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Asian Photography

Vol. 38 - No. 8

REVIEW

**XIAOMI 17
ULTRA**

PRO-PROFILE

**CAPTURING
LIFE AS IS**

- Zach Dobson

**GROUNDED
IN CLOSENESS**

- Laurin Strele

TIPS AND TECHS

**HOW TO
THINK LIKE A
PHOTOJOURNALIST**

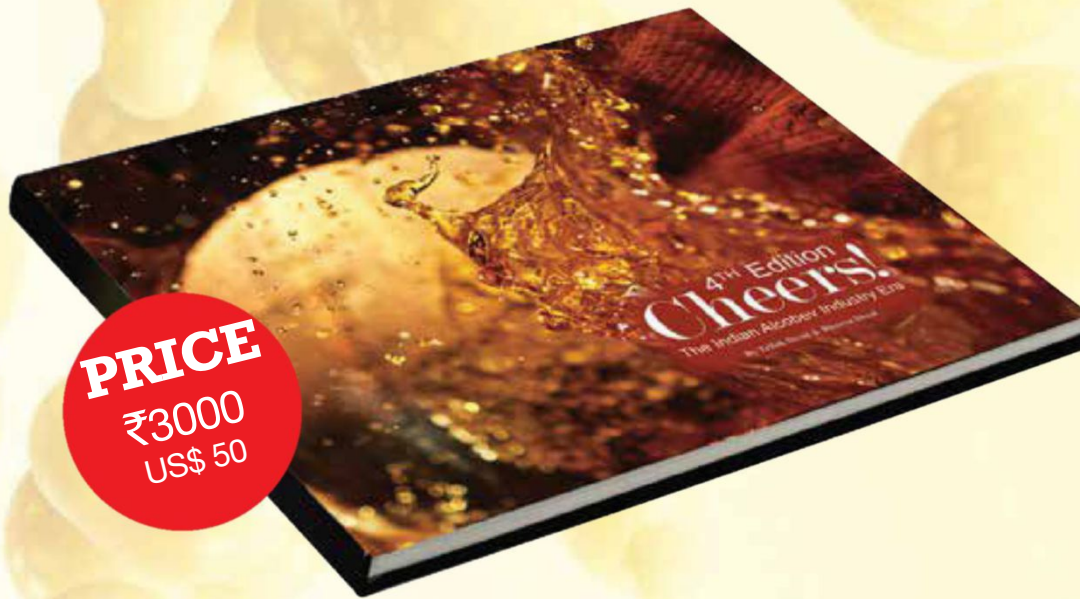
**SHOOTING
UNDER
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**THE ROLE
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RULE IN
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Beyond the Headlines

In an age where billions of images are captured every day, photojournalism continues to remind us that photography is not simply about recording events, it's about revealing their meaning. A powerful news photograph does more than show what happened; it helps us understand where it happened, who it affected, and why that moment matters. As this issue explores, visual storytelling gains its greatest strength when context, subject, and emotion work together in harmony.

The feature on the Three-Shot Rule beautifully illustrates this philosophy. By combining a wide shot for context, a medium shot for human connection, and a close-up for emotional impact, photographers move beyond isolated frames and build narratives that resonate with viewers long after the image has been seen. The approach echoes the structure of written journalism—setting the scene, introducing the characters, and delivering the emotional truth at the heart of the story.

This issue also features inspiring profiles of Laurin Strele and Zach Dobson who have used the camera not just as a creative tool, but as a means of observation and storytelling. Their journeys highlight the diverse paths that lead into photography and demonstrate how persistence, curiosity, and a strong visual voice can shape meaningful careers. Such profiles are important because they remind us that behind every compelling image is a photographer who has learned to see beyond the obvious and connect deeply with people, places, and moments.

What makes photojournalism truly remarkable is that it demands both instinct and preparation. News unfolds unpredictably, yet experienced photographers arrive with an understanding of the story they are seeking to tell. They anticipate moments, observe details others may overlook, and create images that preserve not only facts, but also atmosphere, tension, and humanity.

At *Asian Photography*, we believe photojournalism remains one of the most important responsibilities a photographer can undertake. Whether documenting conflict, celebration, protest, or everyday life, the camera has the power to inform, question, and connect societies. In a world saturated with fleeting visuals, thoughtful photojournalism stands apart by transforming moments into stories that endure—and stories, ultimately, are what shape our collective memory.

So Until Next Time...

Happy Clicking!

Bhavya Desai

Bhavya Desai

bhavya_desai



Asian_photography_magazine



AsianPhotographyMagazine

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Cover shot by: Laurin Strele
Cover Design: Rajendra Gaikwad

Published by TRILOK DESAI on behalf of Special Audience Publications Pvt. Ltd., 509 & 511, Dilkap Chambers, Fun Republic Street, Off Veera Desai Road, Andheri (W), Mumbai - 400 053. INDIA

Printed by TRILOK DESAI on behalf of Special Audience Publications Pvt. Ltd., 509 & 511, Dilkap Chambers, Fun Republic Street, Off Veera Desai Road, Andheri (W), Mumbai - 400 053. INDIA

Printed at HARIOM PRINTERS D-80, Akurli Ind. Estate, Akurli Road, Kandivali (E), Mumbai - 400 101. **Published at** 509 & 511, Dilkap Chambers, Fun Republic Street, Off Veera Desai Road, Andheri (W), Mumbai - 400 053. INDIA

Editor - TRILOK DESAI.

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

Readers' Comments and Suggestions...

Send your letters at apindia.feedback@gmail.com



Dear Sir,

I'm using a camera, but I'm not sure about the photo resolution settings. Should I keep the photo format on Standard or switch to High Resolution? Also, the telecamera doesn't have a 10 cm focus distance.

**Regs,
Heizi**

Dear Heizi,

It is always advisable to keep the camera in the high-resolution mode since if the space in your card permits since it will give you more details in the picture. And this recommendation is platform agnostic—it can work with phones, cameras, etc.

When you mentioned about the telecamera—I am not sure what you mean? Since you are mentioning 10 cms then do you mean macro?



LETTERS TO EDITOR

Readers' Comments and Suggestions...

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Dear Editor,

When you are buying a lens then what should you look at?

**Regs,
Riyaz**

Dear Riyaz

When buying a camera lens, key factors to consider include the lens mount compatibility, focal length for your preferred field of view, maximum aperture for low light and background blur, and whether you need image stabilisation or autofocus tracking.

Of course, along with this it also depends on what is the camera that you use and also what are you planning to use the lens for.

Additionally, I also would recommend to understand which lens is this. If this is your first lens then an all-round lens is preferable since it will give you a more versatile option to shoot variety of things. If second then you should be more specific about the usage – like for portraits a prime lens is better option.



Sony Announces FX5

Sony has unveiled the FX5, a compact full-frame cinema camera that combines the portability of the FX3 with advanced features inspired by the FX6, while introducing several long-awaited upgrades to the FX Series.

The FX5 features a new 16.6MP stacked full-frame Exmor RS sensor paired with Sony's latest Bionz XR2 processor, enabling 5K recording, Open Gate (3:2) capture, internal 16-bit X-OCN RAW recording, 4.5K at 120fps, and 5K at 60fps. It also introduces triple base ISO (800, 4000, and 12800), Dual Gain recording with up to 16 stops of dynamic range, AI-powered autofocus, anamorphic de-squeeze, and professional monitoring tools including false colour, waveform, and vectorscope.

The camera retains the FX3's compact body while adding a detachable 7.08M-dot OLED EVF, a 3.5-inch articulating touchscreen, dual CFexpress Type A/SD card slots, full-size HDMI, Ethernet, Wi-Fi 6E, Bluetooth, and support for Sony's high-capacity battery.

The Sony FX5 is priced at approximately ₹4.65 lakh, while the kit with the XLR handle costs around ₹5.22 lakh. The XLR handle will also be sold separately for ₹75,800 (approx). The camera is scheduled to launch in mid-August.



Tamron Launches 12-20mm F/2.8 Lens

Tamron has unveiled the 12-20mm f/2.8, a new ultra-wide zoom lens for full-frame Nikon Z and Sony E-mount cameras. The launch also marks a major shift in the company's branding, with Tamron simplifying its lens naming convention by dropping technical suffixes such as "Di III VXD".

The new lens features a redesigned exterior with a darker matte finish, updated control ring textures, and an extensive set of customisable controls. These include dedicated focus and zoom rings, a customisable control ring (on Nikon Z), aperture de-click switch, focus mode selector, dual customisable buttons with a three-way selector, zoom lock, and manual focus lock.

Designed with a permanently attached petal-shaped hood, the lens does not support front screw-on filters. Instead, it accepts rear gel filters. It weighs 570g (20.2 oz) and measures 119.3mm (4.7 inches) in length, with weather sealing for added durability.

Optically, the 12-20mm f/2.8 comprises 17 elements in 12 groups, including multiple aspherical and special glass elements to reduce distortion, chromatic aberration, and sagittal coma flare. It features a 12-blade diaphragm with an aperture range of f/2.8 to f/16.



The lens features VXD linear AF motor, and offers close-focusing distances as short as 18cm at the wide end. Tamron says the lens delivers image quality comparable to Sony's G Master series, positioning it as an ideal choice for astrophotography, interiors, and landscape photography.

The lens is priced at ₹1,50,400 for the E-mount and ₹1,59,200 for Z-mount.

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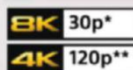
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USA's FCC Fines DJI Clones

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has fined eight companies \$25,000 each for allegedly failing to respond to inquiries related to the importation and sale of wireless products, including devices that may be linked to restricted DJI technology.

The companies named are Cogito Tech, Fixaxo Technology, Lyno Dynamics, Skyhigh Tech, Spatial Hover, SZ Knowact, WaveGo Tech, and Xtra Technology. They have until July 20 to respond before the FCC considers further enforcement action.

According to the FCC, the companies ignored official requests for information about whether they marketed radiofrequency equipment included on the agency's Covered List, which identifies products deemed to pose national security risks.

Several of the firms have previously been associated with DJI-related products. WaveGo Tech and SZ Knowact have been linked to Skyrover drones, while Xtra Technology has sold action cameras resembling DJI's Osmo Action series. However, the FCC's current enforcement action concerns the companies' alleged failure to respond to its inquiries, not violations of import restrictions.



The move comes as U.S. regulators continue tightening oversight of Chinese drone manufacturers and related technology. The FCC has expanded its authority to block or revoke equipment authorisations for products tied to companies on its Covered List and is also seeking to revoke the recognition of a Chinese testing laboratory involved in certifying wireless devices for the U.S. market.

Patreon Announces Anti-AI Crawlers

Patreon has announced a new partnership with Cloudflare to block AI training crawlers from accessing creator content published on its platform, giving creators greater control over how their work is used.

