

BRIEFLY

Cholera claims 33 in Zaire, Rwanda:

Thirty three people have died from cholera in the area around Goma, eastern Zaire, and in a Rwandan transit centre in the past three weeks, the World Health Organisation said Friday. AFP reports from Geneva.

Chinese dissident Zhang Zongliang has been jailed for five years for propaganda and counter revolutionary activities, a human rights group said in a statement received in Beijing yesterday.

Zhang, 56, was informed of the sentence early this week and filed an appeal Friday, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic November in China said.

5 of a family killed in Mexico:

A couple who had written a book on Mexico's murderous drug trade has been found murdered along with their three children, police said. AFP reports from Mexico City.

Polling begins in Ghana:

Stationing in Ghana open early morning to allow more than 9.2 million voters to decide their next president and parliament. AFP reports from Accra.

Teresa meets visitors:

Mother Teresa, recovering from heart surgery, was cheerful yesterday and met members of her Roman Catholic religious order, a clinic administrator said. Reuter reports from Calcutta.

Landslide buries 23 alive in China:

Twenty-three people were killed when a landslide buried them alive in China's southwestern Guizhou province, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

Mild quake hits Japan:

A moderate earthquake measuring 4.9 on the Richter scale shook the Izu group of islands south of Tokyo yesterday but no injuries or damage have been reported, the Meteorological agency said.

Noted Canadian singer dies:

A Canadian country music legend whose career spanned six decades, has died at his home in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was 91. AP reports from Toronto.

Manam volcano erupts:



The Manam volcano erupts wiping out the village of Budawa on the south side of Manam Island off the north coast of Papua New Guinea Wednesday. At least six people have been killed and dozens injured by lava and rocks as the government continues to evacuate the remote island's 7,000 residents.

— AFP/UNB photo

**Over 7 lakh refugees returned to Rwanda so far
Canada has no plan to close down multinational force mission**

OTTAWA, Dec 7: Canada has no plans to close down the multinational force humanitarian mission in Central Africa, Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said here Friday.

left, if we can help support the work of NGOs (non-government agencies), we'll do it.

"The demand is still there, the commitments of the other countries are still there, what we are particularly trying to do is get a further assessment of the condition on the ground in the eastern part of Zaire."

Axworthy said that decisions on operations would depend on the needs on the ground requests from humanitarian agencies helping the refugees.

Asked if he was planning to ask for the dissolution of the multinational force, Axworthy replied: "No, these are decisions that will be taken by the partners in this agreement. We will want to ensure the mandate of the mission, which was to supply humanitarian assistance, is fulfilled."

of 600,000 having gone back out of the original figure of more than one million who aid agencies said had fled to Eastern Zaire in 1994 after a massacre of about a million people in Rwanda.

"Nobody indicated yesterday that we were ending our mission in Zaire," Young said.

"Canada is not acting unilaterally. It will not leave this area unilaterally."



US Nobel Prize winners in physics (L-R) David M Lee, Douglas D Osheoff, and Robert C Richardson after arriving at Stockholm airport Friday ahead of the awarding ceremony on Sunday.

US won't change its ME policy

WASHINGTON, Dec 7: The US state department said Friday it saw no need to change its Middle East policy and rejected calls by former Secretary of State James Baker that it should take a tougher line on Jewish settlements, reports Reuter.

Saying that "we care more about progress than sound bites," spokesman Nicholas Burns argued that despite a slowdown this year in the Middle East peace process, the US policy of discreet mediation was continuing to produce results.

**US demands Milosevic to open talks
Opposition forms shadow govt in Yugoslavia**

BEGRRADE, Dec 7: The opposition in Belgrade has formed a shadow government, Opposition leader Vuk Draskovic announced, reports AFP.

He said it had formed "a democratic government and a state council ready to replace Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and to call new elections."

Tide of development swamps sites of pyramids

CAIRO, Dec 7: The famous pyramids outside Cairo are gradually being swamped by an encroaching tide of development, as the scramble for prime real estate triumphs over the concerns of archeologists, reports AFP.

Just a few hundred metres (yards) from one of the remaining wonders of the world a 5,000-year old Pharonic wall covered in filth and suffocated by building work stands as symbol of the sad state of the area around the pyramids.

The grandly-titled towers of light soar 10 storeys above the remains of the wall, blocks of stone which once were part of the ancient of the great pyramid known as Khufu.

The wall was discovered during work on the towers in February 1993, but not until 25 metres of it was destroyed before the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) was able to carry out any work.

