She can physically melt into a character so well that audiences felt for a moment that another actress had come onto the stage. In Ayub Khan-Din's off-Broadway comedy *Rafta, Rafta* Choudhury's striking chameleon-like talents as an actor are in full play as the sultry actress turns into a prissy Indian mother.

Audiences who loved Choudhury when she debuted in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* playing Denzel Washington's lover were surprised to see the ease with which she slipped into her theatre role as an older woman. "Scott, our wonderful director, gave me the pair of glasses and I disappeared," quipped the effervescent Choudhury, as she appeared relaxed at the Acorn Theatre, after a special performance for the Indo-American Arts Council.

In *Rafta, Rafta* Choudhury pulls back her trademark wild hair into a neat coiffure, wears prim chiffon saris, speaks with a typical Indian accent and negotiates a veritable Freudian minefield in dealing with her dysfunctional relationship with her daughter and husband who are like two bonded peas in a pod. "It was a great opportunity to play someone and understand someone not like me," Choudhury told *DNA*.

Not long ago, Choudhury would have been playing the feisty young bride at the centre of *Rafta, Rafta*. "It's taken me a while to adjust. I've always played the younger generation, so it's comical for me to be playing what I rebelled against. But as I get older, the roles get better," Choudhury, aged 41, told *The Daily News*. The half-Indian, half-English actress has

a key role in an upcoming TV series that will keep her busy after *Rafta, Rafta* ends on June 21. She said she believed the availability of acting roles for women over 40 was increasing.

"When *Mississippi Masala* came out, no one knew what to do with my look," she says. "Back then, to be black was okay, but to be Indian in America? That wasn't so useful. So I studied and got my American accent down and feel I've escaped being pigeonholed. Still, every time I get to play an Indian role, it's exciting. I feel like I'm honouring what my father taught me," she told the newspaper. Choudhury leads a starry stage lineup of fellow film actors Ranjit Choudhry, Sakina Jaffrey and Alison Wright. Manish Tiwari and Reshma Shetty who are the jinxed Indian newbies at the heart of the plot make an impression in the off-Broadway debut.

Khan-Din adapted *Rafta, Rafta* from a 1963 play by Bill Naughton called *All in Good Time*. It was a triumph at the National Theatre in London last year and this American production looks set to run to full houses. The plot sounds like the stuff of sitcom; the newbies are thrown into a crisis as the groom can't deliver in the bedroom. Khan-Din's emphasis on the boisterous Indian household means the entire family shares in the young groom's excruciating predicament. But beyond the laughs, the play is a sensitive exploration of universal family issues. The gags about Bollywood, Indian singers and Bhangra had the predominantly Indian American audience rolling in the aisles. Khan-Din said he was turning his play into a movie "No one has been cast," said the Khan-Din. Audiences are hoping Choudhury will reprise her role in the film version.



Sarita Choudhury (with mike) with the cast at a presser after a performance of *Rafta, Rafta* at the Acorn Theatre in New York



Reshma Shetty, Sakina Jaffrey and Sarita Choudhury in *Rafta, Rafta*



Stills from the play. Sarita Choudhury in the blue sari in a scene from *Rafta, Rafta* —Uttara Choudhury

Sex and the City attracts tourists to New York

Fans are planning a trip to NYC to get a taste of the glamorous life shown in the TV series

New York: Forget the Empire State Building. Some New York tourists are eager to see the city's other landmarks: Carrie's stoop, Charlotte's gallery and that restaurant where Samantha threw a martini in a boyfriend's face.

Fans of *Sex and the City* have long arrived here eager to see the \$500 shoes, the Cosmopolitan drinking fashionistas and the glamorous serial daters for themselves. Now, with the movie follow up to the show set to premiere later this month, a number of them are planning trips so that they can see *Sex and the City*... in the city. "Once we found out there was going to be a movie, we thought what a great weekend to do a girls' trip to New York City, the weekend of the premiere," said Amy Walker, a 31-year-old accountant from Min-



Participants on a *Sex and the City* tour shop in The Pleasure Chest store in New York —AP

King-size living

Participants in the Destination on Location tour will dine at restaurants frequented by Carrie and her friends, visit their favourite boutiques with personal stylists and even have the option to stop for some Botox injections

neapolis who says she has watched the entire series twice on DVD.

Along with three female friends, she's planning to relax at a spa mentioned on the show, take a *Sex and the City* Hotspots tour and see the movie on its opening weekend. "The producers have said that New York City is the fifth lady of the show," says Lisa Blythe Perlman, a guide for the hotspots tour: "Eighty per cent of the show was filmed on location."