CEO Jack Conte revealed the update on Instagram, stating that AI training crawlers are now blocked at the network level across all Patreon posts. "Creators deserve credit, compensation, and consent. If that's not on the table, the crawlers can stay off Patreon," Conte said.

The move is aimed at preventing AI companies from using creators' work to train models without permission, while still allowing search engine crawlers that help creators reach new audiences.

Drew Rowny, Patreon's Senior Vice President of Product, said the company wants creators to be able to grow their businesses without sacrificing control over their content. He added that the update builds on Cloudflare's broader efforts to limit unauthorised AI scraping.

Conte has been outspoken about AI's impact on creative industries, arguing that creators currently receive neither consent, credit, nor compensation when their work is used to train AI models.

The update comes amid growing concerns from photographers, artists, and other creators over the widespread use of publicly available content for AI training.



SIGMA

ART
24-70mm F2.8 DG DN II

Samsung Launches Z Fold8 Series

Samsung unveils Galaxy Z Fold8 series and Z Flip8 with redesigned form factors and AI upgrades

Samsung has introduced its latest foldable smartphones—the Galaxy Z Fold8 Ultra, Galaxy Z Fold8, and Galaxy Z Flip8—bringing redesigned form factors, upgraded hardware, improved cameras, and expanded Galaxy AI features across the lineup.

The Galaxy Z Fold8 adopts a wider, shorter design with a 7.6-inch 120Hz AMOLED main display and a 5.5-inch cover screen. Samsung has also introduced a new display structure using titanium and titanium-alloy components, aimed at making the panels thinner, more durable, and smoother to fold.

The premium Galaxy Z Fold8 Ultra features a larger 8-inch AMOLED inner display and a 6.5-inch outer screen. It is equipped with a triple-camera system led by a 200-megapixel main sensor, alongside a 50-megapixel ultra-wide camera and a 10-megapixel telephoto lens. Both Fold8 models support 8K video recording at 30 fps.

The Galaxy Z Flip8, Samsung's latest clamshell foldable, features a 6.9-inch internal display and a 4.1-inch cover screen. It includes a dual-camera setup comprising a



50-megapixel main sensor and a 12-megapixel ultra-wide camera.

All three devices integrate Samsung's latest Galaxy AI capabilities designed to deliver more personalized, context-aware experiences.

The Galaxy Z Fold8 starts at ₹1.82 lakh (approx), while the Galaxy Z Fold8 Ultra is priced from ₹2.01 lakh (approx). The Galaxy Z Flip8 begins at ₹1.15 lakh (approx). All three smartphones will be available starting August 7.

HoverAir Launches Convertible Drone VERSA

HoverAir has announced the development of the Versa, a convertible camera system that operates as both an autonomous drone and a standalone handheld gimbal. The device integrates aerial flight capabilities with ground-level mechanical stabilisation in a single modular platform.

The system is built around a central camera module mounted on a miniature mechanical gimbal. When docked into its foldable flight chassis, the Versa functions as a self-

flying camera. The drone configuration utilises automated flight paths and subject-tracking algorithms to capture aerial footage, maintaining the hands-free operation characteristic of HoverAir's existing product lines.

The primary hardware update in the Versa model is its detachment mechanism. Users can disengage a physical latch to separate the camera and gimbal unit from the rotor chassis. Once removed, the detached module features a cylindrical base designed for handheld use, operating similarly to dedicated pocket gimbal cameras.

This dual-function design allows operators to capture wide aerial perspectives and stabilised, ground-level footage using the same sensor and storage drive. Upon detachment, the internal gimbal motors transition from compensating for flight turbulence to stabilising the user's walking pace and arm movements in handheld mode.

The HoverAir Versa is positioned for operators who require both aerial and handheld stabilised video, consolidating two distinct form factors into one unit. Complete technical specifications regarding sensor resolution, maximum flight time, and retail availability have not yet been released by the manufacturer. Pricing & availability information is unavailable at the moment.



Nikon Loses Patent Lawsuit Against Viltrox

The China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA) has invalidated Nikon's Z-mount patents, striking down the camera giant's intellectual property lawsuit against Chinese lens manufacturer Viltrox.

Nikon initiated legal action in January, seeking compensation for past sales of Viltrox's Z-mount lenses. Nikon claimed that Viltrox infringed on its Z-mount bayonet design and electronic terminal structure before the patents received official approval.

However, a 25-page ruling released by CNIPA determined that Nikon's Z-mount designs fail to meet the required standard of novelty under Chinese patent law. The panel concluded that the bayonet structure and related electronic connections do not extend beyond ordinary skill in the lens mount landscape, nor do they introduce significant technological advancements.

Without valid patent protection, Nikon's legal claims for compensation have been dismissed. Nikon has three months to appeal the decision or file new legal proceedings.



Sony Pitches to Acquire Tamron for \$1.2B

Japanese lensmaker Tamron has received a non-binding acquisition proposal from Sony Group, that will make Tamron a wholly owned subsidiary of Sony. No other terms of the proposal have been disclosed at the moment. The deal is reported to be worth 200B Yen, or approximately US \$1.2B.

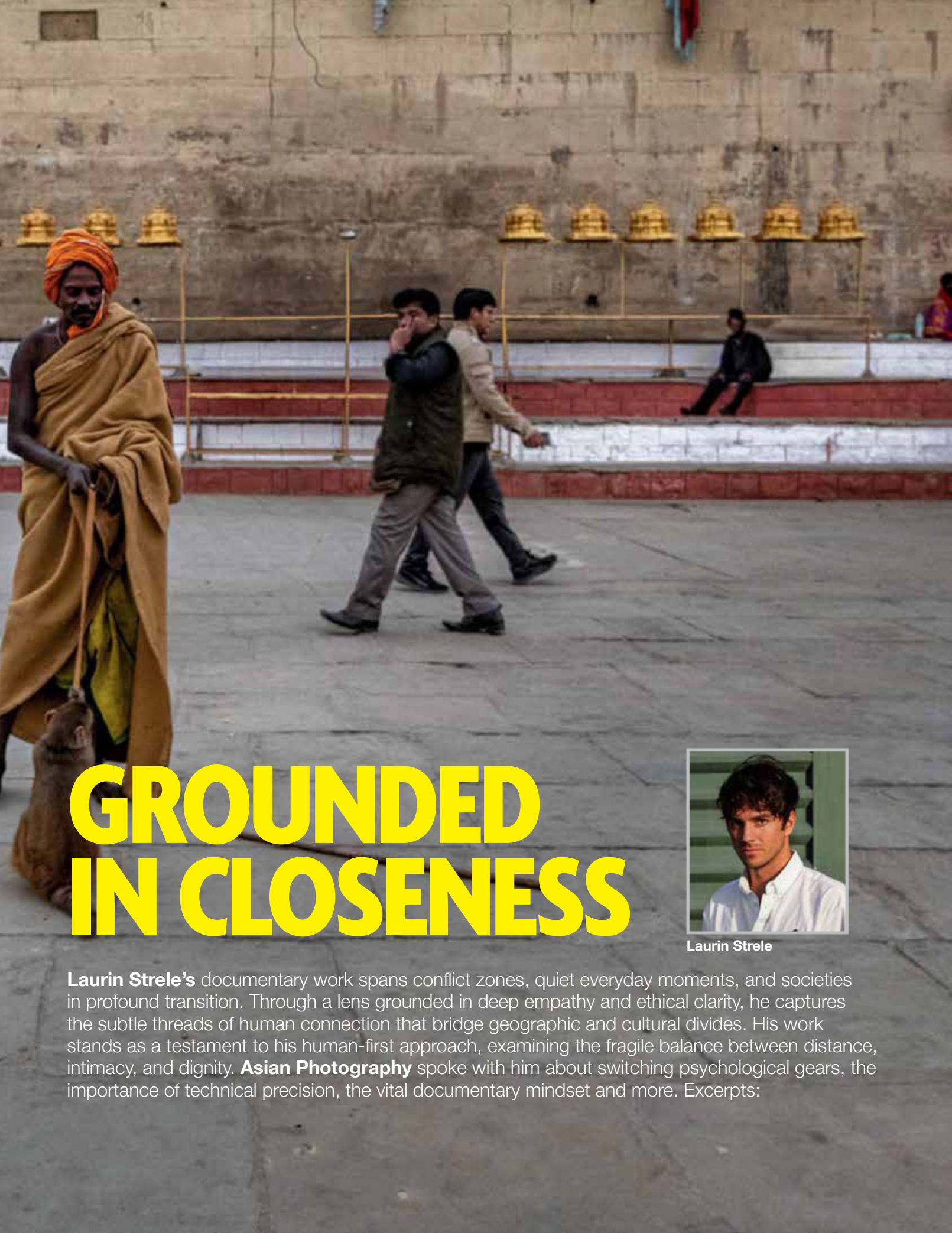
A spokesperson from Sony said that it will enhance Tamron's corporate value and interest of stakeholders, while contributing to improve their imaging business, as Tamron specialises in making lenses for Sony, Nikon, & Fujifilm, and is one of the go-to third-party vendors.

According to reports, Sony already owns a 15.35% stake in Tamron, but will require consent from majority shareholder Effissimo Capital Management Pvt Ltd, a Singapore-based investment firm, who own a 17.4% stake.

Tamron has set up a special committee to review this proposal. The internet is divided on the news, mostly expressing displeasure of a first-party manufacturer buying a third-party vendor, while expressing strong support for Tamron's products.

On the other side, some photographers are comparing this to the acquisition deal between Nikon and RED Digital Cinema—enabling products like the Nikon ZR and internal RAW recording feature in mirrorless cameras. They also hope it enables them to finally get to use Tamron's lenses free of the barrier that is the max burst rate of 15 fps in photos, which usually pushes users towards Sony lenses.





GROUND ED IN CLOSENESS



Laurin Strele

Laurin Strele's documentary work spans conflict zones, quiet everyday moments, and societies in profound transition. Through a lens grounded in deep empathy and ethical clarity, he captures the subtle threads of human connection that bridge geographic and cultural divides. His work stands as a testament to his human-first approach, examining the fragile balance between distance, intimacy, and dignity. **Asian Photography** spoke with him about switching psychological gears, the importance of technical precision, the vital documentary mindset and more. Excerpts:

Around the world, people from different realities, lived experiences, geographies, cultures & political spectrum share remarkable emotional similarities—a truth Laurin Strele

captured in his book *Worlds Apart*. This work explores the underlying emotional thread rooted in our universal need for closeness across our differences. Working from active conflict zones to quiet, everyday moments, he repeatedly encounters the same fundamental human desires to belong, to be seen, to protect one another, and to preserve dignity



when circumstances work against it. This collection of images is anchored by a recurring emotional condition defined by tenderness existing alongside uncertainty. Focusing on those brief moments make macro-historical and political narratives recede, revealing something deeply personal: a subtle gesture, a shared look, the way someone holds another,



or a person quietly withdrawing into themselves. The title carries an intentional paradox; while humanity may appear to inhabit entirely separate realities, drawing closer reveals how connected those realities truly are.

