

LIVING

The French Toy Industry

Faced with very tough competition from abroad, especially from Asian countries, French toy industrialists have closed ranks and decided to combat counterfeiting while targeting export markets. As before, their production is based on a dual objective: quality and innovation.



The Paris museum of dolls



The safety of toys is tested



Taken from a famous comic strip of the Fifties, Babar, king of the toys

Enough to justify the offensive staged by foreign manufacturers whose sales, last year, totalled almost FF 8 bl. And yet, this is not a recent trend. Over a period of twenty years, imports have steadily progressed, resulting in a similarly regular deterioration in the coverage rate (ratio of exports over imports). From 57% in 1973, it fell to 39% in 1983 and then to 27% in 1993. In other

words, the market has virtually been turned around in the space of twenty years. **Pause in Electronic Games** To secure a position worldwide, France's toy industry must take account of two factors: the technological trend, in particular for electronic toys, and the impact on toy-making of low labour costs in a number of Asian

countries and other countries of the Third World. At the same time, it has to combat those who have recourse "to imitations with blatant impunity", as deplored by the Federation. Experts have noted that "while there is little brand counterfeiting in our sector, by contrast, design and model counterfeiting has soared over the last few years". This consists of moulding the leading prod-

ucts of French makes or making intelligent copies which, while retaining the toy's functions, contain shape and/or colour changes: all these signs are then intended to fool the consumer. French toys are coming onto the world market at a time when the market for electronic toys seems to be taking time out. Dolls, construction sets, board games and even garages are becoming more and more popular among young consumers, which is a godsend for French manufacturers, whose range of products actually caters for all age categories: starting with toddlers, with a series of toys (costs, walkers, swivel chairs, pedal toys) often with a very sophisticated stylism and bright colours which contrast vividly with the more pastel hues of products on the other side of the Atlantic.

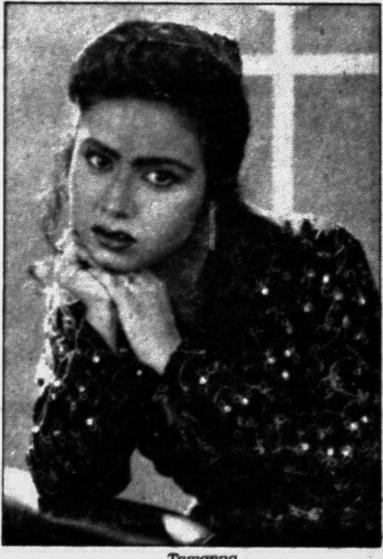
As soon as these toddlers are able to walk, they can enjoy not only traditional games such as playing shop or with garages but also other, more educational products. The Nathan toy manufacturers, for example, offer a range of computers adapted equally well to very young users — to help develop their visual or auditory memory, their sense of logic and their ear for music — and to older users. As they grow up, they discover the delights of Meccano, the metal construction games, which has already entertained generations of children, then the pleasures of electric train sets and the exclusive doll from Corolle. There is a toy for every age group. And to quote the industry's motto: "Giving a toy is as much a gesture of love as making that toy."

Label France

Retracing Steps

by Fayza Haq

TAMANNA Hasina Jamil is used to cat-walks, stages and camera, lights. Friends introduced her to Bangladeshi TV ads about which she feels, "There is something new in Bangladeshi TV ads: the camera work is better and the direction has improved." Tamanna has played the part of "Jhorna" the main character in the package natok "Ridoe Dorpone Kalo Chaya" and is now working with "Boi Porichiti." She will be performing shortly in "Bhinno Shurjo Uttuk."



Tamanna

Tamanna went to Sweden when she was eleven. She was attached to the Bangla cultural associations and was involved in singing and dancing. Weary of being in Sweden for years she now wants to settle back in Bangladesh. Her only complaint of the acting and modelling life in Dhaka are the gossips, rumours and scandals sometimes attached to them.

She was studying as a dental assistant in Stockholm and hopes to go back and complete it. "Life there is totally different from that in Bangladesh. The people there keep to themselves and one feels the lack of warmth one-although I have friends there, I prefer to be in Bangladesh and to settle down here. My husband, who is a medical student, and I will finish our education and return to Dhaka. I am getting offers of ads, and plays so that I am contented to be here. I could have stayed back and gone into performing arts in the Swedish language but I prefer to be here," Tamanna says about herself.