Perlman and her colleagues bus about 1,000 tourists a week to see Carrie's stoop,

check out her favourite sex toy shop, sample her signature cocktail and eat the same cupcakes that they first spotted on the show. The tour company says it has already seen advance purchases more than double for the May 30 opening weekend.

"*Sex and the City* has been one of the all time great commercials for the city of New York," says George Fertitta, who heads NYC Company, the city's tourism office. Fertitta said, "They look at this as a window into New York City," he said. With its glossy shoots at parks, restaurants, night-

clubs and shops around the city, the series has been something of an international ambassador for New York, showing in more than 200 countries around the world, according to HBO.

About one third of *Sex and the City* Hotspots tour goers are from outside the United States, says On Location Tours spokeswoman, Cathy Epstein. The city is looking to capitalise on that interest. NYC Company is launching a website to help visitors plan a *Sex and the City* themed visit, and is organising sweepstakes for such trips in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Britain and around the US. On Location Tours is offering an opening night package that includes its hotspots tour, the movie, and a cocktail party.

One company is charging visitors \$15,000 and up for a luxurious four day trip based on the show. Participants in the Destination on Location tour, launching the weekend the movie opens, will dine at restaurants frequented by Carrie and her friends, visit their favourite boutiques with personal stylists and even have the option to stop for some Botox injections. —AP

British author brands Nobel win 'a disaster'

London: British author Doris Lessing has said that winning the Nobel Prize for Literature was a "bloody disaster", adding she has now stopped writing, the BBC reported on Sunday.

Lessing, whose works include *The Golden Notebook* and *The Good Terrorist*, said she spends most of her time now being photographed and giving interviews.

The 88-year-old was awarded the Nobel in 2007 and at the time said it was "astonishing and amazing" to receive the honour. Asked about her writing on BBC radio, she said, "It has stopped, I don't have any energy any more."

"This is why I keep telling anyone younger than me, 'don't imagine you'll have it forever.' 'Use it while

you've got it because it'll go, it's sliding away like water down a plug-hole."

She added that she had been in constant demand since her Nobel award. "All I do is give interviews and spend time being photographed," she said.



The BBC released extracts from the interview with Lessing, which is due to be broadcast on Radio 4.

The author was born in Iran but her British family moved to what was then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, when she was young. Lessing moved to London when she was 30. Her most recent novel is *Alfred and Emily*, which she says will be her last. —AFP

Crossword no 975



- Across**
1 Thus Indian gets confused by the vernacular (10)
8 Move or shoot back for example (5)
9 A louder musical arrangement (7)
10 Led a nun astray, but not charged! (7)
11 She was ruined by Ernie (5)
12 You need inspiration to draw one (6)
14 A long time and varied things to be done (6)
17 Mount a tractor perhaps (5)
19 Ask for another search? (7)
21 Its quarters are hardly spotless (7)
22 Shoot nothing before the rise, perhaps (5)
23 Can this fruit be so grey or bruised? (10)
- Down**
2 Try to please? (7)
3 Be afraid of disturbing an adder (5)
4 Beach or desert (6)
5 A pondering that's funny (7)
6 I tear out in an angry mood (5)
7 He does well with his money (10)
8 Fly in a coloured container (10)
13 Ran round in the commotion caused by the storm (7)
15 To want that is right, though comparatively broke? (7)
16 A game on which the captain rules (6)
18 Right opposite (5)
20 Mention a price (5)

Solution No. 974

Across: 1 Thrift, 4 Dreary, 9 Soprano, 10 Cache, 11 Essen, 12 Exposed, 13 Pillion ride, 18 Dreamer, 20 Quits, 22 Icing, 23 Epistle, 24 Events, 25 Amoral.
Down: 1 Tossed, 2 Ropes, 3 Flannel, 5 Recap, 6 Accused, 7 Yields, 8 Come to grief, 14 Itemise, 15 Requiem, 16 Advice, 17 As well, 19 Might, 21 Enter

Incubators linked to risk of death

They create electromagnetic fields that alter the heart beat rate of newborns

London: Life-saving incubators may impede the development of the nervous system among infants which can lead to cot death, a research has suggested.

Incubators, which are used to keep the babies warm and decrease the chance of infection, have motors that create electromagnetic fields in the area where they lie.

The study, which is published in the current issue of the *Fetal and Neonatal Edition of Archives of Disease in Childhood*, shows that even the very low electrical fields

given off by the incubators interfere with infants' heart rates, which in turn impedes the development of the nervous system that can lead to cot death.

The research at the General Hospital of the University of Siena, Italy, found these fields cut the variability of babies' heart rates in half.

