

Photo Feature

World Press Photo Comes to Dhaka

Bangladesh is host to the world's most prestigious photojournalistic show thir-tyeight years after its (WPP) inception in 1955.

— Compiled by Shahidul Alam

winning photo gets an award of 2,500 Dutch guilders and an invitation to attend the award ceremony.

Also the annual exhibition WPP possesses a historical retrospective exhibition entitled Eye Witness. This exhibition of approximately 200 photographs comprises a unique selection from all WPP exhibitions from 1955 to the present. It is a selection of press photos that shock people, stir them, astonish them or make them smile.



Newsweek's cover photo by Pavel Rahman

THE world Press Photo (WPP) exhibition opens at the Drik Gallery in Dhaka on the 2nd August 1993. This year's contest, the biggest in WPP's history, shows the finest works from almost 20,000 photographs submitted by 2,000 authors from 84 countries.

Towards the end of each year World Press Photo sends out an invitation to photojournalists, photo press agencies, newspapers and magazines throughout the world to submit the best press photographs of that year.

These press photos, in black and white or colour, compete for the prizes awarded by the independent international jury.

There is no charge for entering into the competition and there is no prior selection. Each submitted photo or series of photos has the same chance of being awarded a prize or being included in the annual exhibition.

The WPP Exhibition after Amsterdam start on a journey round the world from New York to Peking and from Mexico to Moscow, and now to Bangladesh. Submissions for the international photo competition cover the entire range of photojournalism and are divided into nine different categories.

- Spot News
—News Features
—People in the News

- Sports
—Humour
—Arts
—Science and Technology
—Nature
—Daily Life

The international jury is considered a "United Nations of Press Photography". This independent jury of nine members, made up of leading publishers, photojournalists, writers and art directors, judges the submitted work, and presents the winners in each category with the Golden Eye, which could be regarded as the international Oscar for photojournalism.

Finally, the PRESS PHOTO OF THE YEAR is chosen from the winning photos. The photographer receives a prize of 5,000 Dutch guilders together with an invitation to be the guest of honour at the official ceremony which takes place in Amsterdam.

The International Jury of World Press Photo has the additional task of awarding the Oscar Barnack Prize, and the Budapest Prize. The Oscar Barnack Prize was instituted in 1979 by Ernst Letz Wetzlar on the centenary of Oscar Barnack, the pioneer of miniature photography. The theme of this prize is the relationship between man and his environment.

The prize is worth 10,000 Dutch guilders and includes a return flight to Amsterdam to attend the official award ceremony.

The Budapest Prize of 1,000 US dollars plus an invitation to the Spring Festival in Budapest was established by the Hungarian Tourist Board and has a different theme each year.

For several years young people too have been involved in

World Press Photo. An international jury of children each year chooses the Children Press Photo of the Year. This is an activity involving a number of large European newspapers on the initiative of the Dutch Newspaper De Volkskrant and Dutch school television. The



Children's press photo of the year, 1993: A Somali boy runs towards an aid outside Baidoa. — Photo Joel Robine/Agence France Press

For Photographers, it's a Long Road to Success

Sheikh Mohammad Yakub sits quietly in the corner of the Press Club, his eyes glued to the TV. After twenty-six years of service with the PID, his pension of Tk 1156.30 offers him little comfort. Though the senior-most press photographer in the country had been a working professional from pre-partition days, he and his colleagues had little scope in early East Pakistan days; but it was because of Yakub that the later generation, at that stage mostly bromide printers, who picked up photography. Sadly Yakub's negatives, including rare photographs of the pre-partition riots and the ones in Bihar, were kept with a friend for safe keeping while he was trapped in the west wing. Yakub managed to trek his way back through Afghanistan, but his friend, in fear for his own life burnt all his negatives in 1971.

The early Bangla newspapers, Zindagi and Insaaf did not really use photographs much, except for the occasional portraits which were block-printed. It was when Mahbubur Rahman (Moti Bhai), the owner of Orient Studio in Nawabpur

began to peddle his sports photographs to all the newspapers for Tk 5 each, that news photography really took off. The block making process took almost a full day, and the photographs were never current. The Observer and Azad were the leading newspapers, and it was Obaidur Rahman Firoz who in the late 1950s became the first fulltime news photographer. The Observer paid him Tk 150 per month. The photographs were processed in Orient Studio, or Lal Bhai's Studio, or by Mozammel.

