



The floating forests. Former Solomon Islands trees wait for their ship to come.

ISLANDERS RESIST THE MALAY AXEMEN

SOLOMON ISLANDS Government and loggers plan to eliminate last remaining forest on Pavuvu and, by the look of it, every other island in the country.

Locals on Pavuvu, one of the Solomon Islands, have taken to armed insurrection to save their forests. According to police at Yandina, Pavuvu's principal township, 56 men armed with axes, knives, chains, spears and sickles marched on a logging camp established by the Malaysian-owned Maving Brothers on land leased to them by the government, and blockaded the site for two days to prevent delivery of logging machinery.

Police equipped with high-powered rifles later disarmed the men and arrested their leaders. In related incidents, angry islanders beat up two middlemen acting for Maving Bros and threw another into the sea off the wharf at Yandina. They have also threatened to burn logging machinery.

Half of Pavuvu was 'alienated' from its traditional landowners in the nineteenth century and much of it handed over to Lever Brothers for plantations. Now, only the interior of the 17km-wide island, which reaches a height of 488m, retains its original rainforest cover.

The Solomon Islands government plans to eliminate this forest. First, Maving Bros is to clear-fell the estimated 130,000m³ of timber, worth some £12 million. Then the cleared land will be used for a major agricultural development.

At a meeting on Pavuvu in early April, four government ministers – flown to the island at the expense of

Maving Bros – agreed to return the island to its original owners but only after the forest was cleared, insisting that the logging "would benefit the people." But now the government has suddenly backed away from armed confrontation and is sending a mission to Pavuvu to negotiate.

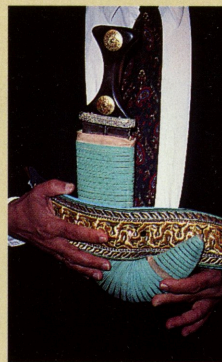
When the government of Prime Minister Sunaone Mamaloni took office in November 1994, it was told that the country was logging at more than 10 times the sustainable rate of 325,000m³ a year, and would run out in 13 years. Mamaloni's response was to cut the export tax on unprocessed logs from 65 to 35 per cent, and reduce the forest-rehabilitation tax from 20 per cent to 7.5 per cent, at a cost to the treasury of £5 million a year. He also extended the deadline for the phase-out of large-scale logging from 1997 to 1999, by which time it is estimated that all loggable forests will have been fully exploited.

Mamaloni happens to be a director of Somma Ltd, which has exported 7,000m³ of round logs worth £600,000 since January. At least two of his ministers are either former or serving directors of logging companies. Responding to an offer by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating to help the Solomon Islands enact legislation for sustainable forest management, a furious Mamaloni last year told Keating to "shut up and clean up his own backyard."

OLIVER TICKELL

UPDATES

Conservation by craft



Yemen's foreign minister, Dr Abdul Karim al-Iryani, with agate dagger handle.

At last there may be an acceptable substitute for rhino horn in Yemeni dagger handles, write *Esmond Bradley Martin* and *Lucy Vigne*. Conservationists have been trying for years to find a high-quality substance that would appeal to Yemeni men's taste in this *de rigueur* accessory, but materials such as bone and plastic have failed to take off. Now Ahmed al-Wazir, a Yemeni craftsman, has produced 35 handles made of locally mined agate, and they appear to have passed a popularity test with the country's élite. He now plans to turn them out commercially, selling them at \$1,700 – slightly more than the cost of the best new rhino-horn handles. Last year, at least 70kg of raw rhino horn – representing a minimum of 24 dead rhinos – was smuggled into Yemen from Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Sayonara to last ibis

'Midori', the last Japanese crested ibis native to Japan, has died, aged 26, at his breeding facility on Sado island. He is survived by 48 Japanese ibises native to China, a mate imported from that population, and five eggs that may or may not, considering their father's age, hatch.

Hill won

Royate Hill, a wildlife-rich disused railway embankment in Bristol (see *BBC Wildlife*, April 1993), is finally safe – after a six-year legal battle that has ended with Environment Secretary John Gummer approving Avon County Council's compulsory purchase of the land – the first time in the UK that this strategy has been used to foil developers. It started in 1991, when a public inquiry rejected plans to build houses on the site. Since then, the property has been partially bulldozed, the developers have been fined for this, the county has purchased it as a wildlife site, the developers have objected, another inquiry has been held, and now the developers have lost again. Much credit goes to the community of Eastville, the councils of both Bristol and Avon, and the Bristol, Bath and Avon Wildlife Trust.



Attack. One day in 1993, Bristolians woke up to the sound of bulldozers . . .

Badgers as fenceless as ever

Badgers are still being mown down by cars on the A41 Berkamsted bypass in Hertfordshire (*BBC Wildlife*, December 1993) – at least 31 are known to have died. Initially, the DoT intended to conduct an experiment on the effect on badgers of not providing fencing, but they backed down after a public uproar. Now, more than 18 months later, the badger-fencing is still incomplete.