

## Interview

## Through western eyes

Dirk A. Frans talks about his exhibition of photographs at Drik

FAYZA HAQ

DIRK A Frans, speaking about what brought him into photography, which he put together in his exhibition, "Images and Impressions" recently at Drik, says, "Basically I had the privilege of seeing many beautiful scenes in the world and I wanted to show those scenes to others. As a child I was lucky enough to travel a



Dirk A Frans

lot also, while working in Bangladesh, I had the opportunity to travel once again a lot and I've seen many things that others haven't. My father used to work for 'Shell' and I had lived in Trinidad, Nigeria, Oman, Gabon etc. As an adult I've worked in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Rwanda and Nepal, apart from Bangladesh. I took photographs of all these places and in particular of Rwanda, I found a sad situation when I went there as a part of relief organization in the 1994 war. I had many awful pictures of skulls and dead people. This is my first exhibition and I did not have one earlier as I felt that I was one of the many photographers and if I do an exhibition there is nothing unusual about my work. But here a number of people encouraged me, including Dr Shahidul Alam from Drik gallery and some of my foreign friends like Dr Sarah Bennett from USA, who advised me, 'just go ahead and see.'

Talking about how different his photographs are from landscape painting, Frans says, "I don't particularly focus on landscapes although they are included in my pictures. I focus on people and development issues which is not often related to landscape. I am a sociologist and I work in participatory development,

and I am particularly interested in seeing how people develop their lives and become more secure in their living and how they can be better to feed their families."

Speaking about his job in Bangladesh, Frans says, "I first came here working for an NGO, HEED (Health, Education, Economic Development) Bangladesh, and there they had a policy that all foreigners should learn Bangla. At that time I thought the idea was stupid because I felt 'Why waste time on learning a language?' However, after three months I realized, how important it was to know the language and having learnt it, I realize that it has benefitted me ever afterwards. Now it is far easier for me to go to work in Bangladesh and I don't need an interpreter. I can now talk to people themselves and get from them what they think. I studied for three months at the beginning, went back to Netherlands, and on returning studied for nine months more. I am still learning Bangla by actually using it and I've been here for 16 years off and on."

"My wife and I came here first 25 years ago. I now work as a consultant for Government Engineering Dept. as a participatory development. I took photographs everywhere I went for work. I took photos both for work and for my private collection. Many of the pictures in my report are also from my private collection. I would say that I have taken over 20,000 shots of Bangladesh. This was a very expensive pursuit. The way I got into this on a more or less professional basis is related to the expense. When I first worked here as a volunteer, I had a camera that was given to me by my father and within two years, due to humidity and the general muggy weather, fungus developed and it went bad. I wanted to buy a new camera in Bangladesh. And this was 25 years ago. However, as a volunteer I had no money and so bought a good second-hand Nikon camera. The first time I used it when I went to the closure of a river at Feni by six thousand laborers for irrigation, it didn't work. This was, photographically an excellent opportunity. I had taken pictures all day but when I had them developed there were only three pictures that were



OK in seven rolls".

Frans adds, "I later saw an article in the 'National Geographic' and I'm pretty sure that if my pictures had been OK they would have been better than the ones in 'National Geographic'. My problem was that I didn't have money for a good camera. I realized that I had spoilt a great opportunity because I hadn't the right equipment. As a consequence I



went and borrowed money to buy a new Nikon camera. As I had to repay the loan, I started selling pictures and this was mostly overseas to an agent in Holland, and he sold them to development journals, monthly

magazines, text books for schools etc."

Asked as to which places of Bangladesh he had taken pictures of most, Frans says, "That would be most probably Dhaka as I spent most of my time here. However, I have visited and worked at all but two of the districts of Bangladesh i.e. Kishoreganj and Netrakona, sometimes being there for as long as even



a year, and I've taken pictures all along, taking my camera wherever I go. Here, at the exhibition I have presented numerous places like Cox's Bazaar, Narayanganj, Bholal Barisal etc. Almost all the districts

are basically represented."

Speaking about his experiences while taking the photographs, Frans says, "I usually don't start taking pictures without speaking to the people. I'm pretty sure that the people don't mind me taking the pictures. Only very occasionally they say that they don't want the pictures and then I don't take those particular subjects."

