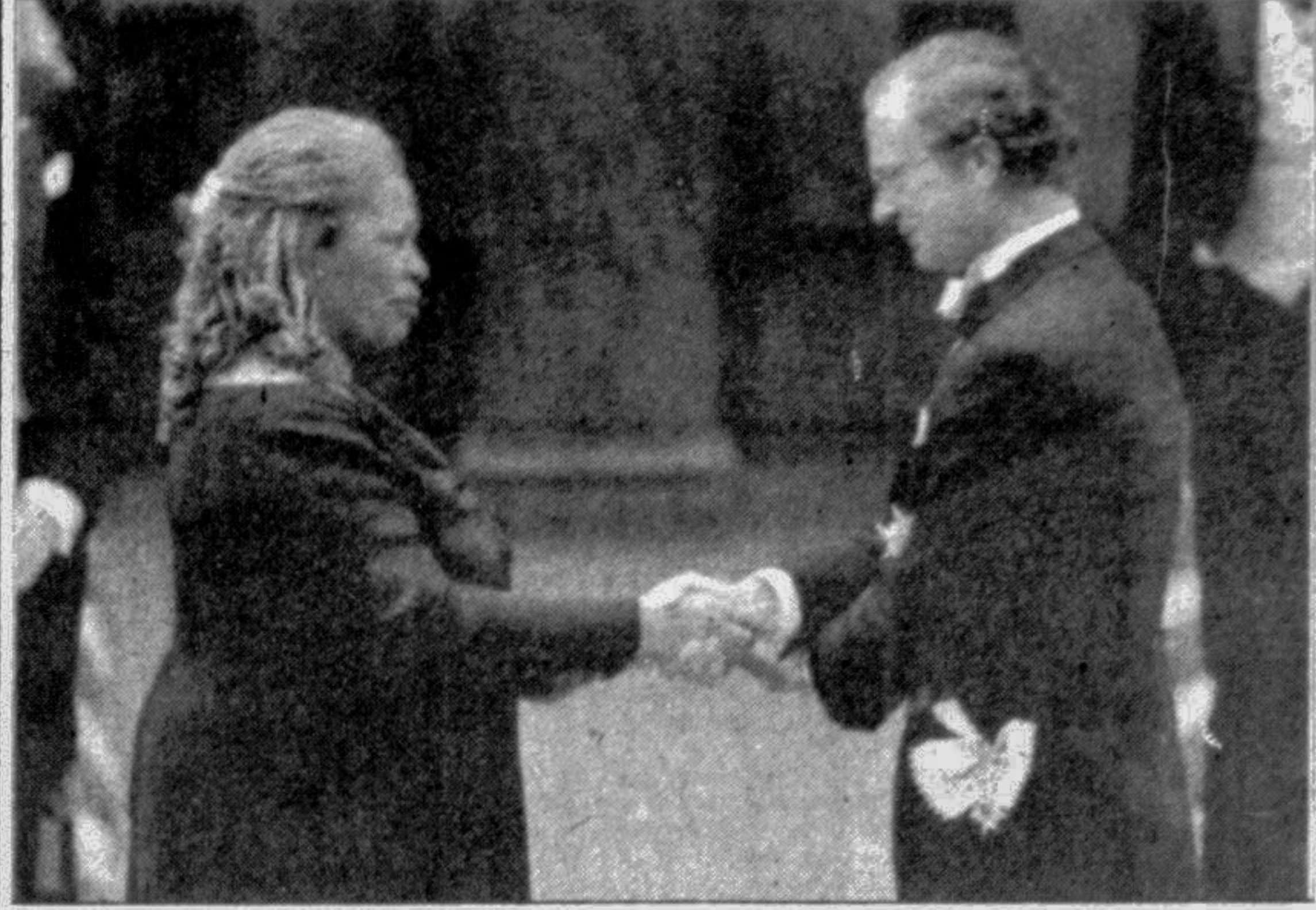




Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (L) is welcomed by Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller (R) on her arrival in Ankara Friday. Bhutto is in Turkey for a three-day official visit.

