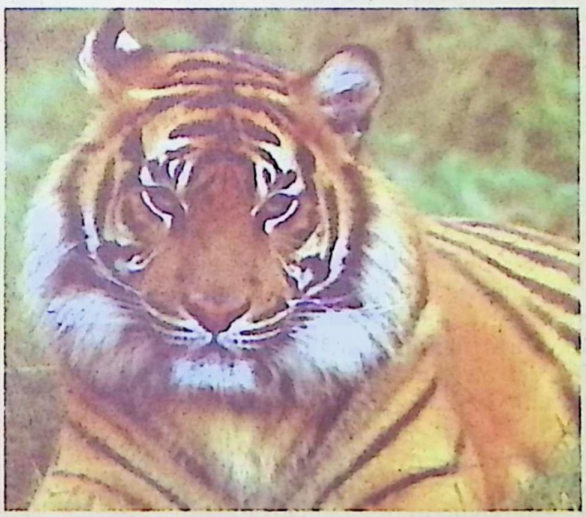
the noise was too great and the crowd too agitated. It was too dangerous to go too close, I wasn't concerned by the thought of the cornered tiger, but the indiscriminate gunfire was another issue entirely.

As we moved outside of the area the already charged atmosphere suddenly intensified, there was a flurry of gunfire, increased intent by those with the sticks, then. I couldn't really comprehend what had happened. The silence seemed too long and we thought that the tiger was dead. I got really upset, I couldn't believe that we had come just a minute too late. The lull continued and I, blubbering *bideshi*, was attracting a fair amount of attention when suddenly the tiger leaped out of the grass again. I saw her majestic head, her huge paws and her beautiful tail stretched out behind her. "It's alive!" I yelled and we were back to action stations.

Through our guide, we were able to convey our concern about the situation to the local Chairman and suggest that there was possibly another way to deal with the events unfolding around us.

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Mean while we acted as an alternative crowd magnet because, lets face it, we were just as interesting a sight as the occasionally glimpsed tiger! The Chairman used his authority to convince the villagers that beating the tiger to death was not the only option. After a period of time the crowd surrounding the tiger started to peel back, leaving the forestry officials alone in the field, giving them a chance to change the possible outcome of the situation.

We waited at the site for a while to make sure that the situation did not reverse itself, then headed back to the town and on to the boat. We set off on the boat to travel the distance we had previously covered on the motorbikes with the intention of dropping back in on the scene to let everyone know that we were still around. On our return, after squelching through the muddy riverbanks and walking through another village, we discovered that the tiger was still crouched hiding in the field but unfortunately one man had been quite badly mauled in the interim.

We heard later that during the night the tiger escaped back into the forest, hopefully to avoid brushes with humans in the future. Unfortunately we haven't heard the fate of the mauled man. Glad we saved the tiger but pretty sure that leaping off the back of a motorbike, racing into a field containing a cornered tiger and men with big sticks and guns firing indiscriminately is the sort of 'dangerous activity' not covered under travel insurance policies...

In retrospect I completely understand that the villagers were terrified and wanted to protect themselves and their loved ones, but the tiger also acted on complete instinct - on finding itself completely cornered by people intent on doing it harm, it merely acted in sefl defense.

There is a great need for strategies to be developed and implemented to manage the interaction of the human and tiger populations in the Sundarbans. There is a need to study the tigers that are living close to humans so that we can learn more about their habits, and just how often they get close to humans. There is a need to raise awareness amongst the villagers living in the region on how to deal with a tiger encounter, for example not to surround it and to leave it with an escape route. The Forestry Department needs the resources and training to deal with a situation like the one we experienced so that the best interests of both the villagers and the forest are maintained. They must have the necessary equipment and training, for example a tranquiliser gun, to remove the immediate threat to all, and the training to manage the crowds that will inevitably form when such an exciting event occurs near villages.

The Bangladesh Sundarbans hold a wealth of natural riches that would make most of the world green with envy. The Sundarbans is an area that every Bangladeshi should be proud to claim as a part of their homeland. It is a peaceful natural wonderland that must be preserved for the benefit of Bangladesh and the world's future generations. ■