Talking about the photographers that he admires, Frans says, "I am not particular on to the photographic scene. I have a lot of respect for the different photographers at 'Drik', Dr Shahidul Alam in particular. I really admire the young photographers, the 'out of focus' group, the working class boys and girls who are getting into photography."

In comparison, I myself come from a very privileged background and there was money to develop and print my photos which I took with my father's camera. As an adult, basically I can do whatever I want.

These working class boys and girls don't have my experience as a youth of travelling all over the world and yet they are getting on with their photography and they are doing a good job. One of the aspects of this exhibition is that through the sale of the display, my book and my other pictures I will be helping these 'out of focus' photographers to get better equipment in order to take better pictures. Fortunately, the Dutch



and girls are being trained for the last six to seven years and they use simple equipment like a fixed lens camera. These youths are being trained in photography and other skills so that they are now making a living. The wonderful thing is that these people come from a different background. As a middle class western male, I have a particular view of society. Since I cannot easily take pictures of women, certainly not inside the house, these working class girls can go in and take remarkable pictures. I am interested in those kinds of photographers and not particularly the big names but those who do innovative work, and who will probably be the big names in future."

Asked what made a good photograph, Frans says, "This is difficult to say. In many ways, when you see a picture and say 'wow' then it is a good photograph. Sometimes you take images to pass on a message, to say something about a country or the people, a site or a project. A lot depends on what you want to communicate. A good photograph is one that will remember."

Dwelling why he had gone in for colour photography, Frans says, "I feel that a photographer has to develop his own style and I've con-

centrated on colour pictures because I think it expresses more than black and white does."

Dr Shahidul Alam of Drik comments that the work in the exhibition, which spans two decades, is both professional and personal and covers a wide range of images that include a vast breadth of activities and location. Frans, he says, has not avoided presenting the daily scenes on the streets, which includes rallies and "hartals", a part of the emerging democracy. He continues, that while the pictures are images of a foreign tourist and pictures of his family, he has not documented his own people, "the donor circuit". He adds that Frans is a "part time" photographer which implies a certain amateur characteristic... The 'amateur' medium is not so bad for if love of the medium is what drives the amateur, then there is no lacking here. He continues to say, "All perceptions are subjective. While we may rightly question the validity of the representation of our cultures by visiting photographers out to fulfill a distant editor's definition of our country; our own perceptions bound by class, gender, race and a familiarity that often prevents us from questioning also need to be examined... this is no fly-by-night photographer."



The Next Generation

American International School - Dhaka (AIS/D) will hold the elementary school play 'The Next Generation' - a musical about the twelve rights of children on May 24 (7:00 p.m.), May 25 - 26 (2:00 p.m.) at the AIS/D auditorium at 12, United Nations Road, Baridhara. Tickets are available at the AIS/D elementary school office.

## Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends

Organised by the High Commission of India, a ten day exhibition titled 'Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends' will start at the High Commission of India Cultural Centre on May 24 at 6:00 p.m. The exhibition features works by fourteen prominent artists of Bangladesh and also marks the inauguration of the newly renovated Art Gallery of the High Commission.

The exhibition will remain open from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. till June 2.

**Bonsai Exhibition**  
The 4th solo exhibition of Bonsai by Arham-ul-Haq Chowdhury will start at the Bengal Gallery (Bengal Shilpalya, 275/F, Road 27 old, Dhamondi) on May 24 at 5:00 p.m. The exhibition will remain open to all from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. everyday till May 31.



Paintings for the Liberation War Museum

A painting exhibition by Kanak Chanda Chakma and Khalid Mahmud Mithu will start at the Saju Art Gallery in Gulshan on May 25 at 5:30 p.m. The artists donated all these artworks for Liberation War Museum's fund raising.

The exhibition will remain open to all from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. till May 31.

## TV GUIDE

## PICK OF THE DAY



Congo

On HBO at 10 tonight

An ill assort band of scientists, mercenaries, try to find the treasure lying in Africa. Guarded by a vicious tribe of killer apes little do they know that once they enter Zinji, they'll become the endangered species.

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

**EKUSHEY:** 8:00 p.m. *Bandhan*. Episode 7: Mother comes back. Everyone knows how she and father got married. A stranger arrives at the house.