Reduction in variability is thought to be an indicator of heart disease in adults. "What we have proved is that the effects of these machines

are not neutral and they should be. The manufacturers of these incubators should take steps to shield babies from their motors and to move motors further away within the machine," said Professor Carlo Bellieni, who led the research.

The findings will deepen concerns about the danger of "electromog" given off by electrical equipment which is thought to interfere with the tiny currents that help to drive the human body and

govern the heart, *The Independent* daily said.

It could also imply that placing infants near electrical devices including clocks and radios may be dangerous for their health. The study concludes that modifications to the design of incubators could help, but they add that it is unclear what long term consequences there may be of exposure to electromagnetic fields at such a tender age.

Many researchers have linked electromagnetic fields with asthma and cancer, the report said. —PTI

A funhouse floating in a Korean spa

Inspa is a Korean spa cum water park, built in America, where families soak, steam & eat together

Donald G. Mcneil Jr., New York

This was the capper to a weirdly sybaritic evening: plunge pools, saunas lined in gold, jade and salt; massage chairs; Korean soap operas and a lot of viewing other people's tattoos. Inspa World, a five-story 60,000-square-foot funhouse, bills itself as a "spa and water park." But that doesn't quite capture it. It takes a mere \$30 to get in. And without water slides or wave machines, it's no Typhoon Lagoon, either: Call it an aquarium for humans.

Inspa is an elaborate local copy of a jimjilbang, a traditional Korean 24-hour bathhouse where families soak, steam and eat together, and sometimes even sleep over.

The owner, Steve Chon, a Queens architect and developer, said he spent \$25 million building it and hopes to open 19 more, the next in Dallas. There are other jimjilbangs in the United States, Chon said, but none as large with big outdoor pools like his. Chon said he first advertised to Korean-Americans, "but I was al-



ways targeting mainstream Americans."

About 70 per cent of the clientele going to Inspa World is Asian. Paying the entry fee gets one a jazzy blue or pink electronic bracelet. The bracelet is both locker key and charge card for food, massages and tube rentals at the pools.

The saunas are stunning. The gold one has tiles coated with 96 per cent pure gold, Chon said. The ladies sauna bath, had scenes both sweet and mystifying: little girls scrubbing their mothers' backs, and women squatting over heated pots. The pots are herbal steamers, supposedly very soothing after giving birth. Exfoliating rubs were given by muscular women.

Half the floor is a food court: juice bar, pizza or sushi, Starbucks or Häagen-Dazs. Wall-mounted televisions silently play shows with English and Korean subtitles.

The other half is a kitsch paradise: a green stone meadow coursed by a running stream and dotted with igloo-shaped saunas. Alcohol is banned for fear of heart attacks in the saunas, Chon said. The ban particularly irks some guests, he added, who like hell-hot saunas with a frigid vodka chaser. The sign's medical advice is just as strange. Heated gold supposedly releases infrared rays that suck out bad energy. This helps fight high blood pressure, paralysis and relieves pain in the feet. —NYT

Sharper images

Jennifer Aniston's hot man

Jennifer Aniston thinks her new lover, John Mayer, is "better looking" than ex-husband Brad Pitt. The former *Friends* actress, who spent four days in Malibu with the musician last week, is smitten with John. A friend of Jennifer's said, "She says he is the cutest guy she has ever gone out with — even better looking than Brad. John likes her intelligence and experience and Jennifer likes John's vitality." Jennifer is already beginning to think that John could be "The One" and is making long-term plans.

Gerri Halliwell's adoption plans

Gerri Halliwell would consider adopting a child. The 35-year-old star wants her 23-month-old daughter Bluebell Madonna to have a sister and is "open" to expanding her family. She told Britain's *Glamour* magazine, "I have a sister and would love to be able to give Bluebell that gift. Before I had Bluebell, even a long time ago, I thought about adoption." Gerri — who is currently dating dancer Ivan 'Flipz' Velez — has raised Bluebell alone since splitting from the baby's father, scriptwriter Sacha Gervasi.

Blake's mum wants him to ditch Amy

Blake Fielder-Civil's mother has told her son that he would be "crazy" to reunite with Amy Winehouse. Though Winehouse has insisted that her marriage is not in trouble, the couple are believed to be on the rocks, with both Amy and Blake facing accusations that they cheated on each other. Blake's mum Georgette has admitted that she is thrilled to see her son finally moving on from Amy and planning a future with office receptionist, Sarah Thomas, who has helped him to see the error of his ways in recent weeks.



Miley Cyrus performs at 102.7 KIIS-FM's Wango Tango concert Saturday in Irvine, California —AP