Translating these ephemeral moments into lasting imagery requires navigating the tension between urgency and technical precision, two forces Strele views as complementary rather than diametrically opposed. In documentary photography, technical decisions must become instinctive, as the decisive moment rarely offers time for conscious calculation. Preparation is therefore essential; by understanding the light, setting the exposure, and anticipating movement before a situation unfolds, Strele remains emotionally present rather than preoccupied with camera mechanics. His visual aesthetic is built in-camera through composition, distance, timing, colour, and the relationship between foreground and background, allowing him to recognise the photograph as



it happens rather than discovering it later on a computer. Post-production is treated as an act of interpretation rather than reconstruction, carefully refining colour, density, and contrast to reflect the atmosphere actually experienced. Restrained cropping is occasionally used, but elements are never added, removed, or altered to manipulate factual truth. For Strele, technical precision matters because it ensures that the emotion and information within the frame remain unobstructed.

This commitment to visual clarity is matched by a strict personal ethic regarding non-intervention, particularly in high-stress or sensitive environments. Strele operates under the fundamental rule that a photograph must never become more important than the person in front of the lens. In genuine documentary situations involving grief, conflict, or crisis, he never directs subjects, asks them to repeat actions, or alters the environment to improve a composition. Recognising the effect of his own presence is vital, as access to a situation does not automatically equal permission to photograph everything. When raising the camera would intensify distress, compromise someone's safety, or turn private suffering into a public spectacle, Strele lowers it, holding that knowing when not to photograph is as crucial as knowing when to press the shutter. Whenever possible, he explains his

“Conflict photography can become reductive when individuals are presented only as victims, as though pain has erased the rest of their identity.”

identity and purpose, relying on respect, body language, and sensitivity when formal prior consent is not feasible. Images that humiliate subjects or strip them of dignity without providing broader context are intentionally avoided, with the only absolute exception to non-intervention being immediate human safety, as no photograph is worth allowing preventable harm to occur.

Navigating diverse assignments across the globe also requires a conscious psychological gear-changing or a reset. Before entering a new location, Strele extensively researches its history, politics, and cultural context to understand existing narratives and recognise his own blind spots, yet he refrains from arriving with a predetermined storyline that might lead him to search only for images that confirm his biases.



Instead, he arrives with open questions. His initial days are spent observing, listening, and absorbing the rhythm of a place without constantly photographing, noticing where people gather, how they interact, how the light shifts, and which situations feel authentic rather than performative. A visual and emotional structure gradually emerges from this patience. Moving between countries demands that he avoid projecting the emotional weight or visual language of a past assignment onto the next, treating every location on its own terms while allowing accumulated experience to refine how he reads subtle body language, power dynamics, fear, and intimacy. Strele seeks to be prepared enough to recognise a narrative, but open enough to let the story contradict his initial assumptions.

This open-ended, human-centred perspective becomes especially vital when documenting human suffering, where Strele seeks to portray subjects with empathy rather than sensationalism. He avoids reducing individuals to mere symbols of trauma or framing them strictly as victims, recognising that even in extreme circumstances, people retain humour, pride, tenderness, frustration, agency, and contradiction. Strele often focuses on the quiet consequences surrounding violence rather than graphic moments themselves: the stillness after a crisis, a family waiting for news, a child adapting to an abnormal environment, or small

acts of mutual care. These quieter images communicate the reality of conflict without turning pain into a spectacle. While graphic images can be necessary to document evidence of atrocities, Strele uses them only when they deepen understanding rather than simply provoke a visceral reaction. By favouring carefully constructed sequences over single dramatic frames, he provides the context needed to show causes, consequences, and ordinary life alongside trauma, fulfilling his responsibility to help viewers understand both the people in the frame and the circumstances that brought them to that moment.

“We may appear to inhabit completely different realities, but the closer I came to people, the less separate those realities felt.”





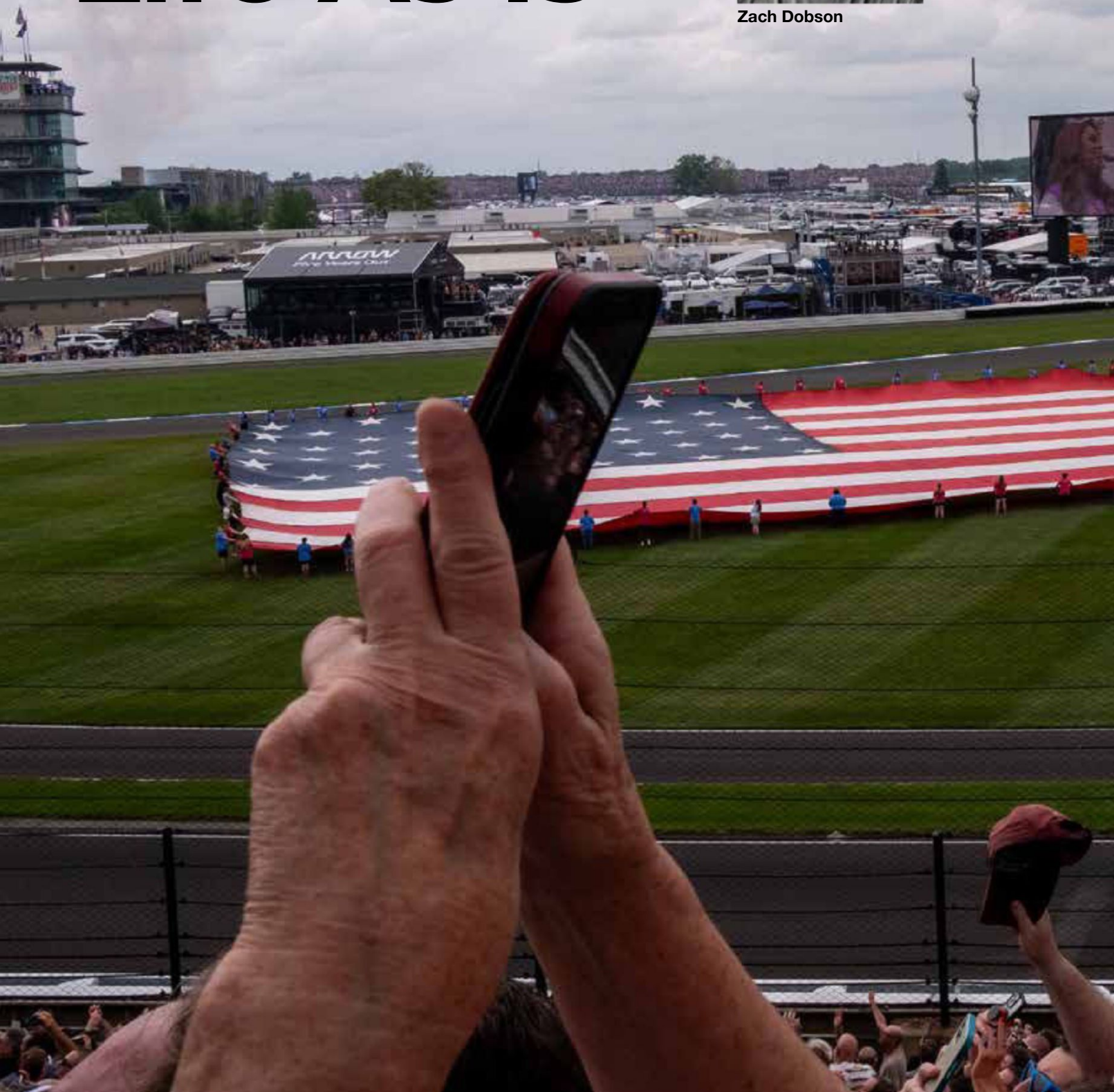
Looking ahead, Strele is increasingly drawn to long-term projects that require sustained attention, including a personal photographic exploration of his home region of Tirol. Photographing his birthplace allows him to look beyond familiar, touristic representations to examine its evolving communities, traditions, landscapes, social shifts, and questions of identity—a task that is often more demanding than travelling abroad, as it requires seeing past the invisibility caused by deep familiarity. Concurrently, he continues his international work in regions experiencing conflict, political change, or cultural transition, focusing on how societies remember, rebuild, and carry the psychological weight of history into daily life. He shares these ongoing narratives through long-form stories, books, exhibitions, and workshops in places such as Mongolia and India. In his mentorship of aspiring documentary photographers, Strele emphasises that documentary work begins long before pressing the shutter; it starts with listening, patience, and remaining present when nothing obviously dynamic is occurring. He advises emerging photographers to resist chasing easy drama, exoticism, or suffering, urging them instead to build genuine trust, comprehend context, and allow people to remain far more complex than any initial story idea, knowing that while a striking image earns temporary attention, integrity is what confers lasting value.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

Capturing Life As Is



Zach Dobson





For **Zach Dobson**, camera work extends far beyond pressing a shutter. It is an immersive study of human experience, visual context, and truth. Having launched his career in the fast-paced world of news coverage, Dobson has developed a nuanced approach to documentary photography that balances single-frame storytelling, natural aesthetics, and authentic engagement with his environments. His work highlights the delicate interplay between visual restraint and deep contextual detail, challenging both the common misconceptions of the industry and the modern shift toward hyper-digital media consumption. **Asian Photography** spoke to him regarding his technical approach towards shooting images, his thoughtful & grounded approach to the craft of documentary photography and more. Excerpts:



Dobson's photographic eye took shape early on in the demanding environment of daily newsrooms, where he learned to translate chaotic real-world events into structured visual narratives—as his career commencement coincided with the incident of September 11, 2001 in the US. Working against tight deadlines and space constraints forced him to evaluate how an image functions beyond mere record-keeping. The goal was never just to show what was happening, but to evoke what it actually felt like to be there. To give viewers enough information to understand a moment, he relied heavily on framing using foreground and background elements to construct deep visual context. While telling a story over a dozen frames is ideal, spatial limits often dictated that a single image had to carry the full narrative weight. Dobson learned to balance these complex, information-dense compositions with simpler images that isolated specific details, understanding that a continuous stream of busy frames would overwhelm an audience. Aesthetics, in his view, serve a narrative purpose: a visually compelling composition invites viewers to linger longer, allowing them to absorb both the subtle details and the emotional core packed within the frame.