### Australia hopes to end row with Malaysia

CANBERRA, Dec 11: Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said this morning that he expects the Malaysian cabinet to end the recent row between the two countries later today, reports Xinhua. The relations between the two countries will return to normal if the Malaysian cabinet decides today to accept Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's apology for his comments about his Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohamad, Evans was quoted as saying in Melbourne by the Australian Associated Press (AAP). Keating described Mahathir as a "recalcitrant" for not attending the informal leaders' meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Seattle last month, which has made their ties severely strained for the past three weeks. While Malaysia has taken some minor steps of sanction against Australia as retaliation, Keating has publicly expressed regret over his comments. The Malaysian cabinet will hold a meeting later today to decide whether to accept the regret or to impose tougher sanctions against Australia. "We have to wait and see what goes out of today's meeting," Evans said, adding that Australia expects a reaffirmation from Malaysia of "the value of the relationship". If the results of the meeting turn out to be positive, they will represent "a straightforward signal" that the problem is over and things are back to normal, Evans said. But it's also possible that the signals coming out of the meeting will be ambiguous, which will affect Australia's business ties with Malaysia, he said. Malaysia is Australia's 13th biggest trading partner, with annual two-way trade totalling 1.6 billion US dollars.



US writer Toni Morrison is congratulated by Swedish King Carl Gustaf after she received the Nobel Prize for Literature during the awarding ceremony in Stockholm on Friday.

### Babangida goes into exile in Egypt

LAGOS, Dec 11: Former Nigerian military President Ibrahim Babangida reportedly went into exile in Egypt 10 days after leaving Nigeria on a private visit to that country, reports Xinhua. The Lagos-based Pan African News Agency (PANA) on Thursday quoted an Egyptian newspaper "Al Wafd" as saying Babangida officially told Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak of his intention to settle in Egypt during a meeting in Cairo, capital of Egypt, last week. Babangida left for Cairo on a four-week vacation with his wife and two of their four children on December 1. Babangida, 52, came to power in August, 1993, when he ousted the military government of Muhammadu Buhari in a coup. He resigned from the army and handed power over to the interim national government headed by Ernest Shonekan on August this year.

## Leaders press for 'yes' vote to Yeltsin's new constitution

MOSCOW, Dec 11: Russia's leaders stepped up the pressure for a 'yes' vote to President Boris Yeltsin's new constitution on the final day of campaigning before voters give their verdict, reports Reuters. Television of Friday night re-broadcast a sombre address by Yeltsin telling voters that rejection of Russia's new basic law, in a referendum accompanied by parliamentary elections on Sunday, could plunge the country back into civil war. Meanwhile Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, due to leave hospital on Saturday after a kidney stone operation, appealed by radio to voters to support the constitution, saying it would stabilise the process of reforms. Chernomyrdin is not campaigning in the polls and commands prestige as a neutral figure standing above the parties. Only the communists have campaigned all-out against the constitution but many political parties have given it only lukewarm support and said it needs amending. Patriarch Aleksy of the Russian orthodox church said in a television interview voters should take part in the constitution vote, though he did not tell them which way to choose. Yeltsin's camp is more worried about voter apathy than about an outright 'no' vote in

Sunday's poll. The constitution can only be approved if there is a turnout of more than 50 per cent of the 107 million electors. In the battle for seats in the new parliament, the pro-Yeltsin Russia's choice bloc changed tactics, turning up the heat on far-right candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a charismatic figure who is promising to restore the Russian empire. Mikhail Poltoranian, who is close to Yeltsin, said Zhirinovskiy could be president in the latter half of next year if his party did well in the elections, as many have predicted. Russia's choice, led by economic reformer Yegor Gaidar, said the right-winger should no longer be seen as a political clown. "If it has all been a joke to you so far, then now it really is fighting, the Russia's choice statement said. Zhirinovskiy closed his campaign with an address to around 4,000 supporters outside Moscow's Bolshoi theatre, predicting that leaders of other former Soviet republic would soon ask to be real sorbed into Russia. Zhirinovskiy came third behind Yeltsin and former Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhko in the Russian presidential election in 1991, but has never yet been in parliament.

## Off the Record

### After a practical joke went sour ...

ARMENIA: An 11-year-old boy killed a former policeman Friday by stabbing him in the back after a practical joke went sour, reports AFP. The boy was playing in the street and threw a water balloon that hit the ex-cop in the face, police in this western town said. The former policeman flew into a rage and kicked the boy, who ran home, grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed the adult in the back before fleeing.

