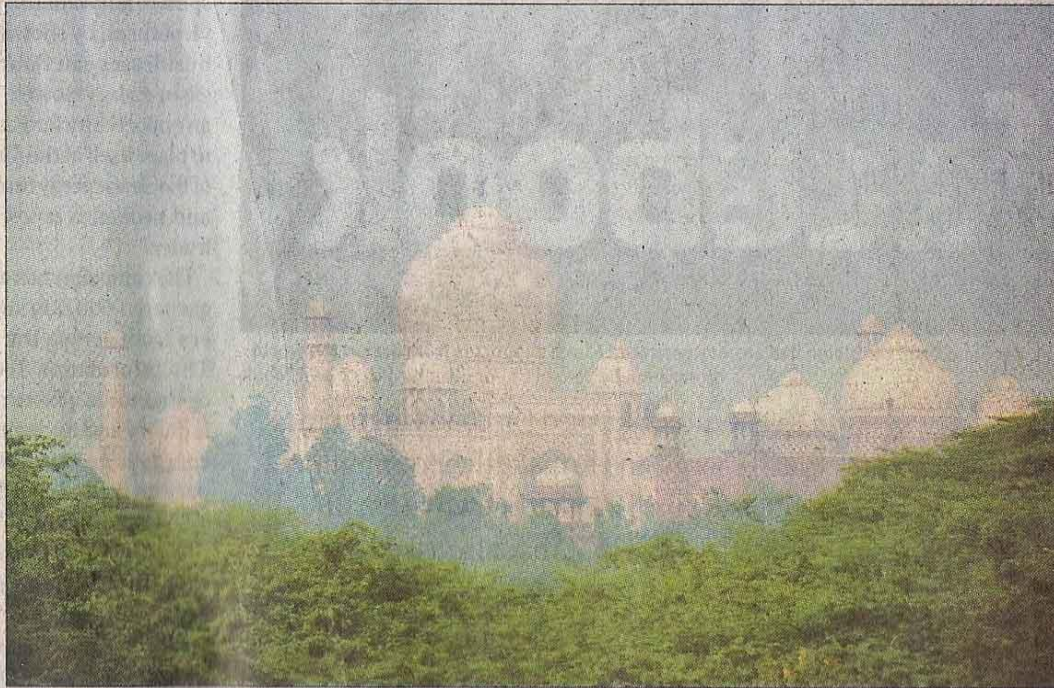


# Film on Man who saved Taj looking for Indian buyer

ANJANA PRADHAN

**T**aj Mahal, that famous symbol of eternal love built by Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, has been under threat ever since its gleaming white marble walls started turning yellow due to pollution caused by the traffic, brick kilns, glass factories and oil refineries in Agra city. Moved by the plight of the World Heritage site, M.C. Mehta, then a young lawyer, took to the streets to save the monument. During his 12-year-long legal battle against the government, he became a thorn to many in authority. This was in the early 1980s. Now after almost two decades, a 56-minute documentary on the man who saved the Taj Mahal has completed filming. Written and directed by Canadian filmmaker Jay Bajaj, *The Man Who Saved the Taj Mahal* will be screened for Delhi's audience at the Indian Habitat Centre on February 26.

"I was extremely moved by a speech I heard Mehta make five years ago in New York. It moved me for two reasons. First, he stammers when he speaks in English. It made me wonder how he had addressed



Still from the film *The Man Who Saved The Taj Mahal*

the Supreme Court of India while fighting to save the Taj. Secondly, he was fighting the battle all alone without any payment," said Bajaj, clearly an admirer of underdog stories.

The film, which was screened during the International Film Festival of India 2010, has seven segments

that deal with seven different cases that Mehta, as a Delhi-based lawyer and environmental activist, fought against the government for causing threat to the mausoleum. Bajaj says, "He sued the Indian Government, stating that the Taj Mahal was dying of marble cancer. He pointed out that the Mathura Refinery and the

other small-scale industries located in the vicinity were causing pollution and acid rain that was damaging the monument."

The film also has a short clip of former US President Bill Clinton standing outside the Taj Mahal. "It was necessary to include this portion in the film as the former US

President has also appealed to the world audience to stand up for the protection of the Taj on the same grounds as Mehta, and his inclusion in the film makes it more attractive to the Western audience," said Bajaj who is now struggling to trade the documentary which he took seven months to complete.

"So far only SUN TV of Canada has bought the film. I hope an Indian broadcaster will buy it soon to air in India," says Bajaj. "It took me four years to find a broadcaster who financed 25 percent of the film. I personally invested in the rest of the film," he adds. However, he points out that the primary purpose of the film was to honour the man who saved the pristine heritage monument. But how does the man himself feel on being documented? Mehta says, "I did my job, and it's a pleasure to know that your work has been appreciated especially when you are a lone fighter and the tunnel is dark. Simple appreciation adds a ray of hope to issues like these. I hope that the documentary will inspire others to work for the protection of the environment, the preservation of heritage monuments and the welfare of the people."