

# The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

**J**ACK Valentl heads the Motion Pictures Association of America, the lobby group for the United States film industry. His warning is clear: "If movies and audiovisuals don't get into Gatt, Bill Clinton won't sign the trade accord."

Clinton and his administration have already given their nod. France does not like any of this. If movies, television programmes and videos get into Gatt (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), "we're not signing," declares French Culture Minister Jacques Toubon.

Unhindered Gatt-approved worldwide trade in "culture" is now as hot a subject of dispute as commerce in grain, steel and cars.

In October, Germany's conservative daily the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* carried a full-page notice paid by France's Culture Ministry. It was signed by 4,000 European actors, directors and producers and urged that culture be left out of the Gatt accord drafts.

Their argument? US-made movies and TV films will swamp Europe if free-wheeling trade in "cultural products" goes unchecked. For them, cultural uniformity is the enemy. America's vision of the world is only one of many, they say. The right to defend other views and conceptions is the need of the hour.

None of the culture pluralists have yet figured out how to go about it, but their reasoning does have substance. Last year, the US sold the European Community (EC) \$3.7 billion worth of films, videos and TV programmes — up from \$2.3 billion four years earlier. Against that, the EC has been exporting around \$300 million annually to the US in recent years.

In the EC, TV viewers watch five billion hours of American films every year. Americans barely exceed 180 million hours yearly for films originating in the EC. The numbers are about as disproportionate for movie hall attendance, with 362 million tickets sold yearly in the EC for American-made films, about eight times more than for EC-made films in the US.

Film-makers in France, the EC's most prolific, complain about what they see as a built-in bias against their productions in the US. They say marketing French films in the US is difficult because American audiences do not like dubbed or subtitled films.

American films recover pro-

## Film and TV Clash could Crash Gatt Talks

Sailil Sarkar writes from Paris

As the deadline to reach a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round nears, unhampered trade in culture industries is now as hot a subject of dispute as commerce in grain. The Americans want to include films, TV and videos into Gatt world trade talks France says it will not sign the deal if these are included, arguing that US movies and TV programmes will swamp Europe if free-wheeling trade in "cultural products" goes unchecked. Gemini News Service investigates the culture controversy.



duction costs through shows in their own vast home market. They can then be sold to Europe at cut-price rates, devastating local film-makers. And that despite EC directives encouraging West European TV stations to buy films made inside the Community, France has stricter quotas governing its television: 60 per cent of films shown must be of European origin, of which two-thirds must be French.

Given the boisterous privatisation these days, the key question is whether culture-makers should receive state help. Film-makers and rulers in the US think not. Many Europeans believe they should.

According to some estimates, western Europe gives around

AT A CINEMA NEAR YOU

A story of TOTAL DOMINATION

\$1.3 billion subsidies to its film industry. Roughly half that figure is borne by France alone. Even in France, nearly two-thirds of cinema admissions each year are for American films. Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* is expected to occupy 20 per cent of all cinemas in French towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants.

Americans might make films, but distributing them in Europe is done by locals. France's giant Gaumont-Pathe and UGC groups together control 86 per cent of the screens in the key Paris region, and almost all cinemas in major provincial cities.

Anatole Dauman, who produced *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and several other art movies, says breaking the stranglehold

of the two groups alone will ensure much-desired plurality. Dauman says the group's concern is to show Hollywood blockbusters like *Jurassic Park* in as many cinemas as possible for quick profit.

Similar distributors are at work in other EC countries. In recent years, with private TV channels proliferating, the demand for films has sky-rocketed. In Germany last year 12,000 films were aired on TV, about 30 times more than in cinemas.

Only big American companies, enjoying easy access to finance, were in a position to match such demand. And well-placed distributors like Leo Kirch in Munich or the Hamburg company Connexion amassed huge wealth buying

and selling cheap American titles in Germany.

