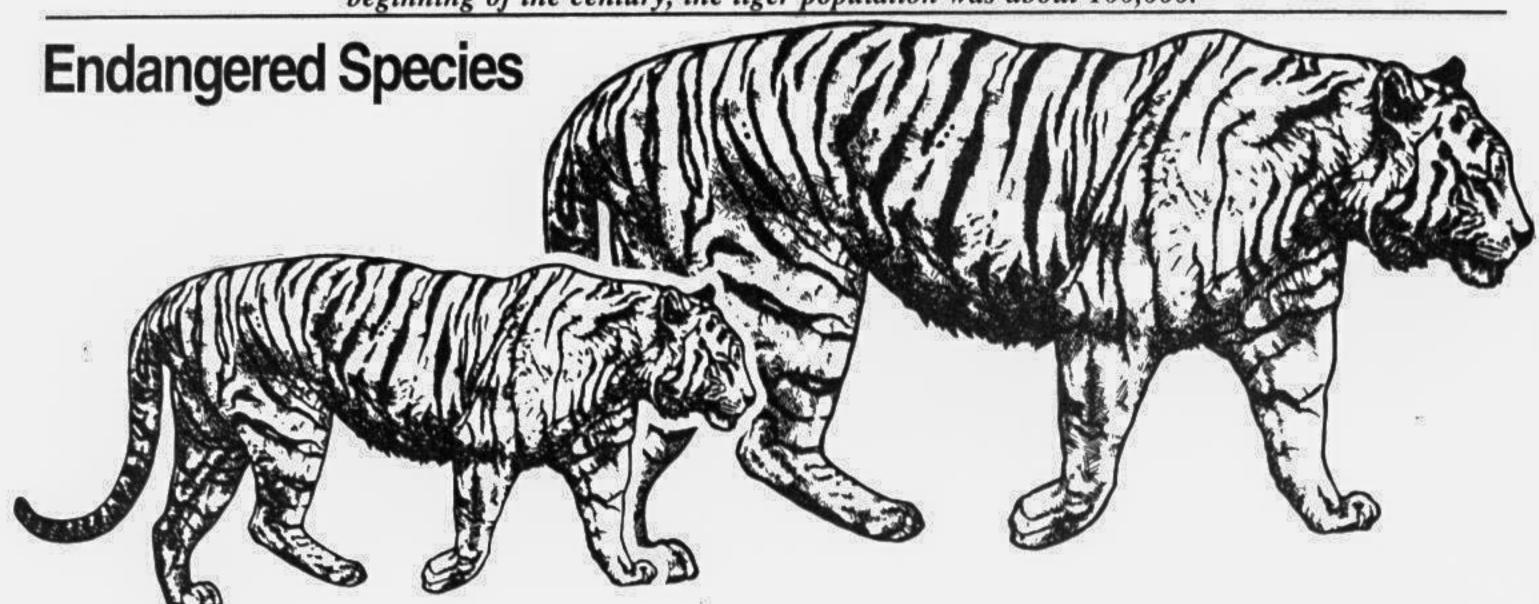
### On the Year of the Tiger

by Sarwat Chowdhury

Tigers in the wild are in danger of becoming extinct unless effective measures are taken immediately. Of the known eight tiger subspecies, only five remain alive today. Conservationists believe that about 5000 to 7500 tigers now survive in the wild (mainly in national parks and protected areas) today whereas at the beginning of the century, the tiger population was about 100,000.



Unlike us human beings, tigers do not recognize international borders. Therefore, saving this endangered species calls for more of an international collaboration.

few days ago, a leading Japanese television Inetwork provoked outrage among its viewers and leading conservationists of the world with the broadcast of a cooking programme. The Fuji Television show, filmed in China was part of a series entitled World Super Deluxe Rare Cuisine", and showed its entertainers eating and enjoying tiger meat.