This dedication to authentic atmosphere naturally dictates his technical choices, particularly his reliance on ambient light. Dobson deliberately avoids artificial illumination because he believes flash fundamentally distorts reality, altering natural colour temperatures and flattening the genuine mood of a room. If a subject is shrouded in shadow, he believes the photograph should reflect that exact reality rather than artificially lifting it. Beyond visual fidelity, working without artificial light serves a crucial practical purpose: stealth and respect. Flash immediately disrupts a scene, pulling subjects out of their natural momentum and drawing unwanted attention to the photographer. While he acknowledges that he can never be entirely invisible, Dobson strives to exist as an unobtrusive, secondary presence rather than a source of disturbance. He respects colleagues who utilise flash effectively for different goals, but stresses that every tool must align directly with what the photographer intends to communicate.

That same instinct for authentic mood guides Dobson when he steps into everyday environments that lack a clear assignment or predetermined headline. Rather than trying to guess what an audience might find interesting, he relies purely on intuition, focusing on whatever naturally catches

his eye—whether it is a subtle glance between strangers, a striking quality of morning light, or the sheer scale of a room. Once a primary subject takes hold, he works around the frame to introduce elements that build depth. This process demands patience; he might spend an hour on a single composition waiting for the light to shift or for a passerby to enter the frame, or he might walk away in seconds if the initial feeling fades. The decision to stay or move on is governed entirely by feel, sticking with a shot only as long as the visual potential remains compelling.

The quiet, patient reality of this work stands in stark contrast to popular public perception about documentary photography and photojournalism. Dobson actively challenges persistent these myths and public skepticism online, where critics accuse photojournalists of seeking fame and building fortunes off the back of other people's misfortunes—a claim he finds absurdly detached from reality. He emphasises that wealth and widespread fame simply do not exist in this genre. The vast majority of working documentary photographers struggle to make a sustainable living. They aren't driven by financial gain, but by a genuine desire to document history, share vital human stories, and make a tangible difference in the world. Only few people, outside of industry peers, can name more than one or two living photographers, making the idea of photography-driven fame a complete illusion.

“It’s really absurd because there is no fame and fortune in photojournalism. Photojournalists are not getting rich. Many of them are barely making a living.”

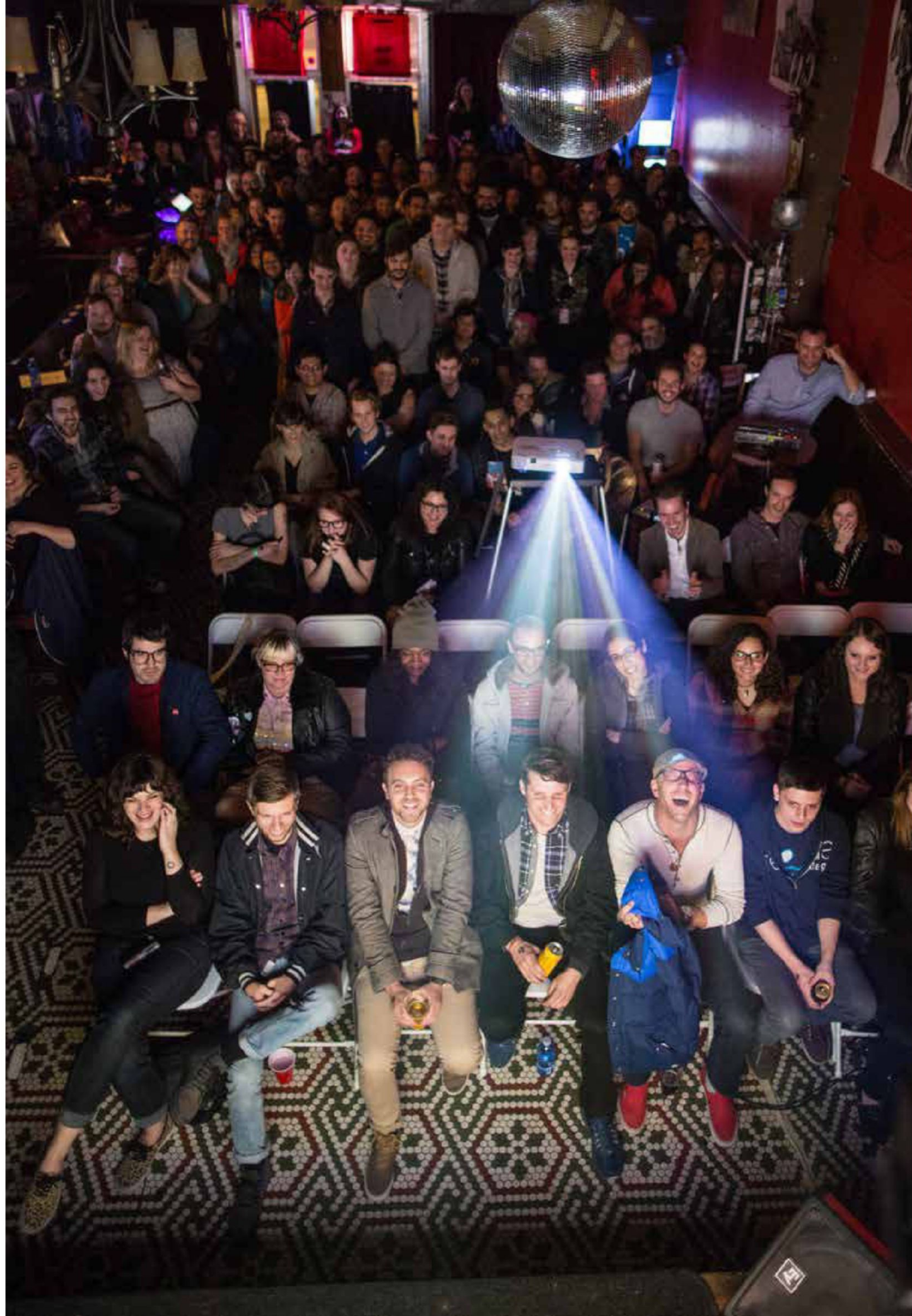




Beyond these misconceptions, Dobson also takes issue with how modern audiences consume photography, remaining a staunch advocate for physical print in an increasingly-digital world. While acknowledging the incredible reach of social media, he argues that backlit phone displays dilute the power and nuance of documentary work. Mobile screens obscure fine details, while the rapid-scrolling culture of modern platforms actively discourages deep reflection. Viewing photo books and print magazines, by contrast, offers a vastly superior tactile experience that respects both the viewer's eyes and the photographer's pacing. Printing also allows for thoughtful sequencing and layout, enabling a project to tell a complete, immersive story. Furthermore, print exposes the viewer to an artist's true depth; where a quick internet search might surface only twenty familiar images, a dedicated photo book reveals dozens of unpublished frames that can rarely be found anywhere online.

This deep respect for the craft also informs Dobson's perspective on the future of the field, particularly regarding how young photographers are prepared for the industry. He points to a critical disconnect between traditional university









“Flash doesn’t show things the way I saw them. If a subject is largely in shadow and I can’t see them clearly, I want to convey that.”

programmes and the harsh economic realities facing working independents today. Many academic institutions continue to train students as if staff positions at major publications are readily available, even though those traditional media roles have been steadily disappearing since the mid-2000s. As print newsrooms downsized, dedicated photo departments were frequently eliminated, leaving surviving writers to double as photographers. Because job security in traditional media is essentially non-existent, Dobson urges emerging photographers to approach their craft as self-sufficient business owners. Taking courses in entrepreneurship, understanding small business management, and actively building an independent personal brand through digital media are no longer optional but are essential survival tools for anyone looking to build a lasting, sustainable career in documentary photography today.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

SHOOTING UNDER PRESSURE

LESSONS FROM COVERING ELECTIONS, PROTESTS, NATURAL DISASTERS AND SPORTING EVENTS

In the high-stakes world of visual journalism and field reporting, the camera is both an instrument of truth and a buffer against chaos. Whether standing amidst a sea of waving placards on a heated election trail, dodging tear gas canisters in volatile urban protests, navigating toxic floodwaters following a hurricane, or tracking a split-second championship goal from a crowded press box, field operators operate under extreme psychological and physical pressure. The environment changes rapidly, but the mandate remains uncompromising: capture clear, compelling, and ethically sound images that tell an honest story. Working in high-intensity environments requires far more than mastering shutter speed, exposure, and frame rates. It demands situational awareness, psychological resilience, swift logistical planning, and deep ethical clarity. Over years of frontline reporting across disparate arenas, visual journalists have distilled key tactical and operational lessons that allow them to produce extraordinary work when the stakes are highest.





1. Political High-Wires: Navigating Elections and Campaign Trails

Elections present a unique pressure cooker. They are governed by rigid schedules, intense partisan scrutiny, hyper-controlled media staging, and sudden bursts of unscripted emotion. The primary challenge in covering political events is piercing through the polished public relations apparatus to capture authentic human moments.

Anticipation is the primary currency of campaign coverage. Experienced photojournalists learn to read the room long before a candidate takes the podium. They look past the candidate at the faces in the crowd: the quiet tension of an aide in the wings, the tearful relief of a supporter, or the sharp, telling body language between opposing faction leaders. Technical preparation involves setting up redundant gear and pre-dialing exposure settings for rapidly shifting stage lighting.

In political coverage, the most defining image rarely happens at the microphone. It happens in the fraction of a second before or after the speech, when the mask slips or the crowd reacts.

Neutrality and spatial awareness are critical. High-pressure election nights feature tight press pens and aggressive competition for sightlines. Staying calm, maintaining professional courtesy toward colleagues, and keeping an eye on back exits ensures both safety and access when unexpected incidents erupt.

2. Unpredictable Currents: Safety and Precision in Protests and Civil Unrest

If political rallies are controlled, civil unrest is pure fluid volatility. Covering protests demands a fundamental shift in mindset: safety becomes equal to, if not higher than, the story itself. The boundary between peaceful demonstration and violent confrontation can dissolve in seconds.

The first rule of shooting civil unrest is minimalisation. Heavy camera bags and dangling straps make a photographer vulnerable and sluggish. Operators strip down to two compact camera bodies, fast prime or short zoom lenses, personal protective equipment (PPE) including helmets and eye protection and individual first-aid kits (IFAK). Maintaining situational awareness requires keeping both eyes open, one in the viewfinder, one monitoring the perimeter.

Key Tactical Rules for Protests:

- **Map key escape routes:** Always identify at least two exit paths before positioning yourself in a crowd.
- **Never stand between opposing forces:** Avoid being caught in the buffer zone between law enforcement and protesters.
- **Maintain transparent body language:** Keep press credentials visible and avoid sudden movements that could be misconstrued.
- **Protect source identities:** Be mindful of local laws and ethical considerations regarding unmasked individuals in sensitive situations.



Ethical considerations are paramount during protests. Photographers must resist the urge to focus exclusively on dramatic violence if it misrepresents the overall nature of a demonstration. Balance, context, and human dignity must guide every frame.