The French mainly, but also other Europeans, stress that without public subsidies their film-making simply will not survive Hollywood's gargantuan onslaught. Rohmer, Rivette, Kaurismaki, Fellini or Godard would never have existed without state aid, says a German film industry watcher.

Former French Culture Minister Jack Ralite notes that not just western Europe but even eastern Europe, frequent producers of quality films, is now flooded with doubtful American productions. He says: "In Russia, American films are given away free for the time being."

Such penetration tactics, he believes, ensures the virtual elimination of movie-making in Russia, as has already occurred in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia or even Georgia.

This almost happened to French cinema too, just after World War Two. In exchange for Marshall plan aid from the US, France was asked to open its markets to American products, including films. Agitation by French actors and movie-makers stopped that and probably saved the then pretty dilapidated French industry from extinction.

Globalisation equals uniformity and must therefore be fought, goes the line, and cultural diversity defended. But, says US interests, what happens when Columbia (owned by Sony) presents a film financed by Japanese banks, produced by an Italian, directed by a French person, and stars an Indian idol?

The *Wall Street Journal* writes: "If Hollywood movies are so successful, it's probably because of its highly cosmopolitan character and the dynamic tension between creative talent and business competition."

Peruvian author and former presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa bears little love for Hollywood's "Jurassic garbage," as he called it in the Spanish daily *El Pais*. But he believes globalisation is here to stay.

Like it or not, art products, despite their intrinsic value, are commodities too, declares Vargas Llosa. So if you want to fight Hollywood, gird your loins and make better products, he counsels.

SAILIL SARKAR is on the staff of Radio France International, based in Paris.

## China: Life Begins at 60



Many Chinese can't seem to wait to grow old and start living it up. Paul Murphy reports from Beijing

**E**CONOMIC reforms in the former Soviet Union may have left many pensioners begging in the streets, but in China the elderly are living it up, free from the usual worries of their age group.

China now has more than 100 million people over 60, and the number is expected to swell to 130 million by the end of the century.

But while the younger generation worries about earning a living, China's senior citizens have all the time in the world to pursue their hobbies and keep themselves fit.

"I can't wait till I'm over 60", says one Beijinger in his late 20's.

Like many in his age group, the young man follows a back-breaking schedule. He is already up at 5:30 every morning so he can take his son to school on a bicycle. Then he rides back home to have breakfast and prepares to go to work. At night he runs a small business to augment his income.

The young man usually passes by retirees gathered in the parks at dawn for their daily exercise. Some even perform feats that their grandchildren may not be able to do. One of the regulars in a Beijing park, a man in his early 70's, performs splits with each leg on one park bench.

"When would I find time for (leisure)?" the young Beijinger asks with a sigh. "It's no wonder the only people you see exercising in the morning are those over 60".

Unlike people in other coun-

tries who dread reaching their so-called twilight years, most Chinese seem to look forward to old age.

In this country, ancient traditions such as the Confucian respect for the elderly have helped ensure that the aged live the rest of their lives in comfort and dignity.

In contrast to the practice of firms elsewhere around the world, Chinese companies are not as reluctant to hire old people. As a result, many retired people are able to find part-time jobs.

The traditional respect for the elderly is reflected even in many Chinese art works. A new book on the paintings of Wang Youzheng, for example, shows many works featuring old peasants in northern China — from a sage white-bearded man making dough cakes to a wizened character with a sad face and all-knowing eyes.

Many of Wang's works also mirror typical scenes on Beijing's streets, such as elderly women looking after babies.

The extended family living in the same courtyard is no longer a reality in most Chinese cities, but the elderly remain close to their children.

Says Beijing storekeeper Zhang Xiao: "I don't think the elderly like living away from their families. It gives them time to indulge in hobbies like chess."

Zhang himself, though, lives far from his parents, who reside in Tianjin. But he maintains strong ties with them, and regularly sends them money.