The three Japanese entertainers appeared to be dining on the tiger at a restaurant in Shanghai. Reportedly, they described their meal as delicious. and even after they had been told what they were eating: the entertainers showed no signs of

Since the Royal Bengal tiger the TV entertainers feasted on is on the endangered species list, many conservationists around the world found the incident especially outrageous. Faced with viewer complaints and media criticism, Fuji TV denied that the eating of this tiger meat violated a global treaty, which protects animals on the endangered species.

The Fuji TV statement also claimed that the meat used in the programme was from a tiger that had died from a fight in a public zoo in China. However, to animal rights activists, this excuse was not sufficient to condone the broadcast of a programme where recognized TV personalities ate and apparently "enjoyed" tiger meat. Particularly in a country like Japan, where the public awareness of the plight of endangered species is still very low, such a programme sets a wrong example for its viewers.

The above incident reminds one of a Hollywood movie enti-

Sanjoy Ghose the ULFA's last resort?

OCIAL activist Sanjoy

Ghose's abduction and

his subsequent disapp-

earance from Majuli, a riverine

island in Assam, on July, 4,

1997 raises questions about the

interface between NGOs and

militants, both critics of the

dered. To mark the first an-

niversary of his abduction.

Ghose's friends held protest

demonstrations in Guwahati

two critics of the government

bound to be problematic? A re-

cently published paper, which

Ghose was writing just before

his abduction, throws some

light on the tense relationship

between an NGO and a militant

group. "Of course, we were

warned and told about the situ-

ation in Assam," recalls Ghose's

wife, Shumita. However, before

reaching Assam, they never an-

ticipated trouble from United

Liberation Front of Assam

However, soon after Ghose,

(ULFA), which abducted Ghose.

Shumita, and five other ac-

tivists moved into Majuli in

April 1996, they were "sized up"

by the militants. Some armed

militants walked into the house

where Ghose and his colleagues

were living as a guest and told

then that they could work, but

In less than a year, tensions

developed between Ghose's

team and the militants. Says

Sunil Kaul, a close colleague of

Ghose: "In January and Febru-

ary 1997, ULFA activities

picked up (momentum) in Ma-

they would be "under watch."

Is the relationship between

Many believe he was mur-

establishment.

and a rally in Majuli.

tled "The Freshman" where the legendary actor Marlon Brando ately. Of the known eight tiger played the part of a dealer in subspecies, only five remain endangered species trade who would arrange for a meal that would be attended by extremely wealthy people around the globe. The guests paid even a million dollars for a dinner. and the main course consisted of an "endangered species". As the movie showed, the more rare and endangered the animal was, the cost of the dinner went up as much. This fictional account obviously depicted a completely illegal practice.

But, the fact is, in various parts of East Asia, import of rare animal products such as tiger bones is still overlooked because of local practices like grounding the tiger bones into powder and selling them as aphrodisiacs. Traditional Chinese medicine uses the animal derivatives to prepare medications in two forms - as individually prepared prescriptions, and as over-the-counter medicines. In most cases, these medicines are manufactured in China and sold in markets worldwide.

Interestingly, the Chinese New Year, which began in January 28, 1998 is the year of the tiger. The environmental organization. World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) announced 1998 as the "year for the tiger" to coincide with the Chinese year. In mid February of this year, a historic Year of the Tiger Conference was held in Dallas USA. This conference was attended by more than 130 representatives from 18 countries including Bangladesh.

