

“As a journalist, your only space is at the edge. You have to be constantly feeling the heat. Go back one more step, and you may cease to be effective. There are no safe options, and no prizes for popularity. If you’re not making certain people uncomfortable by your presence, you must be doing something wrong. The struggle for change is a never-ending process that requires you to be constantly alert, and forever swimming against the current. It is a lonely, stressful, tiring and immensely gratifying journey.”

Shahidul Alam has a wealth of experience in photography, holography, digital imaging, photomechanical reproduction, design, picture library management, information technology, communication and education. Born in Dhaka in 1955, he studied and taught chemistry in the UK where he obtained a PhD from London University. He started photography in 1980 during a hitch-hiking trip across the USA and Canada. In 1983 he was nominated the best photographer of the year (Harvey Harris Trophy) by the London Arts Council. Returning to Bangladesh in 1984, he started as a commercial and advertising photographer, gradually working his way towards his main passion, photojournalism. Alongside, he became involved in the photography movement in Bangladesh, and served as the secretary general of the Bangladesh Photographic Society from 1984, until he left the society, after three terms as president, to start the celebrated picture library Drik, and eventually setup Pathshala, The South Asian Institute of photography. During his tenure as president of the society, he had formed the Bangladesh Institute of Photography. He became involved in the popular resistance against autocratic president General Ershad from 1987 and has continued a body of work he calls ‘The Struggle for Democracy’. Ershad was forced to step down at the end of 1990. Two years later Alam’s body of work won him the Mother Jones Award. It was the first time a South Asian had won the prestigious award. Alam founded Meghbarta, Bangladesh’s first webzine in 1999, Chobi Mela the first festival of photography in Asia in 2000 and the Bangladesh Human Rights Network, Banglarights, in 2001. In 2002, he co-founded Majorityworld.com, an online image bank dedicated to promoting the work of majority world media practitioners. A Jury member of numerous international photographic competitions including World Press Photo (WPP) where he has been a judge on three previous occasions, Alam is currently chair of the year 2003 WPP jury. He was awarded the Andrea Frank Foundation Award and the Howard Chapnick Awards and is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. A prominent social activist, Alam is a promoter of new media and helped introduce email to Bangladesh in 1994. He also setup the first web portal for Bangladesh. Alam has lectured and published widely on photography, new media and education and has been conducting a regular television show on photography. His work has been shown in leading galleries such as the Museums of Modern Art in New York, Oxford, and Gunma, the Photographer’s Gallery in London, the George Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Tehran.