His parents had worked in a

collective factory that made clothing. "When they retired, they were given no pension," he relates. "The factory boss told them, 'Sorry, but we've got no money to spare.' There was nothing they could do but accept the situation."

Zhang says he sends his parent a money although "they are doing okay."

He notes: "Even those without pensions seem to get by because they are always looked after by their children. Filial duty is still very important in China."

Several years ago, state enterprises reported they were worried about the difficulty of feeding a growing number of retirees.

China's policy makers concluded that a crisis was developing; about how to support millions of pensioners and that the country lacked an effective insurance system to provide adequate cover.

But the government announced that the system was being reformed under a new universal pension system intended to benefit all the elderly.

Still, there are indications that not even such glitches in the state pension system have resulted in much suffering among the country's retirees.

Indeed, far from being concerned that its senior citizens may be lacking in food, the official English language newspaper *China Daily* has reported that obesity is one of the main problems among pensioners.

One-tenth of the more than 1.2 million elderly people in

Continued on page 10

## Approximating the Garden of Eden

by Afifa Raihana



Shed with a pool in front

**W**E, the inhabitants of Dhaka, live in a very cramped and crowded city. We have virtually no touch with nature. The skyline of Dhaka which is now etched with tall buildings, allow little room for natural light and air to come in. So, we continually

crave for greenery and fresh air.

And Bon-kids offers more than what our minds crave for. It's a private garden stretched on four bighas of land in Gulshan. Zakia Rouf Chowdhury planned this quiet and peaceful garden with all her imagina-



Bonsai (Banyan tree)

tions. Bon-kids bears great resemblance to Japanese gardens. From outside no one can possibly imagine what surprise it holds for the visitor.

When you enter the garden, you feel as if you are in a dreamland. This garden has been ornamented beautifully. There are several pools and canals where bright blue, yellow and white waterlilies are blooming. These pools are also crowded with various colourful fishes. Small plank-wood bridges have been erected across the pools.

And sheds have been erected here and there to protect one from the blazing sun. These sheds are perfect for resting and having a family rendezvous. There are also many green shady trees. The bushes and bowers of flowers makes it even more enchanting.

It is a very well-maintained garden with narrow paths all around it. It has been planned in such a way that a person can, atleast for some time, have a joyous and wonderful trip.

Bon-kids has one of the

richest nurseries in Dhaka. It has about 150 types of plants. Some of these plants are exotic and have been collected from countries like Japan, Thailand and Australia. This nursery provides flower plants, indoor plants, fruit trees, orchids and bonsai. Some of its rare collections include Japanese iris, red anthurium, waterlily (blue, yellow, white), pineapple plant, red palm, shrimp plant, white dust,



Plants growing without soil

wax plant, moon light plant, asparagus fern, white money plant, cryptanthus, x 'it', cryptanthus bohinus etc.

Ten gardeners work all day on almost ten thousand plants. Grooming and rearing the plants need great skills. They

have earned this skill through many years of experience and direct supervision of Zakia. Plants need constant care, so she spends all her time on this garden. The profit that is earned from the nursery goes to the fund for poor children.

Inspired and supported greatly by her family, Zakia initiated this garden with an initial investment of over Taka twenty lac. At first she got a ten years