There are high rates of divorces and cases of living together in Stockholm. The younger generation suffers from this. Parents there are selfish, as far as I can see. Each one is for himself there. Maybe if I were born there I could get used to it. As I grew up the breaking of relations in Sweden appeared negative to me. However, the people there are undoubtedly developed. Their life, otherwise, is planned and organised. They take great pride in their language and their identity as Swedes. Now that Sweden has joined the European Community it has developed more. Due to the taxes there is social security. The weekends there are wonderful — the place wakes up and is full of life. The summers are fascinating with visiting artists, the water festival and concerts that go all night. The place is full of tourists. The cinema is packed with American shows and is replete with life. The Swedes themselves often leave their country for holiday.

Tamanna says about life in Stockholm. "I believe that it is a pity when people have to abandon their homes and settle out of necessity in European countries. I feel that if I want to stay in acting I can't do it by

occasional visits as it becomes too expensive," She explains about her decision to return. "My husband Yousof Jamil is very understanding and puts no pressure at all on my returning to Sweden. He realises that I want to build up a career in Bangladesh," she adds. Talking about her new life in Dhaka, Tamanna says, "I don't find shopping here so easy. There is bargaining even in fixed price shops as I have to get my shopping done by someone else. I find the crowds of people unnerving. The people in offices, even in banks and post-offices are not always very helpful. I feel the general people here lack education. However, with more experience, I'll get used to life here, I am sure. Of course, I miss my friends who were Italian, Turkish and of Iranian origin. Similarly, I miss my family too."

Tamanna loves the papaya, cucumber, mangoes, jackfruits and lichies of Bangladesh. She is fascinated by the weather, rickshaw rides and the many coloured saris.

Truth is Stranger Than Fiction!

by Farah Ghuznavi

MOST of us have had the kind of nightmares from which we've woken up in a cold sweat, and there seems to be a general consensus that the best thing about such nightmares is usually waking up and finding out that it was all a bad dream. However, when you find yourself breaking out in a sweat, and don't wake up thereafter, you know you're in trouble!

For me, such an incident occurred when I took a visiting US-based friend shopping while I was studying in London. She had wanted to go to the Trocadero, which is basically a big shopping centre-cum-amusement arcade at Piccadilly Circus in the centre of London. At one point, we were exploring a quaint (and extremely expensive!) little souvenir shop, when I saw Sabrina reach out to pick up a small glass animal from a shelf on which were displayed around eighty to a hundred such items (each with the rather exorbitant price-tag of between five to ten pounds).

To my indescribable horror, just as she had picked up the little creature, the entire shelf went crashing down, smashing all the animals displayed there! It was like watching it go down in slow motion; something out of a nightmare, except that no-one was waking me up. The two of us were rooted to the spot, absolutely petrified, waiting for the shopkeeper's wrath to come crashing down on us. Sabrina, as the main culprit, was reduced to babbling incoherently, and I, knowing that I couldn't leave her to face the consequences alone, was already beginning to calculate how many hun-

ders of pounds worth of merchandise had been destroyed.

It seemed like an age before one of the shop staff sauntered over to where we were standing, and I think it was in fact around five minutes before she even noticed. It was long enough for Sabrina to suggest that we make a run for it, but frankly, with the way that Murphy's law ("Whatever can go wrong, will") was operating, I just didn't think we'd make it. As the woman came up to us, we both began to talk at the same time, with Sabrina whispering brokenly, "I'll pay! I'll pay!", while I argued, "It wasn't her fault. There's something wrong with this shelf! It just came crashing down when she picked up that little animal" (which was, in fact, the truth!). To our amazement, the shop manager actually dealt with the matter very casually, saying, "Yes, there must be something wrong with it. Never mind, I'll get someone to take a look at it." This just confirmed our long-held suspicion that those animals were seriously overpriced, but of course we didn't linger about to argue with her, just raced out of the Trocadero, vowing never to return!