### 'Rushdie deserves death sentence'

ATHENS: Prominent Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Yusuf Al Qardawi said the majority of fuqaha (Islamic jurists) are of the view that an apostate like Salman Rushdie deserves the death sentence, reports Irna. Speaking to Egyptian writer on Islamic affairs Fehmi Huwaidi, the Sheikh said apostasy (al ridda) in Islam is divided into two categories: "Mukhaffafa and Mughallaza" which could be translated loosely in English as "light and severe" apostasy. In the "Mughallaza" category, like the apostasy of Salman Rushdie, said Sheikh Qardawi, an apostate calls to his heresy by his speech or pen. So in this case the harsher punishment is to be applied taking the view of the majority of the ummah in order to eliminate evil. He said the one who advocates apostasy publicly deserves the death sentence because it is considered a treachery to the ummah and a major crime.



### Playboy no longer scandalous just naughty

CHICAGO: It started with a restless young man plotting an empire from his kitchen table. He had little money and a big plan to remove the plain brown wrapper from America's most taboo topic - sex, reports AP. Soon he had the recipe: The bunny. The photo of Marilyn Monroe. And, of course, the name, Playboy. Playboy celebrates its 40th anniversary this month and both the magazine and man have changed. Hugh Hefner, once the guru of hedonism, is a senior citizen and family man, his empire is run by a feminist - his daughter, Christie - and his middle-age creation has gone from scandalous to just naughty. Yet it remains a success. Today, Playboy's US circulation is 3.4 million, half its peak in the 1970s; about 80 per cent are subscriptions. It has 1.6 million readers of 17 foreign editions. "Playboy is no longer at the leading edge of sexual shock," said Bernard Beck, an associate sociology professor at Northwestern University. "It's conventional." "It's no longer cutting edge...but it's still the biggest men's magazine and probably the best in the country," declares James Kobak, a New York magazine consultant who has worked with Playboy. "They really changed with culture. Or maybe the culture changed with them."

### Wolf-dog mauls 3-yr-old

TOWNSHEND: A wolf-dog mauled a 3-year-old boy to death after the youngster wandered away from his day-care center, reports AP. Kevin Michael Lahey of Townshend wandered Friday into a yard next to the center, where the 2 1/2-year-old female wolf-dog was caring for a litter of nine puppies. The 120-pound (54-kilogram) animal may have been protecting its puppies after Lahey walked over to look at them, said Cathy Barrows, an animal control officer from Brattleboro who took the wolf-hybrid away after the attack. "She probably chased the boy and knocked him down from the back. From there she ended up fatally wounding him," Barrows said.

## BRIEFLY

### Kyrgyz vice president resigns:

Vice President of Kyrgyzstan Feliks Kulov offered to resign for 'ethical reasons', Xinhua reports from Moscow. He voiced his decision at a parliamentary session and submitted his resignation to Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev after lawmakers accused the government of 'illegal gold deals'. Meanwhile, he demanded the government also resign. After a series of discussions on the country's gold reserves Wednesday, Kyrgyz Parliament, on December 9 threatened to raise a motion of confidence against Prime Minister Tursunbek Chyngyshev for his alleged involvement in "shady dealings with the infamous concern Seabeco".

### Typhoon claims 31 Filipinos:

Typhoon Manny slammed into the eastern Philippines, killing 31 people, barely a week after the region was left devastated by typhoon Lola, relief agencies said yesterday, AFP reports from Manila. Preliminary reports said that 31 were killed in Camarines Sur Province, east of Manila, largely from floods and landslides spawned by Manny. However, relief agencies said they were still awaiting reports from many of their other stations. Camarines Sur and other provinces already suffered at least 130 deaths after typhoon Lola slammed into the country last weekend.

### Indonesian edn officials meet:

A total of 6 million Indonesian school-age children will benefit from the government's nine-year compulsory education programme, Xinhua reports from Jakarta. Director General for Elementary and Secondary Education ZA Achmad told the participants of a coordinating meeting of government education officials held in Kuta, Bali, since Thursday that it was necessary to implement the nine-year compulsory education programme as soon as possible in order to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resource.

