

# Bombay in black and white from Pablo's lens

by **Georgina Maddox**

THE slight awkwardness of Indian Cinema when 'dance girls' lacked the air-brushed finesse of today's Central Asian and East European extras, when the broad empty streets were havens for vintage sports cars, where hand-painted sign boards of shops look down kindly on couples walking hand-in-hand through near-empty streets.

This was Bombay in the 1970 and 1980s. It is this Bombay that lives and breathes in black-and-white of Pablo Bartholomew's repository of images. These images are redolent of nostalgia that brings a lump in your throat; there is also the dark underbelly populated by opium addicts, rag pickers, migrant workers, eunuchs and sex workers at the notorious red-light area, Falkland Road.

The pictures have now become iconic, but when Bartholomew shot them, they were considered ground-breaking. A selection from these are on display at Bartholomew's latest exhibition, *Chronicles of a Past Life — Bombay*, that is now on at Photo Ink Gallery in Jhandewalan.

"I am revisiting these works



**A lanky young Big B before he grew into the angry young man and superstar. Behind him are film extras.**

to provide a historical context to photography in a day and age when people think they are being revolutionary by photographing old cars and peeling doors," says the 56-year-old, a two-time winner of the World Press Award.

"Most of the work that gets passed off as 'art' was already done in the golden era of documentary photography. Now we have to dig really deep to hit even the slivers — forgot the nuggets," he adds.

His disillusionment comes from the demise or cut back of several leading publications such as *Life*, *Newsweek* and *Time*. "About 90 percent of the budget for photography is dedicated to war images; the remaining 10 percent is spent on entertainment and escapism. Photography is lesser of a tool to fight issues with," rues the photographer. The exhibition is his salute to a genre that's finding fewer takers with each passing year.

— *Chronicles of a Past Life: Bombay by Pablo Bartholomew is on till February 25 at PhotoInk, MGF Hyundai Building (Ground Floor), Faiz Road, Jhandewalan; 011-28755940*