A similar experience was related by a friend, Tina, who told me about the time another friend, Saida, came to visit her in Hong Kong, and the two of them went out for a drive. Saida did not have a driving licence for Hong Kong, where laws relating to motoring offences are fairly severe, but she persuaded let Tina let her have a go at driving, saying that they would swap seats if the cops came along. So Tina, against

her better judgement, allowed Saida to take the driver's seat, all the while keeping a vigilant eye out for any members of the police force.

To her terror, she soon found that they were approaching a knot of around seven or eight policemen, clearly investigating some kind of traffic problem. Saida had not noticed them and in her panic, Tina got her words ("police" and "cops") mixed up, and was unable to say anything but — "Saidal! Pops! Pops! Pops!" Fortunately for all concerned by the time Saida had noticed what she was talking about, they had gone past the policemen, who had clearly thought the better of approaching the two strangely hysterical women...

The ultimate example of the kind of situation you don't want to find yourself in occurred at a recent dinner party I attended. A late guest came and sat down at our end of the table for dinner, but before he could say anything, he spied the gentleman next to him, who was (by then) also giving him strange looks. To the amazement of the rest of us, they simultaneously said, "Aren't you the guy whose car ran into me/whose car I ran into last year?"!!! It turned out that that was indeed the case, but luckily for our host, they had apparently settled the matter in an amicable and gentlemanly fashion when the event actually occurred, and were therefore able to proceed with dinner with mutual compliments rather than bitter recriminations. I thought things like that (only happened in fiction (or nightmares)...

Tank-burner Zhang Looks Back without Anger

Fons Tuinstar writes from Shanghai

TIMES are changing in China as a new generation, now in their 30s and raised after earlier political upheavals, prepare to move into positions of influence. And many are no longer afraid to express their opinions.

Film-maker Zhang Zhang is one of them. We met while queuing for steamed buns. "One of these days we must have a beer," he said after we collected our food. This is not how Chinese usually invite somebody to their homes. Zhang, 34, returned a year ago from Australia, where he went with little money and no knowledge of English, after the Beijing massacre in 1989.

"After the mass murders of 1989, I was devastated," he recalls. "They did this happen?" everybody was asking themselves. "Why did we have to kill our own people?" In 1989, Zhang was in his second year at the Beijing Film Academy. Like many students, he became involved in the student-led pro-democracy hunger strike in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

"I was very angry - that night in June when the army attacked," says Zhang. "I lost all confidence in our government. Our demands in 1989 were very basic. Nevertheless, the government seemed to be prepared to let thousands of hunger strikers die. That night, I burned a tank in the square. It was not easy - the tank drove very fast. Later, when I saw all the soldiers in the streets of Beijing, I lost all hope."

However, with hindsight, he is milder about the gov-

ernment's decision to use force to end the hunger strike. "To a certain degree, I now understand why they used violence at the time," he says. "I don't think the government had so many other options. Deng Xiaoping, then chairman of the military commission, said, 'We are not going to talk about this for the coming three years. I think that was very sensible.'"

On arrival in Australia, Zhang saw people partying and broke down. "I thought: how can anybody have fun after what has happened in Beijing? It wasn't fair." Six years later, Zhang returned to his home town, Shanghai, where he now works as a film producer with his friend, director Lou Ye. His films have titles such as *Don't Be Young and Weekend Lovers*. The two men belong to the generation who grew up after the 1966-76 period of leftist turmoil known as the Cultural Revolution.

Looking back, Zhang says: "The government first broke down religion and told the Chinese to be communists. Then, after the Cultural Revolution, people asked themselves, 'Why did we believe the bullshit?' The people couldn't believe anything any more. They were very confused."

This confusion will be reflected in a novel he is planning to write and the theme of a new film which I have called *The China Age* - the years from 1979 to 1989.