### Malaysia blasts developed states:

Visiting Malaysian Forestry Minister Lim Kong Yoik blasted developed countries for criticising forest use policies of developing countries, the Antara news agency said Saturday, reports AFP. "They continue to corner developing countries on forestry issues without giving them a chance, while only 10 per cent of their own forests have been left," Lim said while attending three-day bilateral forestry talks in East Java provincial capital Surabaya. Officials of the two countries shared views on forestry issues in preparation for the world forestry meeting in March, the news agency said.

### Haitian HR group honoured:

A Haitian human rights coalition Friday received the 1993 International Freedom Award from the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Reuters reports from Montreal. The platform of Haitian human rights defence groups received the award, which honours an individual or organisation for an "exceptional contribution made in the defence and promotion of human rights and democratic development in a developing country." The platform group is made up of nine human rights organisations and was founded in Port-au-Prince in the spring of 1991.

## CIS states helping Iraq, Iran, DPRK develop N-arms?

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: The United States has information that scientists from former Soviet Republics have gone to Iran, Iraq and North Korea and there are suspicions they may be helping develop nuclear and other arms, a senior administration official said Friday, reports Reuters. "There are reports of people leaving and going to these countries," said Undersecretary of State Lynn Davis, referring to intelligence reports about the activities of scientists in Russia, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet Republics with nuclear weapons. "Now, precisely what they're doing and how important they are to these efforts, it's hard to have an understanding because we don't have very good intelligence in these countries," she told a seminar sponsored by the center for war, peace and the news media, associated with New York University. Citing the example of Iran, she added, however, that "we have suspicions (about the role of the former Soviet scientists) because we have suspicions about what Iran is doing on a variety of different kinds of developments with respect to weapons of mass destruction." Davis, the administration's pointman on non-proliferation issues, was unable to provide any details on the issue, such as the number of scientists who may have migrated. "It's very difficult to document," she said. The United States and many other countries have been concerned about a potential seepage of nuclear-related brain-power and technology from the republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the secret transfer of technology to other countries from the ex-Soviet states, she said: "We hear reports of the flow of nuclear materials and we follow up on those but we have no specific confirmation of that at this point in time."

## Winegrowers clash with French police

MONTPELLIER, France, Dec 11: Angry winegrowers from southern France clashed with police and invaded runways at the Montpellier airport, local officials said. One demonstrator was slightly injured, reports AP. The clashes followed a meeting of up to 7,000 winegrowers upset over pending European Community reforms that would force winegrowers to uproot some vineyards. After the evening meeting at a nearby hall, winegrowers marched toward the airport and about 300 of them invaded the runways, stopping traffic for 90 minutes, airport officials said.

## Empress Michiko speaks after two months

TOKYO, Dec 11: Empress Michiko has spoken her first words since she suffered an unexplained collapse two months ago whispering "Your Majesty" and her daughter's nickname, "Saya," news reports said Saturday, according to AP. The empress has reportedly been unable to speak since collapsing October 20, her 59th birthday. The Imperial Household Agency announced shortly after midnight Friday that the empress said the two words on Tuesday, Kyodo News Service reported. Palace doctors have said the empress was unable to speak because of psychological factors and has no physical or neurological problems. She collapsed in the imperial palace a few hours before a banquet to celebrate her birthday.



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (R) speaks to journalists on Friday together with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher after their meeting in Tunis.

## Russian guards kill 9 rebels

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Dec 11: Russian border guards shot and killed nine rebels who tried to break into Tajikistan from Afghanistan, news agencies reported Saturday, says AP. The nine were among 15 men who tried to cross into the Pynzhah area overnight, the ITAR-Tass and Interfax news agencies reported. The rest fled back into Afghanistan after an armed clash, and no Russians were wounded, the reports said. Russian troops are in Tajikistan to fortify the borders of the former Soviet republic, fellow member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. More than 20,000 people have been killed during Tajikistan's civil war since 1992. Tajik rebels fighting the pro-communist government in Dushanbe are aided by Islamic Mujahideen in Afghanistan.

