and more than 6,000 seriously injured in Sitakunda over the last 20 years. A survey by Greenpeace and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) revealed that, on average, at least one worker is injured a day and one worker dies a week due to job related accidents in Bangladesh's many ship breaking yards.

The most devastating of such incidents occurred on May 31, 2000. 16 workers were burnt alive and 50 others were seriously injured by an explosion aboard a decommissioned Iranian oil tanker. Months later, I would read an article about the incident in the discoloured pages of a local news paper.

"The victims were identified as Azam, Giasuddin, Jamaluddin, Sumon, Hannan, Kuddus, Rafiq, Habibur Rahman and Hanif. The identities of the rest two could not be known."

pictures I had taken of him. His eyes widened as he focused on his picture in utter fascination.

"Sometimes, people from the city come to photograph us," he said, as he handed me back the camera. "Whenever something bad happens, they are the first to come. They take pictures and then they leave."

I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my gut. The feeling grew more and more intense as I continued to look at the man in the tattered red shirt, with the realisation that he could sense my guilt. I felt the blood rushing to my face in utter embarrassment.

"Your life here must be very difficult?" I said, as I noticed the premature wrinkles above his brow and the dark brown liver spots that were scattered across his sun scorched, leathery skin.

"It's bad for the heart," he replied. "It's bad for the heart,



Many have lost their lives in this rubble, some without even leaving a trace of who they were. PHOTO: ASFARA AHMED

It was not the unusual use of the word "rest" that caught my immediate attention but the word "identity" and its profound implications. Without an identity, one is so easily forgotten. Without a name, one may simply disappear into the mist, without leaving the slightest impression upon the earth. The footprints of their treacherous journey surrender too easily to the ocean's relentless tides. Yet, despite the ocean's strength and persistence, it fails to cleanse the filth and grease from Sitakunda's defiled shores. It clings stubbornly to this land. The bond is too strong. It refuses to let go.

As I stood on the beach, a black and white newspaper photo I had once seen suddenly came to mind, depicting a charred, dismembered, monster of a ship, which had released large quantities of an unidentified flammable gas into the surrounding area. It had caused an explosion that had killed and injured many people. The picture was similar to the image that I had just captured, conveying a certain quality, mood and tone that I now recognised as characteristic of this place.

I was suddenly approached by a thin, bony man in a red tattered shirt with a lively curiosity. "Are you from the city? Are you here to photograph us?"

After a few clicks of my camera, I showed the man the

living a life of such uncertainty. The only people who work here are those who cannot find work anywhere else."

As I saw the defeated look in his eyes, I knew exactly what he meant. He wasn't talking about the afflictions of the body. He was burdened by the afflictions of the mind and the soul.

From a distance, I spotted my father standing beside the car, hands in pocket and eyes locked impatiently on me. I knew it was time to go.

As our car drove away, the massive gates of the shipyard became smaller and smaller, till it was just an insignificant speck of dust on the rear windshield of our car. Finally, it disappeared completely, reduced to an afterthought in my overactive conscience.

The sharp pain in my gut grew stronger with the realisation that I had not bothered to ask the man his name. The man remained an enigma. In our time together, I had failed to gain any real insight into this man and his life. He would forever remain nameless, a distant memory of a silly foolish girl.

When I think of him, I picture him as I saw him last. For a brief moment, I had glanced back, expecting to see something I had missed. I took one last look at the thin man, whose story would never be completely told. ■