**EKUSHEY:** 9:45 p.m. *Sharashari*. Guest: Politician and Businessman, Yousuf Abdullah Harun. Talking about business, he also expresses his opinion on the current political scenario.

**STAR WORLD:** 11:00 p.m. *Ally McBeal*. *I Will Survive*: Fish hires attorney Mark Albert as Billy's replacement; the lawyers defend a woman accused of beating her husband to death with his prosthetic leg.

**STAR PLUS (INDIA)**  
10:30 Action: Chance 65  
10:30 Action Raw Deal 101  
10:15 Comedy: Bill And Ted's excellent Adventure 86  
12:00 Thriller: Brokedown Palace 97  
1:45 Action Resurrection Man 104  
3:30 Drama Seeds of Injustice 92  
5:15 Action Deadly Bet 88  
7:00 Hollywood Action Night Without Malice 92  
8:45 Action Belly 92  
10:30 Action Raw Deal 101  
12:30 Thriller: Hand that Rocks The Cradle 110  
2:30 Action deadly Bet 88  
4:30 Action Cahymes 85

## STAR MOVIES

6:30 Actin: Chance 65  
7:15 World Business Report  
7:30 Click Online  
8:30 Reporters  
9:30 Asia Today  
10:00 BBC News/World Business Report  
10:30 Face to Face  
11:30 World Business Report/World Sport  
12:30 Hardtalk  
1:30 Top Gear  
3:30 PANI  
4:30 Asia Business Report/Asia Today  
5:30 Asia Business Report/Asia Today

## HBO

6:30 Excalibur  
9:30 A Few Good Men  
12:15 Stepmom  
2:45 Losing Isaiyah  
5:00 You've Got Mail  
7:30 Little Women  
10:00 Congo  
12:15 Meet Joe Black  
3:45 A Few Good Men

## STAR GOLD

10:30 Woodland Bollywood News  
11:00 Geet Bahar  
11:30 Milap (Dev Anand, Geeta Bali)  
3:00 Woodland Bollywood News  
3:30 Dil Ki Rani (Raj Kapoor, Madhubala)

## CHANNEL-1

6:15 Drama: Dritto Satta  
7:40 Sai Teke Suru  
8:00 Din Profidin  
8:25 Business Show  
9:00 Drama: Eka  
10:10 Addar Table  
10:40 I Focus  
11:15 Drama: Dritto Satta  
12:40 Sai Theke Suru  
1:15 Business Show  
2:00 Drama: Eka  
3:00 Bangla Cinema: Harano Sur

## PM

6:00 Reciting from Holy Quran  
6:10 Suvo Sandha  
6:40 Arto O Nithi  
7:15 Drama: Ankur  
8:30 I Tele Quise  
8:40 Music Circle  
9:15 Drama: Nepotho Kahini  
9:30 I Tele Quise  
10:00 Musical Programme  
11:00 Bangla Cinema: Ful Or Kata

## ATN

5:30 Islamic Program  
7:00 Musical Prog. "ATN Music"  
7:35 Dance Prog. "Dance Dance"

## 8:05 Drama Serial: "Uttaran"

8:40 Drama Serial: "Jibon Jekane Sesha"

## 9:15 Special Prog: Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in LDC Seminar

9:50 Musical Prog: Ganer Prohro  
10:25 Megaserial: Vidyroh  
11:00 Bengali Film: Bondini

6:32 Health care Prog: Sustha Thakur  
7:10 Film Song's Prog: Surchobi

7:50 Drama Serial: Lokesher Loknath  
8:25 Film Magazine: Dalwood Bichitra

9:00 Discussion Prog: Ektaaer sonic

9:35 Drama: Priyo Shilpi Priyo Gan

10:10 Drama: Tumi Robay Nirbo

11:15 Bengali Feature Film: Shadona

12:00 Law and Order: Special Victims Unit

5:30 Reporters

10:30 Talking Movies

11:30 Earth Report

12:30 Hardtalk

1:30 Holiday

2:30 Reporters

3:30 Hardtalk

4:30 Predictions

5:30 Reporters

10:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

11:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

12:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

1:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

2:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

3:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

4:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

5:30 Asia Today/Asia Business Report

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