According to experts, tigers in the wild are in danger of becoming extinct unless effective

**GREEN POLITICS** 

An Abduction Foretold

Threatened by the AVARD-NE's rising popularity among the people in Majuli, ULFA saw itself losing

credibility rapidly. Tried and tested tactics failed to bring back their people to them. Was the abduction of

measures are taken immedialive today. Conservationists believe that about 5000 to 7500 tigers now survive in the wild (mainly in national parks and protected areas) today whereas at the beginning of the century. the tiger population was about 100,000. This estimate does not seem

surprising when we consider the fact that the human population in the world stood at about 2 billion even in 1930, whereas now we are about to cross the threshold of 6 billion people. With this exponential growth in human population, and consequent loss of wildlife habitat and continuation of illegal hunting, tigers along with other animals had to give away to the expanding human beings. Majestic animals like Bengal tigers are most vulnerable because from a short-term monetary perspective, they are worth more to us dead than alive. Therefore, poaching and illegal trade of tigers continue in various parts of the world. Some experts believe that

the Indian tiger is being poached at a rate of one tiger a day! Without a very strong commitment and public awareness among the tiger range countries, we may soon lose the few thousand remaining tigers. This issue is crucial because tiger range areas span across international borders. The 14 tiger range countries of the world include Bangladesh. Bhutan, Cambodia, China, In-Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal. Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The loss of tigers in the wild threatens not only the species itself but also the ecosystem to

which the tigers belong. As they occupy the top of the food chain, tigers play an important role in determining the population and diversity of other life forms in the ecosystem. In other words, since tigers require large areas of habitat, conserving of this species implies the conservation of vast wild areas that is the home of thousands of other species including mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish and insects.

The Japanese TV programme is also significant because as long as there is direct or even indirect endorsement of the tiger meat and other tiger products, their demand will continue to increase along with the prices. Such a trend unfortunately encourages poachers and smugglers to continue their devastating practices. Without the enforcement of a strong deterrence system and complete consumer awareness, it is extremely difficult to stop the vicious cycle.

More than half the world's uncaged (that is excluding the zoos) tigers occupy scattered patches of government-owned and government-protected forests in Bangladesh, Bhutan. India and Nepal. Unlike us human beings, tigers do not recognize international borders. Therefore, saving this endangered species calls for more of an international collaboration

This century has already seen major losses with the extinction of Caspian. Bali and Javan tigers. It seems vital that we become creative in our efforts to find ways so that the tigers are worth more to us alive than dead, and consequently save our national animal from the path of extinction.

they began systematically in-

terrogating people closely asso-

ciated with US, and warning

them to stay away," Ghose

warned off were local activists.

who ran Dweep-Alok. AVARD-

NE called an emergency meet-

ing and gave them a chance to

"disengage (themselves) hon-

ourably." Instead, the people

people were tired of the gun-tot-

ting youngsters and their dic-

tates. The first jolt to ULFA

came in the form of an article

in Janambhumi. It was written

by a college lecturer named

Dilip Phukan, who asked why

ULFA had not taken up the is-

sue of corruption in the first

visiting the island, about 300

women and children arrived in

buses and trucks, protested in

front him shouting: "AVARD go

all 'requisitioned' by ULFA, and

the people were herded into the

vehicles at gun-point." Some

participants had confessed to

"The trucks and buses were

There were signs that the

suggested a public meeting.

The people who had been

## Islanders Try to Turn the Tide against Coral Disaster

Many of Jamaica's beautiful coral reefs have been reduced to "wastelands of rubble" by man-made hazards, say marine scientists. Urgent conservation measures are now being introduced, reports Gemini News Service, as the destruction threatens not only marine life but the lucrative tourism trade.

### Zadie Neufville writes from Kingston

authorities are stepping up efforts to protect the Caribbean islands coral reefs amid

warnings that 95 per cent of them are either dead or dying. An alarming decline in coral and related marine life in recent years is already threaten-ing Jamaica's tourism trade, the country's main foreign ex-change earner and second largest employer.

One south-cast hotel complex has had to build its own artificial beach out of limestone chips because the original white sand — a cherished feature of the island that was formerly protected by the reefs - was

washed away. Scientists at the Discovery Bay Marine Laboratory of the University of the West Indies say most of the reefs are falling victim to such hazards as pollu-tion, excessive coastal development, overfishing and cli-mate change linked to global warming.