3. The Aftermath: Resilience and Empathy During Natural Disasters

When hurricanes, earthquakes, or wildfires strike, journalists step into zones of profound human suffering and infrastructural collapse. Unlike protests, where threat comes from human action, natural disasters present environmental hazards: contaminated water, downed power lines, structural instability, and severe supply shortages.

Logistical self-sufficiency is non-negotiable. Field operators in disaster zones must carry their own food, clean water, power banks, satellite communication gear, and ruggedised storage media. Relying on local resources depletes fragile communities already in crisis.

From a storytelling perspective, covering disasters requires intense empathy and ethical restraint. Visual journalists must balance the urgency of breaking news with respect for victims grieving lost loved ones or ruined livelihoods. The visual narrative should highlight human resilience and system responses, avoiding sensationalism or intrusive exploitation.







4. Splitting Seconds: High-Speed Clarity in Sporting Events

To the uninitiated, sports photography might seem less dangerous than disaster or riot coverage, but its pressure is uniquely intense. Millions of viewers, rigid wire service deadlines, and hyper-fast movement mean there is zero margin for error. If you miss a championship-winning goal or an Olympic finish line shot by a thousandth of a second, there are no second takes.

Success in sports visual journalism hinges on deep domain knowledge. A photographer who understands the tactical nuances of basketball or track and field can predict plays before they unfold. Technical mastery—utilising high-speed burst modes, customised autofocus tracking profiles, and remote camera triggers—allows the photographer to execute that foresight flawlessly.

Moreover, the modern sports photographer operates under grueling deadline pressures. Transmitting tagged, keyworded, and edited images directly from camera to news desks within minutes of an action sequence requires absolute discipline and muscle memory under fire.

5. Core Principles for Visual Storytellers Under Fire

Across all four distinct environments, several universal principles separate seasoned professionals from amateurs when shooting under extreme pressure:

1. **Gear Familiarity as Muscle Memory:** You cannot afford to look down at dial settings when tear gas is deployed or

when a sprinter breaks from the blocks. Operating gear must be as subconscious as breathing.

2. **Emotional Regulation:** High-pressure assignment work triggers adrenaline spikes. Top photojournalists practice deliberate breathing, grounding techniques, and emotional compartmentalisation to keep hands steady and judgment sharp.
3. **Relentless Ethical Integrity:** Pressure often entices photographers to exaggerate or alter context for a more dramatic shot. Maintaining truthfulness in framing and captioning is the foundation of journalistic credibility.

Conclusion

Shooting under pressure across elections, civil unrest, disasters, and sports tests the absolute limits of a visual journalist's craft. While the technical demands vary from telephoto sports lenses to ruggedised disaster gear, the ultimate objective remains constant: capturing authentic human truth in the face of chaos. By combining rigorous physical preparation, technical agility, situational awareness, and unwavering empathy, field operators ensure that even in the most chaotic moments, the world receives a clear, honest window into history as it unfolds.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

HOW TO THINK LIKE A PHOTOJOURNALIST

IT'S ABOUT FINDING THE STORY, NOT TAKING BEAUTIFUL PICTURES

Walk into any photo gallery, and you'll be surrounded by technical perfection: crisp focus, flawless exposure, vibrant colours, and rules of third followed to the millimetre. They are beautiful pictures. But step into the editorial room of a news publication or flip through a classic photo essay, and you will notice something different. Some images might be slightly grainy, motion-blurred, or framed wildly off-centre. Yet, they grab you by the chest and refuse to let go. That is the divide between a photographer and a photojournalist.

A traditional photographer asks: "How can I make this scene look beautiful?"

A photojournalist asks: "What is happening here, and why does it matter?"

Shifting your mindset from visual aesthetics to narrative intent isn't just for newsroom veterans—it is the single most transformative shift any visual storyteller can make. Here is how to stop chasing pretty images and start thinking like a photojournalist.







1. The Story Is the Subject, Not the Object

Most photographers begin with an object: a stunning mountain peak, a vintage car, or an interesting face in the crowd. They construct the frame around that object.

A photojournalist begins with a narrative premise. The physical objects in the frame are merely characters or props serving that narrative. If you are documenting a closing neighbourhood bakery, a pristine macro photo of a loaf of bread tells the viewer very little. A shot of the flour-dusted baker sitting alone at 4:00 AM surrounded by empty flour sacks, however, tells a human story of labour, passage of time, and quiet farewells.

Mental Shift: Before pressing the shutter, ask yourself: If this photo had a caption, what verb would it use? If the answer is just “is” (e.g., “This is a flower”), keep searching. Aim for actions, conflicts, or relationships.

2. Anticipate, Don't Just React

Beautiful landscape or architecture photography often allows for patience—you set up a tripod and wait for the light. Photojournalism happens in real-time, but it is rarely about lucky accidents. It relies on anticipation.

Thinking like a photojournalist means constantly reading the room:

- **Micro-expressions:** Watching a subject's body language to predict when they are about to laugh, cry, or gesture.
- **Spatial awareness:** Identifying a background element

(a political sign, a shadow, a doorway) and waiting for a person to walk into position to create a visual metaphor.

- **The “Moment After”:** Novices stop shooting when the main action finishes—say, right after a speaker leaves a podium. A photojournalist keeps the camera up to capture the sigh of relief, the handshake in the shadows, or the quiet moment of exhaustion immediately following the event.

3. Build a Narrative Arc (The “Establish, Medium, Close” Rule)

A photojournalist rarely relies on a single “hero shot” to tell an entire story. Instead, they think in sequences, constructing a visual essay that guides the reader through a complete narrative arc.

If you are covering a local street festival or a craft workshop, shoot with a three-tier mindset.

You begin with the establishing shot—a wide, sweeping frame that sets the scene, establishes scale, and anchors the environment. Once the context is clear, you move inward for the medium shot, which brings the characters into focus. This is where the human action lives: two artisans collaborating, a vendor engaging with a customer, or a performer lost in their craft. Finally, you move in tight for the detail shot. These intimate close-ups capture the worn texture of a craftsman's hands, a specialised tool, or a fleeting micro-expression—small, symbolic elements that add emotional resonance



and nuance. By constantly cycling through these three perspectives, you force yourself to look beyond the obvious “pretty view” and capture the entire living ecosystem of your subject.

By varying your visual distance, you force yourself to look beyond the obvious “pretty view” and capture the ecosystem of the event.

4. Embrace the Incomplete and the Imperfect

The pursuit of absolute technical perfection can be the enemy of truth. When you prioritise razor-sharp focus and ideal lighting above all else, you often miss the raw energy of a fleeting moment.

Photojournalists understand that emotion trumps technical perfection every single time.

Robert Capa’s famous images of the D-Day landings at Omaha Beach are notoriously out of focus, shaky, and damaged by a processing error. Yet, they remain among the most iconic war photographs in history because they put the viewer directly into the terrifying, chaotic water with the soldiers. The technical flaws actually amplify the authenticity of the moment.

Don’t delete a frame just because the shutter speed was a fraction too slow or the ISO was bumped too high. If the emotion in the frame is real, the grain only adds grit.



5. Find the Contrast and Conflict

Stories thrive on tension. A photo that is purely pretty lacks tension; a photo that tells a story almost always contains a dynamic contrast.

Look for scenes where elements collide:

- **Generational:** An elderly street vendor standing in front of an advertisement for a modern tech startup.
- **Emotional:** A single solemn face in a sea of celebrating sports fans.
- **Socio-economic or Environmental:** A pristine glass skyscraper casting a literal shadow over an ageing historic district.

When you train your eye to look for tension, you stop seeing isolated objects and start seeing the social, economic, and human context surrounding them.

6. Ethics and Authenticity Over Manipulation

Finally, thinking like a photojournalist requires a deep respect for reality. In an era dominated by heavy photo-editing filters, staging, and AI generation, true photojournalism stands on the bedrock of authenticity.

- **Don't Stage the Scene:** Resist the urge to ask your subject to “turn towards the light” or “do that again”. The moment you direct the scene, you transform a document of reality into an illustration.
- **Edit for Truth, Not Just Pop:** Post-processing should aim to represent the scene as close to what you witnessed as possible. Brightening shadows to reveal a subject's face is fine; removing a distracting trash can or altering the sky integrity breaks the quiet trust between the photographer and the audience.





The Takeaway

Moving from taking pictures to reporting stories isn't about buying new gear or hunting down overseas war zones. You can practice photojournalism in your local coffee shop, at a family gathering, or on your daily commute.

Next time you lift your camera to your eye, pause before pressing the shutter. Ignore the lighting for a split second. Ignore the geometry. Ask yourself a simple question:

"What story am I telling right now?"

If you don't have an answer, keep looking. The world is full of stories waiting to be noticed—you just have to stop looking for pretty pictures long enough to see them.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

3-SHOT RULE IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

A single image can certainly freeze a moment, but moments rarely exist in isolation. In that aspect photojournalism is not merely about showing *what* happened; it is about helping the audience understand *where* it happened, *who* it happened to and *why* the moment matters in the first place.

Some of the strongest visual stories are not built from one extraordinary photograph, but from a carefully considered sequence of images.

Long before smartphones made visual storytelling accessible to everyone, filmmakers had already mastered one of its simplest principles: vary the perspective.

Establish the scene. Introduce the subject. Then move close enough for a revelation.

Photography eventually adopted the same philosophy, giving rise to what many visual storytellers simply call the three-shot rule. Less a rigid rule than a storytelling mindset, thinking in three photographs rather than one encourages photographers to move beyond documentation and towards narrative.







What is the Three-Shot Rule?

Since the idea came from filmmaking, let's begin with an example closer to home. Like every movie that begins with establishing context, introducing the subjects and their actions and finally delivering the consequences, the three-shot rule in photojournalism operates on a similar foundation. Using a combination of wide shots, mid-shots and narrow or tight close-ups, these three frames deliver a narrative.

The first frame is the wide shot. This is where the story begins—not with a person, but with the place. Every event unfolds within a larger environment, and the wide shot offers context to journalism's oldest questions before a single word of caption is written: *Where are we? What is happening? Why should we care?*

Once the audience understands the setting, the photographer moves closer.

The medium shot introduces the people who inhabit that story. It shifts the narrative from place to participant, narrowing the viewer's attention without sacrificing context. It is often the photograph that answers the question, *Whose story am I following?*

Finally comes the close-up.

If the wide shot establishes context and the medium shot introduces the subject, the close-up delivers emotion. It isolates the details that would otherwise disappear inside a larger frame. The close-up allows viewers not merely to observe a story but to feel it.

What Does the Three-Shot Rule Deliver?

Taken together, these three perspectives create a visual rhythm remarkably similar to written journalism. Each image strengthens the next until the viewer has experienced a complete photograph that can communicate on its own.

