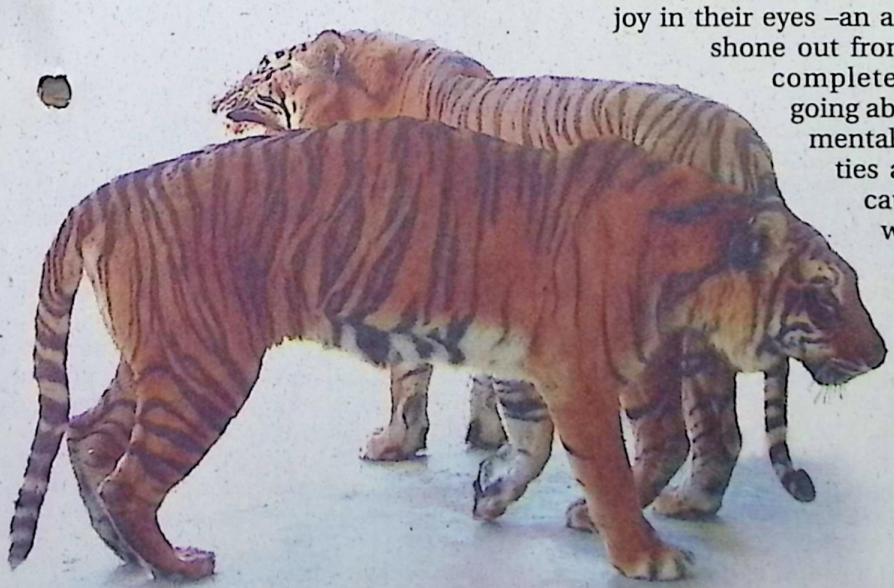
through a period of great turmoil –the challenge could not get any more challenging.

The journey began in the southernmost point of Bangladesh-Teknaf. A 14-hour bus ride that by the end felt like jumping on a trampoline was a pretty apt beginning for the gruelling 10 days to come. However, the moment the challengers got off the bus and saw their ten colourful customized rickshaws, all the exhaustion suddenly fell away. From the first time they got on the rickshaws and pedalled the first few strokes, their body language was transformed and they were well on their way to become *rickshaw-walas* for the next 10 days.

Not a second of the journey was easy. From day one where there were bumpy hilly sandy roads to keep you on your toes, up until the final day when the rickshaws had to be dragged up six steep bridges, the roads kept throwing curve balls at the challengers. But when people are determined enough, every obstacle can be overcome. People pedalled on with bloody knees, through sweltering heat, amidst crazy traffic – you name it, they did it and their resilience was inspiring. There were rewards too though – smiling kids offering to give the rickshaws a push when the road got too steep, villagers offering food and resting places, strangers shouting words of encouragement from the road sides, a little boy who cycled 20 kilometres alongside the challengers - all of which worked as energy boosters as they gained momentum from day to day.

The challenge created a bond between the challengers and Bangladesh. Through the quiet shaded brick roads or busy city streets, they say it was the best possible way to explore Bangladesh in her most authentic flavour. There were games of cricket with little kids, unplanned lunch stops at people's homes where the challengers were welcomed with open arms. In the end it was not only the beautiful Bangladeshi landscape that created the most impact, the most moving moments came in the most unexpected ways. In a little primary school in Eidgaon, during a lunch break the challengers stood up with the kids during assembly as the kids sang *Amar Shonar Bangla,* or when people from seven different nationalities went barefoot up the Chakaria Shaheed Minar and observed a moment of silence for the language martyrs on the International Mother Language day – the impact of the challenge was observed at its deepest level.

And finally, the journey came to an end in Joymuni of Mongla, a beautiful village just beside the Sundarbans – the forest the challengers strived so hard to protect. As they crossed the finish line made of traditional rural paper-flag decor, as they received colourful gamchas from local kids and celebrated with fresh coconut water with tears of joy in their eyes –an amazing contentment shone out from them. Successfully completely 400 kilometres, going above and beyond their mental and physical capacities and doing it all for a cause they believe in wholeheartedly was a once in a lifetime experience, they said in unison. So what did the tigers gain? These 20 people will return to their homelands and be lifetime ambassadors of Bengal tigers, raising awareness and support for the protection of our national pride. ■



All for the tiger.

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSOIN SIKDER