Some have already been reduced to "wastelands of rubble" says a report from the labora-

Such warnings have prompted the government and environmental organisations into drawing up an action plan aimed at protecting the island's recent reclamation of wetlands has led to severe damage to the remaining reefs and marine

nearby reef. Problems begin inland, with Jamaican environmentalist deforestation and agricultural Peter Espeut welcomed the run-off causing chemicals and move as "long overdue". He said: soil to flow into the sea. Run-off "Primarily, the Jamaican Coral increases algal growth, and be-Reef Action Plan calls for a cause overfishing has reduced the number of fish feeding on the algae, the coral can becomes chain of coastal and marine protected areas to be established around the coast and in smothered and starved of oxyoffshore areas to micro-manage the marine species, including the coral reefs. Related ecosys-All these hazards place the

reefs under great stress, often causing a bleaching effect, as the one-celled organisms which inhabit the outside layer of each coral polyp are killed off. This process, in turn, begins to destroy the reef. On top of this, the effects of

global warming and an increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes have also caused massive damage to Caribbean reefs, according to Dr Deborah Brosnan, of the United Statesbased Sustainable Ecosystems Institute. Brosnan's institute is help-

ing governments in the region to protect the remaining coral. Emphasising the importance of reefs around the world, she says they provide up to 12 per cent of global fishery resources.

Their destruction, therefore,

places a further strain on depleted fish stocks, while the loss of the many natural compounds they contain may also deny the world valuable future

medicinal benefits. A World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) report says: "Coral reefs are one of the oldest types of living systems on Earth, and the variety of life they support rivals that of the tropical forests of the Amazon or New Guinea. In the tropical Pacific, for example, reefs may be home to more than 1,300 species of fish. These biological wonders have survived tens of thousands of years of natural change, but many of them may not be able to survive the havoc wrought by humankind.

"One tenth of all the world's coral reefs have already been virtually destroyed, and another third are expected to be lost within the next couple of decades, even without climate

The report adds that climate change "will certainly speed this demise for the most endangered and vulnerable reefs". which include those of Jamaica.

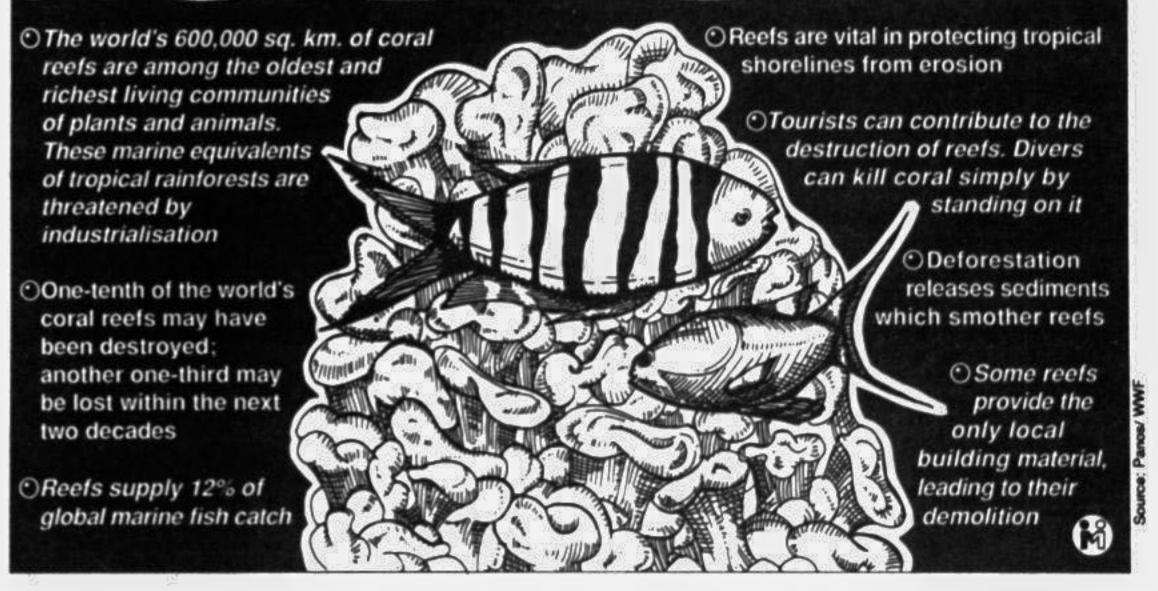
The Kingston government has already taken some steps to protect them. Fishing curbs have been imposed, and net sizes regulated. Strict planning rules have been introduced in some areas, particularly on beaches, and measures have been taken to control sewage outflows. A ban has been brought into effect on the removal or sale of coral.