In 1960 the Observer converted one of its toilets to a darkroom. Azad and the Morning News and later Ittefaq went for staff photographers, but the photograph was not given much importance. A B M Musa of the Observer began to publish the first photo features using big 4/5 column blow-ups. Regular features on everyday events like 'Mr Observer goes on wheels' became quickly popular. Mozammel's photographs of kids jumping cross roofs of Old Dhaka, on kite flying sessions, and his photographs of police lathi charges (where he himself broke his leg)

and of course the first photographs of the bare-foot procession on the 21st February, endeared him to the public. A Chowdhury of the Pakistan Times brought with him the first telephoto lens when he photographed the India-Pakistan cricket test in 1953. The first 35mm camera (Nikon F) belonged to Kamrul Alam Khan, the managing editor of Azad. The camera, along with two lenses, got stolen and was later purchased by Matin for Tk 2,500. Thus 35mm photography had begun. Huda and Matin, and later Aftab Ahmed began to make way for a new generation of innovative photographers, Zahurul Huq, Muazzem Hossain Bulu, Monwar Hossain Manik, Rashid Talukder, Akil Khan, and of course Golam Mawla. The 60s were the glory days of news photography, and a major reason being the technological change to offset printing. No longer was a photograph just a blob of ink with a caption. Zaman of the Observer was an innovator who began to use cellophane in place of the traditional methods of etching, and later used gumming-out techniques to print colour. It was

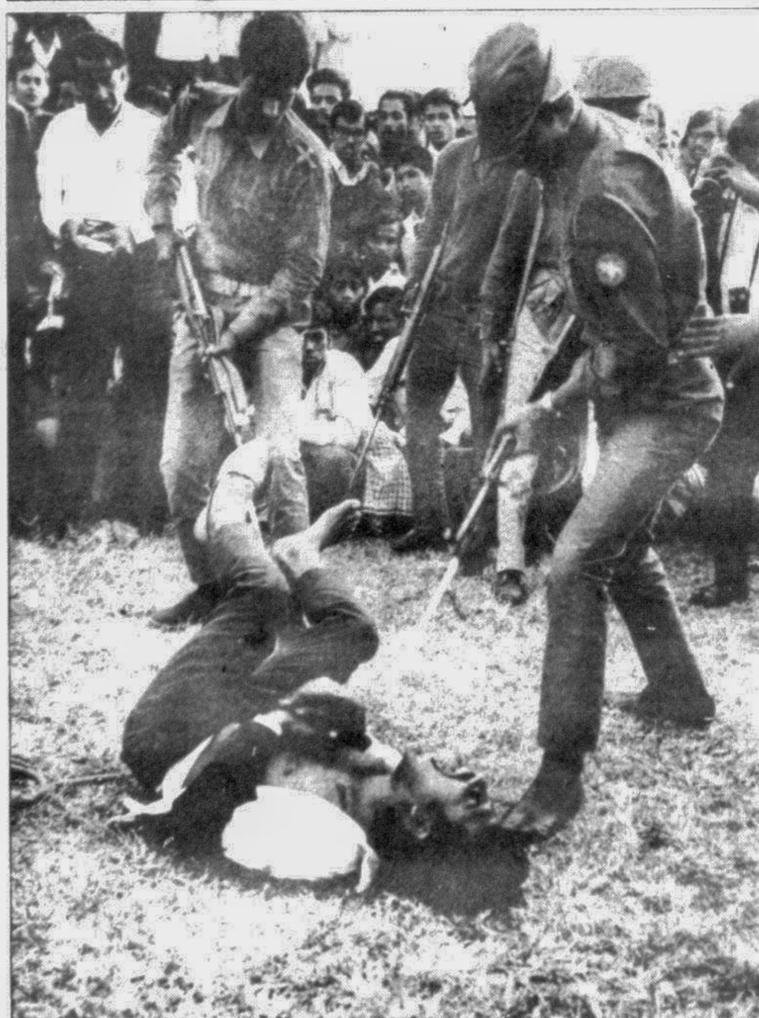
Chitrali and Cinema Star who began printing the first colour photographs in 1962, printing mainly glamour shots of film stars. The Observer introduced colour to news in 1965.

In the 70s, during the floods, Akil Khan's photographs of snakes and people coexisting, pushed the circulation of Dainik Bangla to one lakh. That was also the time when Golam Mawla's photographs of the 70's cyclone filled almost the entire front page of Dainik Bangla. A new trend in photography with a human angle had been set.

Though much of their work was never seen by the public, the press photographers took great risks to document enough of what happened in 1971. Sadly except for the few who got to see the exhibition in Delhi in '72, many of the photographs have never been seen again by the people of Bangladesh. Talukder's photograph of the killings on the 16th December remained unpublished as it would have spelt sure death for Talukder. A less emotive photograph of the same event won an American photographer the Pulitzer. By this time photographers were seeing more international work, and were trying to attain international status themselves. Editors began to see new ways of using photographs and became more liberal in the way pictures could be used. Very few people remember that it was a photographer, Shamsul Islam Almajr, who won Bangladesh's first gold in GDR in 1976. The later shooting successes that the nation went bananas about pales in comparison.

