SHEFALEE VASUDEV

Jacko, Naturally

AS curtains fell on America's most watched celebrity trial of recent times, the crowd staring at the giant screens at New York's Times Square thickened every instant. Pop diva(na) Michael Jackson, accused of molesting young boys, was a free man. Would people mourn or celebrate? I was looking for a gender and colour divide in the reactions. But the restlessness wasn't so easy to label. Jumbo combo emotions spilled out. Claps, whistles and tears of triumph competed with anger, remorse and disbelief. King of pop, incredible talent, innocent...roared some. Abuser, floozie, dyke, hissed others. It was a free-for-all venthouse. Some praised his courtroom composure, others ridiculed the roasted marshmallow his nose now looks like. In newsrooms, the trial went on, convicting Jackson with each question the anchors asked. Except for Larry King, who stayed loyal to his pretensions of being objective, everyone—media, jury, mothers, friends and fans took a stand. The climax was going to the people's heads like climaxes do, but it affirmed why star trials need such attention. If letting celebrities walk free is a coincidence we must live with, then trying them mercilessly is a consolation not to be denied to the people. How else will they know that even if there is some truth in every lie, justice has bigger promises to keep. Would this be a lesson for juries across the world? "We were disturbed, but the accuser's mother came across as a practised, over-the-top liar," said Paul Rodriguez, the jury foreman. It wasn't the first time that America had favoured the lesser of the two liars. The trial had proven that abusers and accusers can be of the same ilk. It was a case of Liar vs Liar. "Naturally, Jax won," said a man as he celebrated by digging his knife into a Tad's steak. Naturally.

SANDEEP ADHWARYU

A Kurti For All Seasons

A deep pink bandhini kurti paired with a white Calvin Klein trouser adorned a window at Macy's. The kurti, India's pret pet, was on a summer rampage. An XXXL one in orange with blockprinted Sanskrit letters looked lost on a big girl as she sipped Peet's coffee, but elsewhere on the Metro, it was white and wispy with fine Lucknawi embroidery or a glamourous green with zardozi at a Broadway show. The competition for the summer look was bold and beautiful. Layered spaghetti tops, glitter chappals, espresso hair and bronzed cleavages. But the desi fad stood head and shoulders above all. Sequined gold and silver jutis, beaded belts, jholas, silver toe rings followed the kurti's assault on fashion victims. In the shops at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, too, it was Jaipur's kundan and jadau jewellery that carried the biggest price tags and looked the most stunning. India was all over New York.

$48 For The Big Apple

FOR $48, you can buy a 48-hour tour of New York on the Gray Line sightseeing bus. Hop in, hop off fun. In summers, this means you can sit at the head of the bus by day and night and bite the big apple with your eyes. Free with it is a guide's non-stop commentary to prevent tourists from catching forty (eight?) winks. Guides, often college dropouts, brash youngsters looking for other jobs, or disillusioned artists with dashed dreams of buying a luxury apartment in Manhattan, interpret the city in their own ways. A failed guitarist talked of the architectural peculiarities of New York pointing at wrought-iron staircases and prison buildings. Another spoke of the differences between Gothic and Romanesque churches. An older, could-have-been-successful-painter defended Greenwich Village from being a haven of drug addicts and homosexuals. He spoke of actor Al Pacino's father being a painter and the troubles of the ethnic neighbourhoods. But it was Wanda, the self-proclaimed 30-year-old "wonder" from Spain, who took the cake. She had learnt English but hadn't yet dropped her accent. Her voice was like long nails grazing a tin as she told tourists where to go if they were looking for Two for One deals. She was a freebie freak. A female Eddie Murphy—cute, irritating, with a sense of humour that would make a laughing hyena cry. Some guides are just voices but others are brands.

Stories in Candour

THE American candidness about promiscuities and fidelities is an admirable one. But that hardly justifies creating a psychobabble script out of every spat, hug and kiss. Everyone who has any relationship anywhere in the world has a story to tell, but in the US you can dream of writing a bestseller based on it or convert it into a hollering episode of a relationship talk show. If you are erotically frustrated and/or fulfilled, and didn't know how to fake and forget it, you could thrash out a collection of sexual essays (flip through *Jane Sexes it Up*—Thunder's Mouth Press). But if you'd rather sue your Hispanic half-sibling for a couple of thousand dollars because she made you buy a washing machine that did not quite wash your dirty linen, then try The Larry Elder show or the People's Court on TV.

Victoria's Ruby Slippers

VICTORIA'S Secret, the widely known lingerie brand, and its disbelief in coyness is very revealing. Their black lingerie, purple fishnet stockings, denim bras with white lace, red G-strings and the new beauty line with its tantalising Ruby Slippers lipstick looked super sexy on tall, curvy mannequins invitingly undressed for shop windows. They unapologetically beckon women to combine sex with appeal. Potent with possibilities to explore inside and outside the bedroom. Coco Chanel, inventor of the little black dress, would have approved. "Always remove, never add," she once said.