The new action plan is aimed at strengthening such controls and extending national marine parks. Besides the Montego Bay reserve, nature sanctuaries will be created around Negril and Port Antonio, and further efforts will be made to protect mangroves.

Environmentalist Peter Espeut says the government plans to work in partnership with other stakeholders, including fishermen and the National Water Commission. Although the conservation task is immense, he remains cautiously hopeful that they can achieve positive results. The writer is a freelance

journalist who has worked in Britain, Holland and Jamaica.

# Corals in crisis



tems, such as mangroves and

seagrass beds, have also got to

island's 795 kilometres of

coastline, almost two-thirds of

which is fringed by white sands.

Reefs have protected the coast

from the effects of hurricanes

and provided rich feeding

grounds for fish and other ma-

rine life. Mangroves and sea

grass beds, meanwhile, have

helped to protect the corals

from inland pollutants, soil

erosion and other man-made

ance has been disturbed.

However, this delicate bal-

Rapid development around

the coasts has destroyed many

wetland areas and increased

pollution from sewage outflows.

In the Kingston harbour area,

Coral surrounds much of the

be protected."

# How to Influence People and Lose Friends

by A Husnain

ORGET about Dale \_\_ Carnegie's How to Influence People & Win Friends, a best seller decades ago, when the young professionals memorized the gold mine of ideas and applied it indiscriminately, with many funny results; meaning that life is not a book in black and white, which can be opened and closed at will, or kept on the bookself (life), or carried in the pocket.

In dealing with other people there are thousand other shades of grey areas in daily interaction where attractive book formulas do not appear to apply readily under topical conditions. You need judgement, and judgment comes from experience, and experience comes at many levels, after many years of the filtration process.

Experience is a hard task to master; but what is worse that it takes a long time to learn something, and longer still to unlearn nasty experiences. Once you learn the hard way in the alleys and by-lanes of life, full of open manholes and unlighted street lights, either you do not care much to leaf through a book, or can never find the time to sit down to browse through such self-improvement books.

You are eager to pass on your stock of local wisdom to the restless and inattentive younger generation, they have

bi-polar vision: one eye is directed towards you, and the other scanning for more glamorous images or realities.

Hence the story of success is not a linear progressive curve on 2-D paper (a sheet of paper has only two dimensions, and cannot cope with the instant sixth sense). By the way what is the definition of 'success'? The subjective definition is restrictive, and the objective one is abstract, and takes longer than one term to show any result Success is a lifetime search for what is not.

Any way, times have changed, and the third world is competing as a third force in the dubious art of making money. This is the world of the have-nots, who cannot resist temptation, and cannot stand or sit with tolerance. Watch our own society, and notice how Dale Carnegie's precepts have changed in a subtle manner. Keep up with the breeze otherwise the sweet murmuring will pass you by.

Here are some modern amendments, but the application is not advised, and the results are not guaranteed.

 Never acknowledge credit to others. Always try to establish that the good deed was done years ago by your group, however obscure. Herd instinct is useful even in this mobile age.