## Religion and politics do not always mix in South Asia

KATHMANDU, Dec 11: Recent polls in Pakistan and by-elections in India showed that religion and politics do not always mix in South Asia. Islamic parties were routed in Pakistan and in India the rightwing Hindu Party lost its key state, reports IPS. Democratic secularists have hailed the demise of the religious parties and maintain that the South Asian voter has sent a clear message that for them, the economy is paramount. That may be, true this time. But if South Asian economies continue to fail to deliver the goods and an increasingly younger and more restive electorate sees no end to hardships they could still be swayed by populist, pseudo-religious demagogues. The initial euphoria that greeted the return to political pluralism in some South Asian countries over the past few years is being replaced with a creeping sense of disillusionment. The October election in Pakistan was a rare ray of hope. It was the fairest in decades, and showed that Pakistani politics was eroding the pull of religious radicals, out-growing the military and evolving into a mature two-party system. But even in Pakistan, politicians have largely discredited themselves. What good are free elections, people ask, if there is really no choice?

It was in Pakistan that South Asia's own third wave of democracy got going in 1988. Bangladesh and Nepal soon followed, overthrowing authoritarian leaders. In many cases, jailed pro-democracy activists went straight from their cells to swearing-in ceremonies for cabinet posts. Giddy with new-found freedom, dissidents who had fought long and hard for the cause of freedom drew up new constitutions that ensured civil liberties and rule of law. But across South Asia, and even in countries with long traditions of free multi-party elections, politicians are busily giving democracy a bad name. Suffering decades of detention, persecution or exile does not seem to dissuade dissidents when they assume office from being any less short-sighted, venal and self-serving than their predecessors. It may have been too much to expect that after decades of centralised power, mismanagement and corruption, these countries would transform themselves overnight into economic miracles. But that is exactly what millions of South Asians were willing to believe, despite getting vivid demonstrations of the limitations of west-

ern style parliamentary democracy in India and Sri Lanka which are being torn apart by secessionist and communal forces. In India, decades of dynasty rule corroded democracy to the point where squabbling within the ruling party has made it vulnerable to an onslaught from the religious right. East Asian proponents of capitalist authoritarianism today present India as a glaring example of the unsuitability of western-style freedoms for ensuring rapid economic progress in developing countries. Politics, they say, has become an end in itself and not linked to improving peoples' living standards. Sri Lanka used to be a model of how a Westminster-type government could thrive in the Third World and still provide its population with basic needs. But it did not take long for a system that evolved over centuries in a liberal, homogeneous European setting to be doomed by ethno-religious chauvinism. Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh suffered long years of authoritarianism and there is appreciation here of the political space that democracy has brought. But transferring the loyalty of the electorate, the military or extremist parties to pluralism has been more difficult. A headline in a Karachi newspaper on elec-

tion day in October said: "Unstable democracy is better than dictatorship". But although South Asia's intelligentsia may be convinced about democracy's long-term merits as the least risky path to economic development, its impoverished millions are far too impatient to wait for democracy to work its way out of a messy transition. Unless democracy can show economic and material results rapidly, the right to vote will be regarded as a trick. Radicals of left or right, religious zealots and separatists will fill the vacuum. In the past three years, South Asia's elected governments have shown fecklessness, skewed priorities and a fatal deficiency in the art of governance. In Nepal, former political detainees are still grappling with state-craft, and squandering away their mandate in petty infighting while the economy stagnates, foreign aid sits unused, inflation, unemployment, power cuts and water shortages radicalise a seething urban population. The South Asian lesson is clear: The longer political pluralism fails to bring social rights to its long-suffering poor the greater the danger of democratic reversal.

## Confce on AIDS in Africa begins today

GENEVA, Dec 11: International specialists are to gather in the Moroccan city Marakesh from December 12 to 17 for a conference on AIDS in Africa, the World Health Organisation announced here Friday, reports AFP. The head of the WHO campaign against AIDS, Dr Michael Merson, is to address the opening session on Sunday. WHO sources said he would present new figures confirming an increase in the number of persons in African afflicted with the HIV virus, which precedes the development of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Merson is expected to urge African governments to step up their prevention efforts and to appeal for an increase in international financial assistance to combat AIDS.