

# — culture curry —

## Frames from ground zero

Ryan Lobo explored war zones with his camera and returned with heart-warming frames and life-changing tales, some of which are on display at his ongoing exhibition

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THE ASIAN AGE

A freelance filmmaker, photographer and writer based in Bengaluru, Ryan Lobo's photographs have been widely exhibited and appreciated. His co-produced movie, *The Redemption of General Butt Naked*, recently won an award at the Sundance and Bermuda film festivals. His photo exhibition — "War and Forgiveness", shot in war-struck Liberia, Iraq and Afghanistan noticeably brings out the suffering of people and stories of unparalleled forgiveness, among myriad other frames.

The first thing that comes to mind while imagining a war zone is the image of destruction, smoke-bellowing from whatever remains of cities and people fleeing for their lives. But a ground zero is not where any soul would dare to tread. Recalling how he chanced upon such assignments that are exhibited, Ryan says, "I've been involved in documentary film-making for various clients for past 10 years. I helped make a documentary on the heroin trade in Afghanistan for National Geographic television in 2007 and also visited Iraq the same year. Liberia was an independent documentary project funded by us filmmakers ourselves initially and was completed in late 2010." And adds, "At the time these stories sounded compelling enough to be part of so I chose to do them."

But the picture of Liberia's "General



(Inset) Ryan Lobo; and his works : (above) *Afghan National Army Soldier in Poppy Field*; (left) *The Redemption of General Butt Naked*

than the context, both cultural and philosophical, that we found ourselves within at that time and I was moved by it. It seemed strange to me, that people who have suffered terribly find it easier to forgive, find personal healing in that act."

Talking about how it could have an effect on the audience here, Ryan adds, "He (General) represents the possibility of what we could be, for worse and possibly for better now. Joshua claims to have murdered approximately 20,000 people. During filmmaking, I photographed his quest for redemption and forgiveness. Initially, I wondered what use it would be to exhibit photographs of faraway wars in India until I decided that an interesting thing about working in war zones was seeing the same thing, perhaps the seeds of the same thing within ourselves, in our conversations and in the way we often treat our own people."

*The exhibition is on till May 6, at Art Motif Gallery, Lado Sarai*

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Butt Naked" has the most compelling story behind it. Ryan explains that Joshua Milton Blahyi had earned himself the name "General Butt Naked" by fighting stark naked during civil war as he believed he was protected by magical powers when he did so. He narrates, "In Liberia, I saw a woman forgive the General who had ostensibly killed her brother, and photographed the moment. I recall feeling and thinking that I had witnessed something immense and larger