Always find fault with oth-

ers, especially your predecessors. Current situations would never have gone wrong had the earlier foundations (or the lack of it) been set up in the right manner. You found everything in a mess, now, and 20 years ago. You wonder how the country continued to exist without you at the helm of affairs.

\* Always point out that nobody thought of the idea before you. The rest are duffers. Never give credit to others. Ignore facts and data, and forget you ever made a mistake.

\* Everything is done in public interest, for the janata — the poor, simple, honest folks who were waiting so long for your august presence in their midst. Even your children's education had been arranged abroad, with great personal sacrifices, to enable them to return to the country, and serve the poor masses and our 'rich' country. The poor are loyal to poverty and therefore stick to it through thick and thin; to provide more opportunities to the social ambassadors. Eat panta-bhat (soaked rice) in company of the cellular.

\* Tickle the heart-strings; never tap the brain. Avoid logic and rationality, and pile on the emotion and passion. Buy expensive onion to generate mega tears at public meetings. A new breed of executive personality parlours are coming up in cosmopolitan Dhaka. Warning: visiting such Think Tanks

might change your character! Anyway, it is worth taking the risk. In this part of the world. one can afford to burn the fingers more than once, as dalals (agents) and money come cheap.

 Bank-loan defaulting is a good business. It keeps you in the limelight, protects your shady deals, and puts you in the category of upper-class untouchables. A cluster of defaulters is a time-bomb. The philosophy is the modern version of having the cake and eating it

 Learn to use the back door The front door is always closed and well guarded against indiscretions. The world is an illusion; don't believe what you are

\* Never praise anybody at any time. Use foul language, lose your temper and loosen your tongue (no VAT yet); glare at the perfectly innocent people through the microphone, and denounce anything in sight. Praise your leader five times a day, farz, sunnat (obligatory, optional), and denounce other leaders ten times a day — people have short memories. Buy special tasbihs (rosary); many

models are available. Repeat your message again and again, till it dawns on people that the majority is always

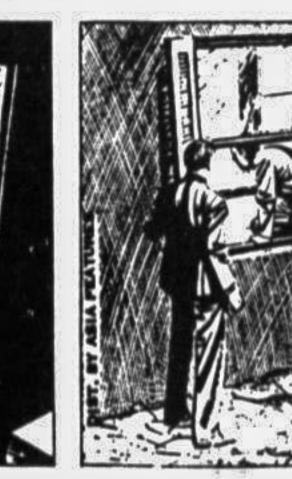
\* Never retire; tire others till they surrender.

### Garfield® ULFA had to save its face now. On May 31, when the chairperson of the Assam State Human Rights Commission was

# GARFIELD, ARE YOU PEEKING ) AT YOUR PRESENT? PEEKING.











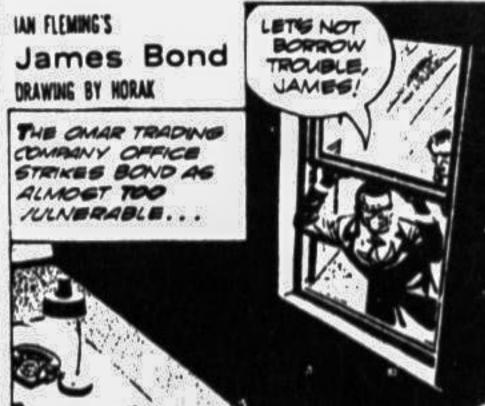


"The first of June dawned cloudy, and the island was lashed by the first downpour of the season," Ghose writes. For the people of Majuli it was a crucial choice : AVARD-NE or ULFA? They chose AVARD-NE. Ghose and friends antici-

pated trouble right from late 1996, when ULFA started threatening local workers of AVARD-NE. The threats were never direct. And ULFA had a credibility among the people.