Since then the SCA has fought a fruitless three-year battle to preserve the site, and what remains of the wall now lies at the bottom of a ditch strewn garbage and dwarfed by the towers offering unrivalled views over the historic pyramids.

"The land is worth at least 15 million pounds (about five million dollars) and the built-up area is 32 million pounds," said Mamdoh Ahmad, who runs the project for a joint Egyptian-Kuwaiti construction firm.

"We obtained all the necessary government permits to build and the construction should be ready within one year," said Ahmad, adding that "some 400 families will live here."

"The apartments will sell for a minimum of 1,000 pounds per square metre, maybe a bit more for those overlooking the wall," he said.

According to Ahmad, a section of the wall is buried under the parking lots of the towers and extends several metres under another plot of land where a school will be built as part of the tower complex.

Zahi Hawass, Director of Antiquities for the Giza and nearby saqarah pyramids sites, deplored what he sees as the greed of real estate brokers in the region.

"The construction site should have been stopped," he said, stressing the historic importance of the wall-part of the ancient port on a canal built by the architects of the pyramids.

Hawass pleaded for a new law which would place under the SCA's effective control the region bordering their Giza plateau.

But currently such a law is wishful thinking, as dozens of new buildings including hotels are mushrooming in the area.

Tens of thousands of people live in the villages of Nazlat al Samman and Nazlat al-Sissi on the outskirts of the plateau where construction is strictly banned.

"The residents are wealthy. They live off tourism by selling visitors trinkets, offering horse and camel rides and also by trafficking in antiquities," said a local antiquities inspector, who asked to remain anonymous.

"Antiquities lie under each house. It's a real mafia," the man said.

Urban development has accelerated since the 1970s, eating into the land surrounding the Giza pyramids which are around 12 kilometers (seven miles) southwest of Cairo city centre.

Off the Record

Buddha's tooth relic conveyed from China

YANGON: A sacred relic popularly believed to be Buddha's tooth arrived here Friday from China and was escorted to a pagoda in carriage pulled by an elephant, reports AP.

Monks, nuns, devotees and ordinary citizens gathered at the airport for the arrival of the tooth, which was transported on a special flight from China.

Hosting the arrival, which was broadcast live on state television, was the chairman of Myanmar ruling junta, Gen. Than Shwe.

This is the second time since the military regime took power in 1988 that the tooth relic has been lent by China. It was also brought here in 1955, when the country was under civilian rule.

The only other Buddha's tooth relic is in Sri Lanka. China has never allowed its relic to be sent anywhere outside China except for Myanmar.

The gesture is believed to be a particularly effective form of diplomacy, a good will gesture by a close ally that cannot be matched. Myanmar has been ostracised by Western nations because of human rights abuses. China is a major arms supplier to the country's junta and a major trading partner.

As prayers were chanted Friday, the sacred tooth relic was carried from the aircraft in a jeweled box and placed onto a decorated palanquin escorted by people dressed in royal garb or as celestial beings.

In a ceremonial procession, the relic was brought from the airport to Yangon's World Peace Pagoda on a decorated carriage drawn by one elephant and trailed by four others.

Overwhelmed father of sextuplets

HUELVA, Spain: A day after his wife gave birth to sextuplets, an overwhelmed father thanked Spaniards for a roomful of telegrams and flowers Friday, reports AP.

"I'm still a bit dazed - I can't quite come to grips with what has happened to us," a grinning Miguel Angel Raposo, a bricklayer in the southern Spanish town of Bollullos Par del Condado, told the private Europe Press news agency outside the hospital.

He said his wife, 31-year-old Rosario Clavijo, was recovering well while the four boys and two girls remain on respirators in hospital incubators.

Clavijo learned more than a month ago she was carrying eight fetuses after taking fertility drugs. One fetus died three weeks ago, during the 27th week of her pregnancy, and a second died on Thursday.

A medical staff of more than 30 delivered the six babies by Caesarean section after inducing early labour.

Less than a dozen cases of living sextuplets are known to exist. Over the past decade there have been two cases of sextuplets and one of sextuplets in Spain, but some of the babies were lost in each case.

Mayor's dream for colourful city

MOSCOW: Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov has decided to paint the town red, or yellow, or pink, or any other bright and attractive colour, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AP.

Operation Bright Facade and Operation Historical Colour will do away with the drabness the capital suffered under Soviet rule, when officials strove to make people's lives and city streets uniformly gray, wrote the daily Moskovsky Komsomolets.

Several large dark buildings erected in the 1930s and '50s in central Moscow will be among the first to assume a new look, according to a recent city government resolution adopted at Luzhkov's urging.