Editors understand that visual monotony causes viewers to disengage. A sequence composed entirely of wide shots quickly becomes repetitive, while a collection of close-ups can feel claustrophobic and disorienting. Alternating perspectives creates visual movement even when the subject itself remains stationary. The eye continuously rediscovers the scene, making the story feel dynamic rather than static.

An Editor's Powerplay

The technique serves an equally practical purpose during editing.

Anyone who has conducted interviews knows that conversations are rarely delivered flawlessly. Subjects pause, repeat themselves or stumble over words. Cutting directly between two sections of the same talking-head shot produces the familiar jump cut that instantly distracts audiences.



The solution is often remarkably simple: Cut away.

A close-up of the interviewee's hands. A medium shot of their workspace. A wide view of the surrounding environment. These additional images allow editors to bridge dialogue seamlessly while simultaneously enriching the narrative with visual context. Yet successful visual narratives depend upon more than simply collecting three different angles. Rhythm matters.

A beautifully photographed sequence can lose its emotional impact if paired with rushed cuts, overpowering music or poorly timed narration. Likewise, restrained editing can elevate even modest footage by allowing viewers enough time to absorb what they are seeing.

Mastering the Three-Shot Rule

In many ways, photography and filmmaking operate according to the same invisible principle: every creative choice should serve the story. Mastering the Three-Shot Rule therefore begins long before pressing the shutter.

Experienced photojournalists rarely arrive at a location without first imagining how the narrative might unfold. Even when covering unpredictable events, they instinctively search for the sequence they need. Researching the assignment beforehand, identifying likely vantage points and mentally storyboarding the progression of images reduces hesitation when events begin to unfold. In fast-moving environments, preparation often determines whether a photographer reacts instinctively or simply reacts too late.

Text: Natasha Kittur

THE ROLE OF PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY IN MODERN JOURNALISM

For over a century, the iconic photojournalist was defined by heavy hardware: a shoulder burdened with leather straps, dual DSLR or rangefinder bodies hanging like pendulums, and a battery of telephoto lenses capable of capturing detail from a football field away. Today, that aesthetic has been fundamentally changed. In the hands of both seasoned war correspondents and ordinary citizens caught in extraordinary circumstances, the smartphone camera has emerged as one of the most powerful newsgathering tools in human history. The transition from dedicated camera systems to mobile photography in modern journalism is not merely a story of technological convenience; it represents a seismic shift in how news is captured, processed, verified, and consumed. Smartphone photography has dismantled traditional barriers to entry, accelerated news cycles to near-instantaneous speeds, and fostered an unprecedented era of visual democratisation.





1. Elimination of Latency

In news reporting, time is an unrelenting master. Previously, photojournalists faced an inescapable latency limited by their medium—whether it be film or primitive digital—of shooting, secure memory cards/film rolls, transport gear to a safe location, ingest files onto a computer, colour-correct (or develop film), caption, and transmit via a dongle. In high-stakes environments, this process could delay publication by hours or even days.

Smartphones compressed this entire pipeline into seconds. With high-speed connectivity integrated directly into the image capture device, a photograph taken in the middle of a civil protest or during an active natural disaster can be edited, captioned, and broadcast to global newsrooms within moments. During breaking news events like political developments, the first visual evidence reaching global audiences is almost exclusively mobile footage. By eliminating physical latency, mobile photography transformed breaking news from a retrospective digest into a real-time conversation.

2. Unobtrusiveness, Intimacy, and Candid Reality

Beyond speed, mobile devices possess a unique physical and psychological property: invisibility through ubiquity. A photojournalist wielding a professional camera rig instantly

alters the environment. Subjects become self-conscious, authorities become suspicious, and security forces often react with hostility or outright censorship. Big gear screams “PRESS”, drawing scrutiny and defence mechanisms.

Conversely, a smartphone is ubiquitous. Everyone carries one; everyone holds one up. This visual anonymity allows journalists to blend into crowds and capture authentic, unposed human moments that traditional equipment would disrupt. In conflict zones, authoritarian regimes, or marginalised communities, a smartphone allows reporters to document human rights abuses and street-level realities without attracting the immediate, dangerous attention that traditional gear invites.

The big rig creates a barrier between the photographer and the subject. The phone dissolves that wall, allowing the viewer to feel as though they are standing right beside the reporter in the heat of the moment.

3. Citizen Journalism and Decentralised Coverage

Perhaps the most radical contribution of mobile photography is the total democratisation of visual witness. News outlets can no longer maintain physical bureaus in every corner of the globe. When unexpected events strike, the professional press is rarely on the scene first.





Through mobile photography, citizen eye-witnesses become frontline chroniclers. The high-definition camera in every pocket has transformed ordinary citizens into an extended network of global stringers. Iconic moments of modern history were fundamentally driven by mobile imagery captured by citizens before professional crews could arrive.

4. The Verification Paradigm and Ethical Challenges

However, this democratisation brings profound ethical and logistical challenges. The sheer volume of user-generated mobile imagery flooding social networks during crises has created an acute problem of authenticity. Deepfakes, out-of-context archival photos, and manipulated mobile images can spread faster than verified truth.

This shift has forced modern newsrooms to evolve. News organisations now employ dedicated Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) and verification teams trained to analyse smartphone metadata (EXIF data), geotags, atmospheric lighting, and shadow angles to authenticate mobile photos before publication. Furthermore, computational photography in modern smartphones—where artificial intelligence

automatically alters HDR, sharpens details, or removes objects—raises new ethical questions about what constitutes an untouched, ethically sound journalistic photograph.

An Essential Hybrid Future

Phone photography has not rendered photojournalism obsolete; rather, it has expanded its horizons and redefined its purpose. While dedicated DSLR and mirrorless cameras remain essential for sport, long-lens documentation, and high-end features, the smartphone camera has claimed its place as the primary engine of breaking news and intimate documentary work.

Ultimately, mobile photography reminds us that compelling journalism has never been about the size of the glass or the price of the sensor. It is about access, truth, empathy, and perspective. By putting a capable camera into the hands of billions, technology has ensured that when history happens, the world is always watching. It is one of those genres where the gear, truly, doesn't matter, unless it does.

Text: Natasha Kittur

CAPTURING DISSENT

HOW TO CORRECTLY DOCUMENT A PROTEST

When history turns a corner, it usually happens in the streets. Protests, demonstrations, and public rallies are the physical manifestation of political discourse. For journalists, visual artists, and citizen observers, capturing these moments is both a civic service and a powerful storytelling responsibility. However, documenting a protest isn't like shooting a parade. High emotional stakes, shifting legal boundaries, and fast-moving environments mean that taking photos or video requires technical preparation, ethical awareness, and physical vigilance. Here is a guide on how to document public dissent accurately, safely, and ethically.





Rhiya Ahir stopping a police van with detainees in Dadar, Mumbai during CJP Protest

1. Ethics and the Duty of Minimising Harm

Before touching a shutter button, every visual documentarian must answer a fundamental question: Who does this image serve, and who could it hurt?

In an era of ubiquitous facial recognition software and digital surveillance, a high-resolution photo of an identifiable demonstrator can lead to unintended consequences, including employment retaliation, doxxing, or prosecution.

Key Ethical Standards

- **Blur or Crop Identifiable Features:** Unless an individual is an official spokesperson, public speaker, or consenting subject, avoid capturing clear, full-face shots of everyday marchers. Crop tight on signs, hands, silhouettes, or feet.



Sudanese Photo that won a World Press Photo

- **Context Over Sensationalism:** It is tempting to chase dramatic visuals—a burning trash can, an isolated argument, or an intense standoff. However, focusing solely on extreme moments skews the historical record. Aim to show scale, banners, context, and the general character of the crowd.
- **Obtain Informed Consent When Possible:** When taking intimate portraits, a quick nod, a verbal check-in, or showing the person the back of your camera LCD builds trust and respects personal agency.

2. Digital Security and Metadata Protection

Your camera records far more than just light, it records data. Metadata (EXIF data) embedded in image files can reveal exact GPS coordinates, timestamps, and camera serial numbers.

Crucial Safety Rule: If you are uploading media live or sharing raw files, strip the metadata first.

Protecting your media starts with securing your hardware: set a complex, six-character or longer alphanumeric passcode on your device, and disable biometric features like Face ID or fingerprint unlocking, as authority figures can legally compel biometrics far more easily than a passcode in many jurisdictions.

Before uploading any media publicly or sharing it with news outlets, always pass your files through metadata-stripping utilities like Metapho or Image Pipe to wipe all location tags and hardware identifiers. Finally, shield your work against confiscation or device damage by establishing a routine for local and cloud backups: periodically sync encrypted copies or swap out SD cards throughout the event, stashing the physical memory cards securely in a separate pocket.

3. Physical Safety and Situation Awareness

Protests are fluid dynamic environments. A peaceful march can turn into a crush of people, or face sudden crowd control interventions like tear gas, pepper spray, or kettle manoeuvres by law enforcement.

Preparation Checklist:

1. Plain, comfortable clothing (neutral colours; avoid identifiable branding)
2. Shatterproof eye protection or swim goggles (for pepper spray/dust)
3. High-capacity power bank and durable charging cables
4. Physical press credentials or ID stored accessibly
5. Water bottle and basic first-aid supplies

Navigating the Crowd

1. Maintain an Exit Route: Always identify two ways out of a street or intersection. Never allow yourself to get pinned against fixed barriers, brick walls, or riot shields.

2. Blend In, Don't Hide: Dress neutrally. Avoid wearing military fatigue patterns or tactical gear, which can make you look like an agitator or a target to both police and demonstrators.

3. Keep Your Head Up: Do not walk while



Kenyan photojournalists covering a protest against the police

looking down at your camera screen or phone. Frame your shot, take it, lower the device, and scan your surroundings.

handmade cardboard signs, worn-out marching shoes, painted slogans, or chalk on pavement. These close-ups convey texture without compromising individual identities.

4. Technical Execution: Shooting Under Pressure

Documenting a protest requires fast decisions about exposure, composition, and focus. You rarely get a second chance to catch a fleeting moment.

Recommended Baseline Settings:

- **Shutter Speed:** 1/250s or faster, which freezes movement in walking crowds or action shots
- **Aperture:** f/4 – f/8, providing enough depth of field to keep signs and faces readable
- **ISO:** Auto-ISO with an upper limit of 3200 or 6400 to prioritise sharp motion over noise
- **Focus Mode:** Continuous AF with Tracking

Pro Tip: Have multiple settings set to custom setting buttons on your camera's mode dial – most cameras have it.