Says Kaul: "The consensus was to wait it out till the situation turned serious." What was serious - killing? maiming? "We never thought of any of us getting abducted. In July last year, (on the day Ghose was abducted), while going along with militants. Ghose saw a police jeep. But he never waved." Shumita and a few others still believe in their heart that he is

CSE/Down To Earth Features.





"Whenever Assamese workers were sent to the field, the militants threatened them. brandishing weapons." Kaul had worked as a doctor in the Indian Army before joining the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development -Northeast (AVARD-NE), the NGO that Ghose led.

Ghose's last paper indicates that the AVARD-NE and the ULFA had been jostling for space. The paper, titled Voluntary Organisation and Militancy. A Personal Account, recently published by Voluntary Health Association of India. New Delhi, chronicles the ten-

sions. AVARD-NE and ULFA shared the same terrain and the same mass base. They both were critics of the establish-

Says Kaul: "Sanjoy said idealistic youths had two choices - pick up arms or become NGO activists." Explains Ghose's wife Shumita: "The methods are different, so there would definitely be a conflict.'

Ghose chose Majuli as it symbolised the dilemma of the northeast. The northeast, though rich in resources and with a strong social structure, has been left out of the development process. Similarly, Majuli, located near Jorhat, an important trade centre, is the hub of traditional learning and spirituality in Assam but at the same time is the backyard of development. AVARD-NE and ULFA often crossed each other's path in Majuli.

The social workers would go into the most interior and remote hamlets seeking to improve the delivery system. ULFA cadres would be using the same spots as hideouts. "We would bump into ULFA cadres all over the island," notes

But the actual fight was for space in people's mind. Ghose's team gained the local Assamese people's confidence soon. In August 1996, Majuli was marooned in one of the worst ever floods. Ghose and his team started two services - medical service and installation of shallow hand-pumps for drinking water.

Recalls Kaul: "We had to walk in the water, carrying bicycles over our heads." However, local officials often put hurdles on their way, delaying and slashing government

Incensed, Ghose dispatched a stinging feature report to The Sentinel, a daily from Guwahati, exposing the babus. AVARD-NE's Assamese newsletter Dweep-Alok flashed a few other scams, including one involving a local leader of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) swindling a handpump. These exposes did not exactly endear the NGO to the vested interests in Majuli. When Ghose and his col-

leagues started a project to tackle soil erosion in Majuli. the locals voluntarily pooled in 30,000 human days of labour. By the time they could protect 1.7 km of Majuli's banks from erosion, AVARD-NE had earned one more enemy - the contractors who had been skimming the fat off such government projects. Says Kaul: 'There is a rural development department-

contractor-militant nexus."

In an e-mail message to one of his friends in Delhi on June 14, 1997, Ghose wrote: "I think this nexus needs to be exposed too many people are involved, and this has caused and is causing unnecessary suffering .... We know who the culprits are they are petty contractors and some local bigwigs, but this ULFA angle has confused the is-

AVARD-NE was fast becoming an alternative power base. threatening ULFA's credibility. According to Ghose's paper, of which there has been no refutation so far, the local people gave repeated signs that the NGO activists were more than welcome in their island. They wrote newspaper articles praising AVARD-NE and gave them a thumping support, while denouncing ULFA, in a public meeting.

By the beginning of 1997. they began to threaten AVARD-NE's local activists. In April 1997, AVARD-NE's first local recruit, Bhagirath, was told : "Resign immediately, and spread the message that AVARD is a cover for RAW (Research and Analysis Wing - India's external intelligence agency).' He refused. Bhagirath was then transferred to Rajasthan, where Ghose and colleagues had worked for 10 years before shifting their base to Assam.

Coercive tactics failing. ULFA started playing up to people's cultural ethos. The organisation that came up during the 1980's "anti-foreigner" agitation has often used cultural motifs to whip up xenophobia. By May, unsigned posters accusing AVARD-NE of "being im-

overnight. "A week after that,

posters, perpetrating a culture of dependence and destroying the local culture of Assam" were alive. pasted in five locations