Luzhkov is famous for his campaigns to make Moscow a more attractive and comfortable city.

His pet projects include restoring a highway that circles the city, installing new statues and fountains in Moscow's squares, lighting its buildings, churches and bridges to bring out their beauty at night and rebuilding a mammoth cathedral destroyed by the Bolsheviks.

Lankan minister, army chief survive chopper crash

COLOMBO, Dec 7: A military helicopter carrying Sri Lanka's deputy defence minister and army chief crash landed in the country's north today, but both men are safe, a military official said, reports Reuter.

The helicopter with Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte and army commander Lieutenant-General Rohan Daluwatte, came down in rebel held territory north of the town of Vavuniya, about 220 km (135 miles) from the capital Colombo.

"It had crash landed after experiencing mechanical trouble," the official told Reuters.

A senior air force official said the men had been brought to Vavuniya and were safe. "They are all fine," he said.

Ratwatte and Daluwatte are widely credited with the military's recent victories over separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the north of this Indian Ocean island nation.

The Sri Lankan government has been embroiled in an ethnic war since 1983 against Tamil Tiger rebels demanding a separate homeland in the north and east of the predominantly Sinhalese nation.

Four Africans in race for UN secy gen post

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 7: Four prominent Africans entered the race for the top UN job and others were expected to join the contest next week after Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali temporarily stepped aside in the face of an unrelenting US veto, reports AP.

The 15-member Security Council will convene again Monday afternoon, and diplomats said Friday they would begin a series of unofficial votes to eliminate the weaker candidates.

It was the first time candidates other than Boutros-Ghali had been formally submitted to the council, which must select a secretary-general and forward the name to the 185-member General Assembly for ratification before the 74-year-old Egyptian's term ends Dec. 31.

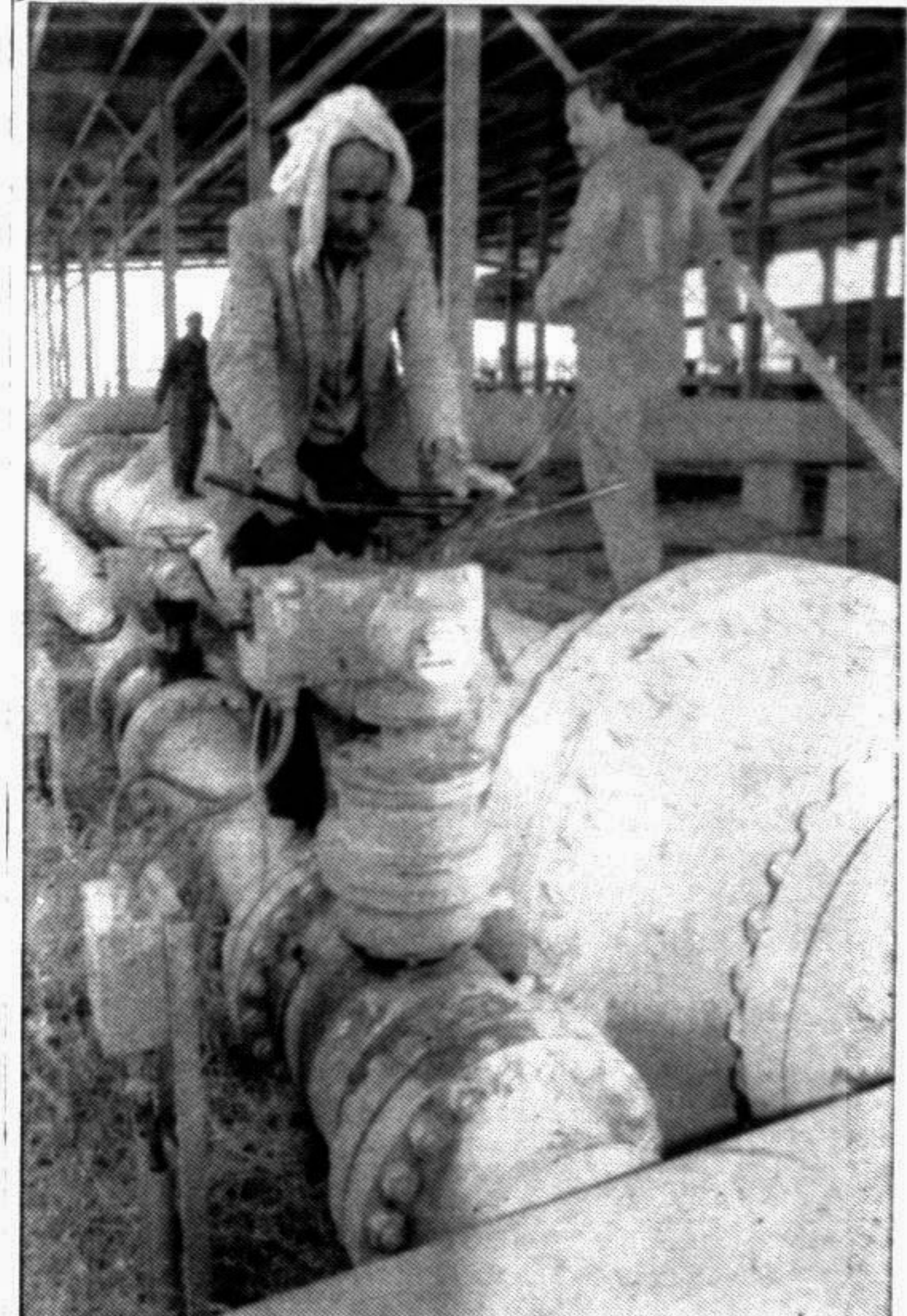
African ambassadors jointly submitted the names of UN Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan of Ghana; former Niger Prime Minister Hamid Algbadi; Ivory Coast Foreign Minister Amara Essy; and former special UN envoy Ahmedou Ould Abdallah of Mauritania to the council Friday.

