

Where Elbows do the Talking

It was a mixed week. Sandwiched in between the hartals and the ekushey barefoot walks and the launch disaster, were news items that led to very different emotions at Drik. Shoeb Faruquee, the photographer from Chittagong, won the 2nd prize in the Contemporary Issues, Singles, category of the world's premier photojournalism contest World Press Photo. The photograph of the mental patient locked by the legs as in a medieval stock, is a haunting image that is sure to shake the viewer. However, the stark black and white image tells a story that is far from black and white. In a nation with limited resources, medical care for all is far from reality. Expensive western treatment is beyond the reach of most, and has often been shown to be flawed. Alternative forms of treatment is the choice of many. The fact that the boy photographed was said to have been healed, further complicates the reading of this image. Shoeb is one of many majority world photographers who have attempted to understand the complexities of their cultures, which rarely offer simplistic readings.

http://www.worldpressphoto.nl/index.php?option=com_photogallery&task=view&id=240&type=byname&Itemid=119&bandwidth=low

It was later in the week, that Azizur Rahim Peu, told me that the affable contributor to Drik, Mufty Munir, had died after a short illness at the Holy Family Hospital. I would contact Mufty when I was in trouble, needing to send pictures to Time, Newsweek or some other publication. We would work into the night at the AFP bureau, utilising the time difference, to ensure the pictures made it to the picture desk in the morning. Occasionally, while hanging out at the Press Club waiting for breaking news, we would dash off together. Mufty uncomfortably perched on the back of my bicycle and me puffing away trying to get to the scene in time.

Wire photography is about speed, and their photographers are known for being pushy, but this shy, quiet, self effacing photographer made his way to the top through the quality of his images. We had to push him to have his first show in 1995, which our photography coordinator Gilles Saussier and I curated. The show at the Alliance was a huge success, but Mufty was not impressed by the excitement the show had created. He simply wanted to get on with his work.

He did have problems with authority, or rather, authority had problems with him. Despite his shyness, he was a straight talking photographer, who didn't hesitate to protest when things weren't right. Not being the subservient minion the gatekeepers of our media are accustomed to, he often got into trouble. But the clarity of his protests played an important role in establishing photographers' rights. In the abrasive world of press photography, where elbows do much of the talking, this gentle talented practitioner will be dearly missed.

Unknown to the rest of us, the brother of Rob, the gardener at Drik, died in the launch that sank in the storm at the weekend.

Shahidul Alam
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