He praises retired senior leader Deng Xiaoping, who introduced economic liberalisation and foreign trade po-

CHINA

The years of upheaval

- 1949: Communists win power
- 1950-55: Land reform, nationalisation, extensive health and education programmes
- 1957: Campaign to 'Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend' replaced by anti-Rightist crackdown against critics
- 1958: Great Leap Forward for rural collectivisation and urban industrialisation
- 1959-61: Famine kills 20m
- 1960: Split with Soviet Union
- 1962: Mao Zedong's power temporarily slips after failure of Great Leap Forward
- 1966-76: Estimated 10m killed in Cultural Revolution upheaval
- 1976: Mao's death sparks internal feud
- 1978: 'Four Modernisations' (agriculture, industry, defence, science) launched
- 1979: Brief invasion of Vietnam for supporting China's opponents in Cambodia
- 1981: 'Gang of Four' jailed to symbolise end of era of revolutionary struggle
- 1986: Student demonstrations force resignation of party general-secretary; campaign against 'bourgeois liberalism'
- 1989: Martial law in Tibet after rioting; Hundreds of reformist students killed in Beijing massacre
- 1990s: Economic liberalisation stepped up

licés, for "opening the door to many Western influences. I still think Deng was a very brave man to do that."

For ordinary people, especially the old, the opening of China to the outside world after decades of isolation meant more confusion.

"The young people wanted to start something new. But

the whole society - the authorities, our families - were trying to stop us," he recalls. In the early days, even dancing to pop music was banned as being too intimate.

Zhang fights tears when he talks about his struggles: "We had no sexual life; no future. In other parts of the world you can start an educa-

sion. Here you don't know what will happen." His parents were not able to help much. Their life had been devastated by the Cultural Revolution.

"One day I discovered my mother had been reading my diary. I was very upset as I felt she was intruding on my privacy. This, in turn, made my parents very upset. They said that in Chinese families there is no such thing as privacy, that I shouldn't write down such thoughts. "Later, I learnt my father was imprisoned for two years during the Cultural Revolution, based on what other people had read in his diary. My parents were not being nosy - they were only afraid for my future." This fear of what tomorrow may bring had dominated his parents' lives. "My mother died, but my father still thinks anything is possible in China. Now the door to the West is open, but tomorrow it can be closed again. Maybe they were right, but I don't want this fear to dominate my life." Although the events of 1989 left a scar on his soul, he believes that in the end its effects were beneficial. "Officially, Deng started his economic reforms in 1979. For a long time, they were only words. Only in 1980, after the mass murder at Tiananmen Square, did China start the real economic reforms. "It was the," he says. "That the government realised they should listen to the people." — Gemini News

The writer is a Dutch Journalist based in Shanghai.

Freedom from Junk Food

Indians are being exhorted to fight for independence once more. Kunda Dixit of Inter Press Service reports.

millions second only to China. Coke-slayer George Fernandes who was industries minister in 1977, is today a leader of the Santa (Equality) Party and is once more waging war against multinationals peddling aerated drinks and other junk food.

As India's communists copy their Chinese comrades and embrace Market-Leninism, disillusioned leftists have gone to the opposite extreme and found common cause with xenophobic activists like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (Front for National Awakening) to oppose transnational penetra-

tion. The front has been staging anti-TNC rallies all over India, burning Coke effigies. It is allied to the Hindu-based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Shiv Sena combine that won elections earlier this year in India's industrial heartland, the Western coastal state of Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital.

As soon as it came to power, the main opposition party BJP, changed Bombay's official name to its vernacular original: Mumbai. And then it set about keeping its poll promise: to kick out the US energy giant Enron, which had a US\$2.8 billion contract to build a huge power station south of here. The Enron cancellation was politically motivated, but it was another victory for India's grassroots activists who have in the past few years managed to stall several mega-projects like the US\$3 billion Narmada Dam and a US\$200 million Du Pont nylon factory. They have even swept away attempts by the likes of US seed giant Cargill to establish a toe-hold in India. But in Bombay's business circles, there is gloom and cynicism. Says an executive of a US-based food firm that has opened an affiliate here: "We are going to be more cautious, this current anti-out-

sider feeling is not very healthy."

The tremors are already being felt in other BJP-controlled states. Another Enron project for generating 2,500 megawatts of solar energy — the second largest project of its kind in the world — is facing problems in the desert state of Rajasthan.

A Siemens multi-cycle plant in BJP-ruled Gujarat state has hit the headlines over a pay-off scandal. Elsewhere foreign investors, learning quickly from the cancellation of Enron, are hurriedly revising their cost estimates for power projects downwards.

More than the psychological impact of the Enron affair, businessmen here are worried about what they see as a looming power shortage in the years to come as economic growth far outstrips the growth in installed generation capacity.