Framing the Story

To tell a complete story, structure your documentation around three distinct visual perspectives:

- **Wide Shots (The Scale):** Establish the location, the sheer density of the turnout, and the surrounding environment (city landmarks, police presence, weather).
- **Medium Shots (The Action):** Capture interactions—people holding signs, megaphones in use, organisers directing traffic, or medics offering assistance.
- **Detail Shots (The Emotion):** Focus on hands holding

5. Knowing Your Legal Rights

While specific laws vary by state and country, several universal principles apply to documenting public events in most democratic societies:

- **Public Space Photography:** You generally have the legal right to photograph anything visible from public property (sidewalks, parks, public streets).
- **Private Property Boundaries:** Private spaces (malls, private plazas, inside businesses) have different rules. Property owners can ask you to stop recording or leave.
- **Equipment Seizure:** In the vast majority of jurisdictions, law enforcement officers cannot view, delete, or confiscate your media without a warrant or formal arrest. If asked to delete footage, state clearly and calmly: "I do not consent to a search or the deletion of my files."

Truth Over Sensationalism

Documenting dissent is a balancing act between courage and care. The objective is not to sensationalise conflict, but to preserve an accurate, empathetic historical record of public expression. By prioritising human safety, respecting digital privacy, staying physically aware, and maintaining clear ethics, you ensure that your documentation honours both the craft of journalism and the people standing in the streets.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

HOW TECH IS FIGHTING AI IMAGES

The pandemic wreaked havoc in the media space with record-high numbers of misinformation and disinformation put on the internet, making “fact-checking” a mainstream phrase. The advent of generative AI made that problem worse, as producing photorealistic imagery with text prompts blurred the boundary between captured reality and synthesised fiction. AI-generated imagery is antithesis to photojournalism, is what several veteran photographers say, including the World Press Photo winner Arko Datta. For an industry built on the non-negotiable premise that seeing is believing, this shift poses an existential challenge. To counter the flood of synthetic media, tech developers, news organisations, and hardware manufacturers are creating a defence system based on two complementary approaches: verifying authentic imagery at the source and labelling AI-generated content at creation.

Key Technologies in Image Verification

Rather than relying solely on human intuition, the media ecosystem is adopting structural, mathematical, and cryptographic tools to trace where an image came from and how it was made.

1. Content Credentials & Cryptographic Provenance Standards

The global benchmark for digital transparency is the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA). Backed by tech giants like Adobe, Microsoft, Google and OpenAI and news organisations like BBC, C2PA attaches a tamper-evident, cryptographically signed label known as Content Credentials directly to digital media files.

When a photo is taken on a supported camera or generated by AI, the software signs a manifest in the

file’s container. This records the exact device or AI tool used, timestamp, location data, and any subsequent edits. If someone alters the file without authorisation, the cryptographic signature breaks, signalling potential manipulation.

2. Imperceptible Pixel Watermarking

While C2PA metadata acts as an attached certificate, metadata can be stripped when images are re-saved, screenshotted, or uploaded to social media platforms. To solve this, developers use invisible watermarking embedded directly into the image pixels.

Technologies like Google DeepMind’s SynthID embed subtle mathematical signals deep within the image’s pixel values. These signals are invisible to the human eye, but specialised detectors can scan an uploaded file and confirm if it was generated by an AI model, even after cropping, colour filtering, or heavy lossy compression.

3. AI Forensics and Detection Models

When an image carries neither metadata nor an active watermark, forensic algorithms step in. Forensic detectors analyse pixel anomalies, unnatural lighting gradients, impossible shadows, facial asymmetry, and frequency-domain noise patterns typical of diffusion models to estimate the probability that an image is synthetic. If it doesn’t qualify, or anomalies are detected in an image, that image can be discarded.

Why These Technologies Matter to Photojournalism

The stakes in photojournalism extend far beyond technical curiosity; they strike at the heart of public trust and democratic discourse.



Preserving the “Chain of Custody”

Historically, photo editors verified images through raw file analysis, metadata, and trusted photographer networks. In breaking news scenarios like war zones, political rallies, natural disasters, unfiltered synthetic images can circulate globally within minutes. Provenance tech allows newsrooms to establish a chain of custody from the camera sensor to the published article.

Protecting the Credibility of Real Photographers

The widespread availability of AI image generators creates a secondary hazard known as the “liar’s dividend”. When bad actors are caught in compromising real photographs, they can claim the evidence is “just an AI deepfake”. By establishing a clear, standardised way to verify authentic human-captured photos, provenance technology protects legitimate photojournalists against bad-faith dismissals.

Combatting Disinformation at Scale

Fake images, such as the ones designed to manipulate elections, financial markets, or public safety rely on swift viral spread. Standardised signals allow major social platforms and search engines to automatically display context badges like “AI-generated” or “Verified Original” alongside images before disinformation takes root.

The Road Ahead: Challenges and Adoption

Despite rapid technical progress, significant hurdles remain to ensure that the images you see aren’t tampered with generative AI, or is completely generated using AI.

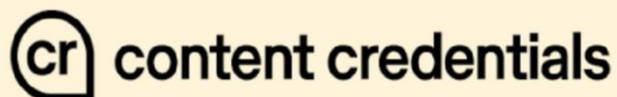
Access Equity: The biggest, and number one hurdle in battling disinformation—hardware-level C2PA signing is limited to some professional (and expensive) camera bodies like Sony A1 II and Leica SL3-S and enterprise software. This makes it harder for freelance photojournalists, especially in under-resourced regions, to immediately adopt the new standards into their workflows.



The “Stripping” Problem: Many social media platforms routinely strip container metadata upon upload to save bandwidth or protect user privacy, severing C2PA manifests unless platforms actively update their infrastructure.

Adversarial Evasion: Open-source AI models can be modified to bypass built-in watermarks or omit metadata entirely, requiring detection models to constantly evolve.

The fight against synthetic media deception cannot be won by a single silver bullet. Instead, it relies on a layered defence: C2PA credentials for detailed historical context, pixel watermarking for durability, and forensic tools as a fallback. For photojournalism, embracing these open provenance standards is essential to preserving the integrity of visual history in an age where seeing is no longer automatic grounds for believing.



Text: Anirudh Iyer

Xiaomi 17 Ultra Review

For the last few years, smartphone cameras have been chasing bigger numbers—higher megapixels, longer zoom ranges and increasingly complex camera systems. But image quality isn't determined by megapixels alone. Sensor size, optics and focal length play an equally important role. With the Xiaomi 17 Ultra, Xiaomi has built its latest flagship around two key features: a 1-inch primary sensor and a 200MP floating telephoto offering continuous optical zoom between 75mm and 100mm. Combined with Leica's Summilux optics, the hardware certainly looks promising. But specifications only tell part of the story. We spent several weeks shooting with the Xiaomi 17 Ultra to see how this camera system performs in everyday photography.



Design & Handling

At 218g, the Xiaomi 17 Ultra is a sizeable phone, and most of that weight comes from the large circular camera module on the rear. There's no hiding what Xiaomi wants this phone to be—the camera system is clearly the focus. Leica branding sits within the module alongside subtle Ultra branding, giving

it a clean appearance without looking excessive.

Despite its size, the phone is comfortable to hold. The rear surface is smooth and can be slippery, so using a case is advisable. The large camera module also shifts the balance slightly, although it doesn't take long to get used to.

Camera Setup

Xiaomi has based the entire camera system around Leica's Summilux optics, and the specifications are impressive.

- **Main Camera:** 50MP 1-inch sensor with Leica LOFIC (Lateral Overflow Integration Capacitor) technology
 - **Ultra-Wide Camera:** 50MP sensor
 - **Telephoto Camera:** 200MP sensor continuous optical zoom (75–100mm focal range, 3.2x and 4.3x)
 - **Front Camera:** 50MP sensor
 - Can shoot videos in 8K 30fps and 4K up to 120fps
 - Powered by the Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor with Xiaomi's newest imaging engine
- Video recording extends to 8K at 30fps and 4K up to 120fps, with image processing handled by Xiaomi's

latest imaging engine running on the Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 platform.

Main Camera

The primary camera uses Xiaomi's 50MP Light Fusion 1050L sensor with a 1-inch sensor size and records 12.5MP images by default. It offers both 1x and 2x shooting modes.

The larger sensor immediately benefits dynamic range. In daylight, the camera retains highlight detail well while preserving texture in darker areas, making it particularly effective for architecture and high-contrast scenes. Colours remain natural without excessive saturation, producing images that look balanced rather than artificially enhanced.

There are occasions where processing becomes more noticeable, with some images appearing slightly underexposed. When this happens, both shadows and highlights lose a little latitude. Fortunately, detail remains excellent throughout, and the larger sensor consistently delivers clean, sharp files.

Ultra-wide

The ultra-wide camera uses a

50MP Samsung JN5 sensor, producing 12.5MP images by default.

Image quality is consistent with the primary camera, maintaining natural colour reproduction and good sharpness across most of the frame. Distortion is well controlled and contrast remains balanced. Exposure occasionally runs slightly dark, resulting in flatter-looking images, but overall the ultra-wide performs reliably and maintains good consistency when switching between focal lengths.

200MP Floating Telephoto

The telephoto is undoubtedly the highlight of the Xiaomi 17 Ultra.

Built around a 200MP Samsung HPE sensor with a default 12.5MP output, it provides continuous optical zoom between 75mm and 100mm (3.2x to 4.3x)—something we haven't seen implemented in quite this way on a flagship smartphone.

Within the optical range, image quality remains consistently sharp with good contrast and natural colours. Like the other cameras, exposure can occasionally lean towards the darker side, but detail levels remain high.

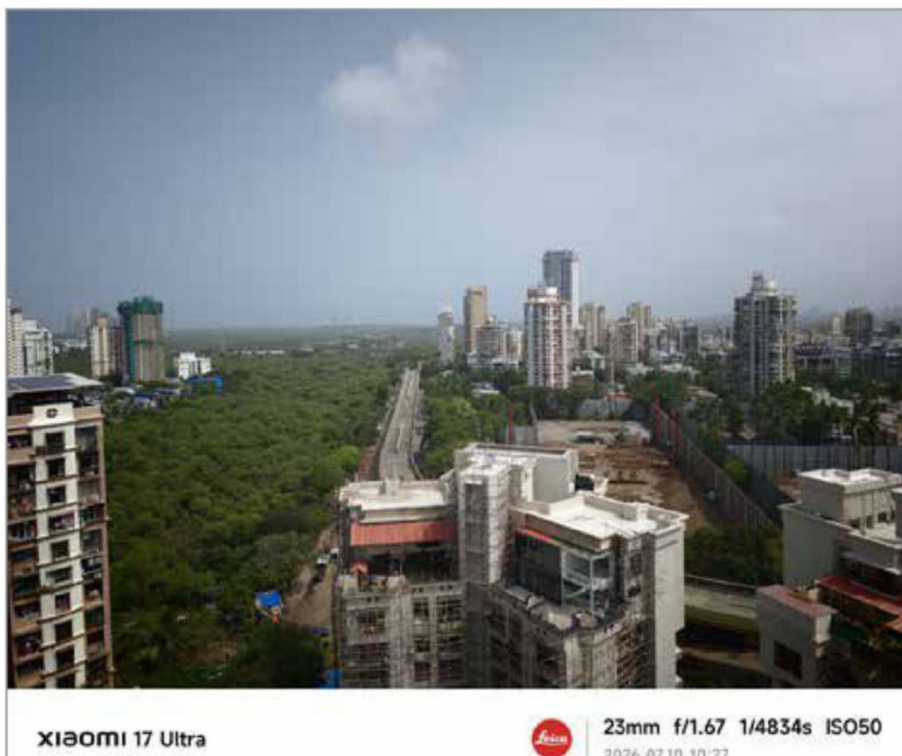
What impressed us most, however, was how practical the system feels in everyday use. Autofocus locks confidently as you zoom, making it easier to frame distant subjects without the camera constantly hunting for focus. Images also remain surprisingly usable up to around 30x. Beyond that, colour shifts become more noticeable and fine detail begins to fall away, but unlike many smartphones, the zoom doesn't feel like a specification added simply for marketing. It can genuinely be used.