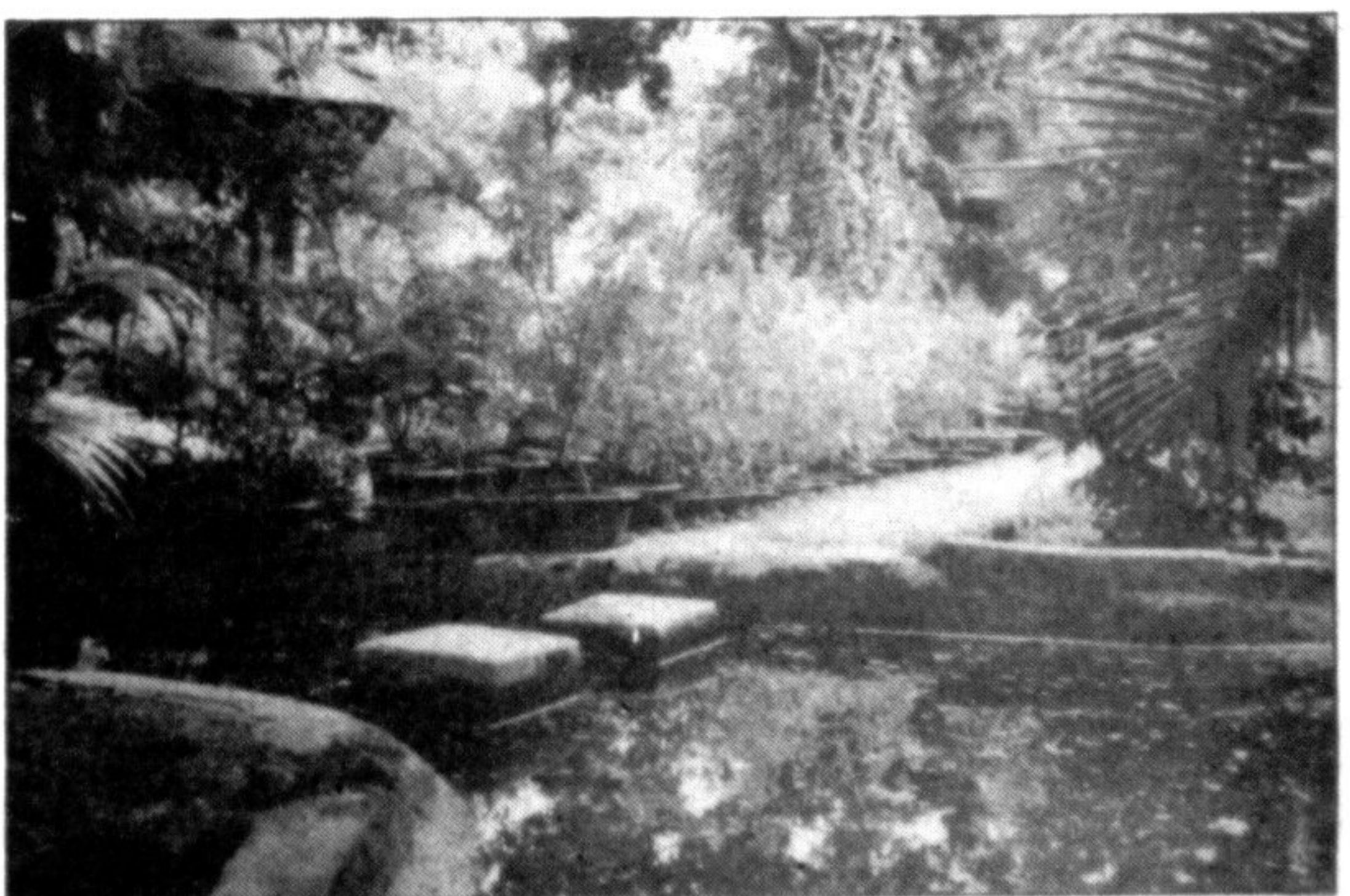
Water lily

tainty whether the garden will survive next year or not. Maybe, one fine sunny morning a bulldozer will come and destroy this heavenly garden to build a multi-storied building.

"Public money is scarcely ever so well invested employed as in securing bits of waste

ground and keeping them as open spaces," said Sir Arthur Helps. When the ever increasing pressure of population and greed of profit mongers create a constant tendency to encroach upon what seems to be merely unutilized bits of land, the City Corporation should always keep

in mind that every locality must be provided with requisite lands, where the common man can relax and find respite from the dust-laden, smoke-infested atmosphere of their congested homes and spend a few hours in tranquility, far from the madding crowd.



Steps on water