A new crop of photographers were coming to the fore. Muzammel, Bulu, Pavel, Benu and Rafique were all given scholarships, mostly organised by the Press Institute, where ABM Musa, the DG had a significant role to play. Musa also organised the first major workshop, inviting T Kaushi Nath and Mukherjee from India. More recently Azizur Rahim Peu won a scholarship to Germany. Rashid Talukder of the old school continued to do good work, but years of police brutality began to take its toll and the new generation with motor drives and faster, longer lenses, began to assert themselves. Rafiqur Rahman, Pavel Rahman and Mufti Munir joined the international news agencies — Reuters, AP and AFP respectively, and Huda also occasionally contributes to AP. Their photographs often grace the front pages of major news magazines and international dailies. The wire services in these agencies transmitted several hundred photographs by these photographers during the cyclone in 1991 which were circulated widely.

In 1992 Shahidul Alam's work 'The Struggle for Democracy' won the Mother Jones' International Award for Documentary Photography, the first time the award has been won by someone from Asia or Australia. Alam's inclusion in the international jury for the World Press Photo in 1994 heralds a new era for Bangladesh photographers.



Razakar paid in his own coin.

— Photo Rashid Talukder/Drik

Drik : A Picture Library with a Difference

In September '89, a small group of people, in an effort to change the negative portrayal of people in the developing world set up a picture library, not in the traditional locations of London, New York or Paris, but in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Drik, a Sanskrit word, stands for vision, inner vision, philosophy of vision. Drik Picture Library was set up with the vision that photographers and writers from the developing world would be given a chance to portray their people and their cultures through their own eyes. Their sensitivity, their knowledge and the depth of their understanding would create a more meaningful and honest portrayal than had ever been attempted or desired by foreign journalists on week-end assignments.

It was an attempt to extract at least a degree of control from

the West in terms of how people in poorer nations were represented. Three years and 45,000 images later, Drik stands tall amongst image banks in the Third World, not only in the quality or quantity of its images but through the nature of its work. It has taken active part in the democratic struggle in Bangladesh, and has campaigned against oppression in all spheres. Through Drik, photographers and writers in the Third World have had access to the most prestigious publications in the world, and their network has created an appreciation of their own strength, and the confidence that grows from it.

Drik has talented photographers skilled in portraiture, advertising and editorial work, experienced writers, a modern photographic studio for hire, laboratories providing the highest quality printing and

processing and duplication services, produces exhibitions and AV (audio-visual) shows, sells original photographic prints, and provides a consultancy service for publication and design. A fulltime librarian and an assistant librarian are gradually building up an extensive collection of images of the flora and fauna, physical heritage, political history and cultural and ethnic roots of the country. There are important sections on industry, crafts and architecture, but a historical section that has glass plates dating back to 1918 is its pride. Currently Drik is being set up as a photographic resource centre with a reading room, cafe, a design studio for pre-press work, as well as extra dark-rooms and a meeting place for artists which complement the Drik Gallery all set to house the World Press Photo 1993 Exhibition.

The World

In a Cyclone's Swath Across Bangladesh, A Hard Life Revives

THIRTY charts in the name for the first victims in the delta where the Ganges meets the sea in Bangladesh. In a richer country, an area would live on hundreds of millions that live only a few feet above the waters. In many areas, the cyclone took an untold toll, the world's most vulnerable people, the world's poorest, the world's most neglected. The poor have no choice but to get up and try to make a living fishing the Bay of Bengal or planting rice in the mud. On the night of April 28, an enormous cyclone struck. Winds rose to 150 mph, waves were 30 feet high, and those they hit were lost. Boats, crops, settlements—everything by the official estimate that no one can verify for the accuracy of 100,000 dead. Quickly, people have been rebuilding. The government is helping, the international community is providing relief. About 100 American military personnel worked for two weeks in these pictures, taken in cooperation from the CARE and Oxfam relief agencies by photographers for Drik, a picture library for Third World photographers, both the independent and the state-run. The little girl in the top was rescued by a distant uncle. The crops are returning. For better or worse, the others are a hunched again.



Fishermen in Maheshkhali rebuilding their boats. Many sought an area by the storm wave downcast.

An orphan of the storm on the plot of land that was once her home.

A week after the cyclone, salt water still had to be carried from distant wells.

In a land where nearly 900,000 children die every year without disaster, a nurse from CARE teaches mothers in the Cor's Bazaar area about immunization.



Full-page display of pictures by Bangladesh photographers in the New York's Times.