Had Xiaomi extended the optical range a little further—closer to 135mm—this would have been an even more versatile telephoto system.

Low-light Performance

The 1-inch sensor continues to work in the Xiaomi's favour after dark.

The main camera retains good detail with controlled noise, while bright light sources remain well managed without blowing out. Shadow areas also maintain their natural appearance rather than being aggressively brightened.



Daylight Main

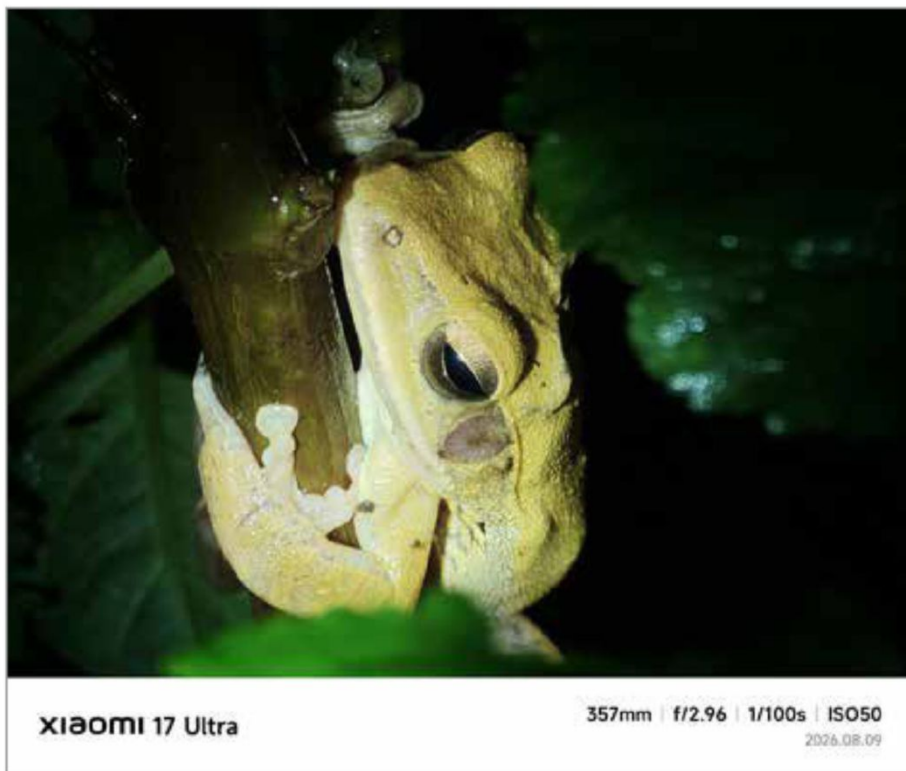
The ultra-wide maintains colour consistency, although sharpness drops slightly compared to daylight. The telephoto performs well within its optical range before detail gradually softens at longer focal lengths. Image processing also becomes more

noticeable during night photography, particularly as the camera continues processing after capture.

Lens flare is reasonably well controlled, with minimal ghosting when shooting directly into bright light sources.



Daylight Wide



expected from a flagship camera system and can appear softer around the focus plane.

Photography Kit

Xiaomi's optional Photography Kit continues to be one of the better camera accessories available for a smartphone. The kit includes a custom case, detachable grip, physical shutter button, zoom lever and programmable controls for settings such as exposure, ISO and white balance. A built-in 2,000mAh battery also extends shooting time.

While it makes the phone bulkier, it also makes the shooting experience feel considerably closer to using a dedicated camera. We weren't able to test Xiaomi's optional Leica lenses, so we cannot comment on their impact on image quality.

Lowlight Telephoto

Portraits

Portrait mode continues to be one of Xiaomi's strengths. Skin tones remain natural, edge detection around hair, glasses and clothing is clean, and background separation is convincing. There are occasional tonal shifts, but overall consistency remains good, even in lower light.

Video

The Xiaomi 17 Ultra records up to 8K at 30fps and 4K at 120fps, while the front camera supports 4K recording up to 60fps. Xiaomi has also introduced Live Cinematography modes, which are preset shooting styles designed to make greater use of the telephoto system during video recording.

Front Camera

The front camera uses a 50MP OmniVision OV50M sensor, producing 12.5MP images by default with both 0.8x and 1x framing options. Image quality is detailed, colours remain natural and exposure is generally well balanced.

Macro

Macro photography is where the Xiaomi 17 Ultra is least convincing. Rather than using a dedicated macro lens, Xiaomi relies on the telephoto camera for close-up shooting. While convenient, images often lack the fine detail



Lowlight Main



Xiaomi 17 Ultra



135mm f/2.96 1/50s ISO4000

20/07/2026 18:03

Portrait

Battery & Display

The 6,000mAh battery comfortably lasts a full day of photography, even with extensive shooting. Xiaomi's 90W wired charging also keeps downtime to a minimum.

The 6.9-inch LTPO AMOLED display is equally suited to photography, offering a 120Hz refresh rate, Dolby Vision, HDR10+ support and a claimed peak brightness of 3,500 nits. Reviewing images outdoors is rarely a problem, even in bright sunlight.

Verdict

The Xiaomi 17 Ultra is built around two key features—a 1-inch

primary sensor and a 200MP floating telephoto—and for the most part, both justify their presence. The primary camera delivers detailed, natural-looking images with good dynamic range, while the telephoto is one of the most practical zoom systems we've used on a smartphone, producing images that remain genuinely usable well beyond its optical range.

The software still has room to improve. Processing can occasionally become aggressive, exposure isn't always perfectly balanced, and macro performance falls short of the standard set by the rest of the camera system.

At around ₹1.4 lakh, the Xiaomi 17

Ultra sits firmly in the premium flagship segment. But for photographers looking for a smartphone that places genuine emphasis on image-making rather than simply adding more camera specifications, it makes a compelling case for itself.

TEXT AND IMAGES: BHAVYA DESAI

PHOTO SCAPPE

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or
Send in your entries to *asianphotographyindia@gmail.com*



Name: Kiran Bevinkatti
Camera: Canon R50
Lens: 18-45mm
Focus length: 31mm
Shutter Speed 1/125s
Aperture: f/8.0
ISO: 100
Instagram ID: @kbfotosss



Name: Abhishek Thengari
Camera & Lens: Sony A7 V, Sony FE 35mm f/1.4 GM
Focal Length: 35mm
Shutter Speed: 1/5000s
Aperture: f/1.4
ISO: 400
Instagram ID: @onceseenabhi



Name: Harshit Suryawanshi
Camera & Lens: Sony a6400, with Canon 50mm 1.8, Viltrox Nex IV adaptor.
Focal length: 50mm
Shutter Speed: 1/1500
Aperture: f1.8
ISO: 200
Instagram ID: @Lensation_46



Name: Hillol Sen
Camera & Lens: Sony Alpha ILCE-6600 APS-C Mirrorless + Sigma 56mm f/1.4 DC DN
Focal Length: 56 mm
Shutter Speed: 1/125 sec
Aperture: f/2.8
ISO: 6400
Instagram ID: @the_wanderflux





Name : SAYAK BHATTACHARJEE
Camera & Lens: CANON EOS
 90D & EFS 18-135 mm
Focal Length: 18 mm
Shutter Speed: 1/125 s
Aperture: 5.6
ISO: 100
Instagram ID: nat.pixs



Name: Shaheen Iquebal
Camera & Lens: Fujifilm X-T3 + Viltrox
 75mm f/1.2
Focal Length: 75mm
Shutter Speed: 1/250 sec
Aperture: f/2
ISO: 200
Instagram ID: @jaarzii



Name: Sharan S
Camera & lens: Canon EOS M50 with
 50mm f/1.8
Focal length: 50mm
Shutter speed: 1/320s
Aperture: f/2.8
ISO: 100
Instagram: itz__humanoid



Name: Soumayan Biswas
Camera & Lens: NIKON D7500 and Tokina atx-i 11-20mm f/2.8 CF
Focal Length: 12 mm
Shutter Speed: 1/1250 sec
Aperture: 11
ISO: 100
Instagram ID: @soumayan.photography



Name: Vishnu Mohan
Camera & Lens: vivo X200 FE (Built-in Lens)
Focal Length: 23.00 mm (35 mm equivalent)
Shutter Speed: 1/8500 s
Aperture: f/1.88
ISO: 149
Instagram ID: @the_ekalyatri

PHOTO MONTAGE

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I am Deepanshu, a photographer living in Delhi. My work focuses on photojournalism, documentary, street photography with a particular interest in documenting people, everyday life, social issues, public events, and moments that carry a strong sense of reality and human emotion.

I see photography as a way of observing and documenting the world as it unfolds and I am interested in capturing genuine moments, expressions, interactions, and situations that communicate something beyond the frame. Over the past several months, I have been developing practical experience as a Photojournalist and Video Journalist with *The Red Mike News Channel*. Working in news environments has helped me develop the ability to respond quickly, observe carefully, and adapt to constantly changing situations.

The CJP protest at New Delhi emerged as a youth-led movement demanding justice and accountability for students amid concerns over examination irregularities and the NEET paper

leak. The protesters raised their voices for the rights and future of students, justice for affected families, and accountability from those responsible. A key demand of the movement was the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

As the demonstrations grew, large numbers of students and supporters gathered in Delhi and called for a march towards Parliament. The protest became increasingly intense, with slogans, flags, posters, barricades and police presence shaping the atmosphere. Amid the crowd were moments of anger, determination, solidarity and hope. The movement eventually reached a significant turning point with the minister's resignation, which protesters and CJP leaders described as a major victory.

This photographic series documents the protest from the ground at Jantar Mantar—capturing the people, emotions, slogans, resistance and atmosphere of a movement that brought students together in their demand for justice and accountability.

Instagram: @deepanshuclicks



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