Western and African diplomats said names of Senegal Foreign Minister Moustapha Niassa; Salim A Salim of Tanzania, secretary-general of the Organization of African Unity, and Orla Otuunu, a former Ugandan ambassador, were expected to be submitted by Monday.

Mine blast kills 6 troops in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 7: At least six soldiers were killed and another five wounded in a mine attack in northern Sri Lanka, officials here said today, reports AP.

The troops were bathing near a military check-point on the Jaffna Peninsula when one of them stepped on a booby-trapped device that activated the mines Friday, a military spokesman here said.



Iraqi workers working Friday at an oil pumping station in Kirkuk, from where the Gulf state exports oil to Turkey. Iraq's Oil Minister Amer Mohammed Rashid announced the resumption of oil exports at midnight December 10 New York time (0500 GMT) under the oil-for-food deal with the United Nations. Under the deal, Iraq is to be allowed to export two billion dollars worth of oil every six months to purchase food and medicine for the civilian population.

Myanmar police swoop on students to quell demonstration

YANGON, Dec 7: Police sealed off and dispersed a demonstration by several hundred students on Saturday as the military government confronted the biggest wave of street protest since using troops to bloody crush a 1988 pro-democracy uprising, reports AP.

The students were dispersed in an area near Yangon University sealed off to the public for several hours by hundreds of police equipped with shields and truncheons. Few witnesses were in the area, but it was feared violence was used.

The demonstrators had rejected entreaties by their professors to leave peacefully. One student held aloft a picture of independence hero Aung San, father of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The demonstration was the third spearheaded by engineering students from the Yangon Institute of Technology since October and the second this week.

The protests, stemming from the police beating three students in a dispute with a food-stall owner, mark the boldest dissent seen against the military, which has ruled Myanmar since 1962. In a sign heralding trouble, some students were seen gathering sticks and rocks.

hundreds of demonstrators numbering a few hundred people, were seen several kilometers from the main group.

Witnesses kept hundred of metres (yards) from the scene by roadblocks said police dispersed them, but it was unclear if violence was used.

The police had moved quickly Friday to stop the demonstration before it started, sealing off roads with fire trucks outside the Yangon Institute of Technology as 100 students tried to leave, apparently for the university, two kilometers (1.2 miles) away where all the protests have been staged.

The students agreed to return inside at the request of the deputy education minister, but later slipped out in small group. Some even commandeered commuter buses, one student said, to reach the university.

Government officials have said demonstrators arrested Tuesday were treated "arrested and gently." Authorities said that 609 people, including 487 students, were detained Tuesday and released after identity checks.

The students' main demands have been the creation of an independent student council and disclosure of police brutality, but political demands for freedom and human rights have seeped in, mirroring the campaign led by Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has voiced support and said the students share her opposition to injustice. But she has denied the regime's claims their actions are orchestrated by her National League for Democracy.

It has increasingly cracked down on Suu Kyi in recent months.

Suu Kyi was launched to international prominence by the 1988 uprising. The State Law and Order Restoration Council that seized power placed her under years of house arrest without trial before releasing her in 1995.

Suu Kyi's supporters won elections in 1990, but the government never allowed the elected parliament to convene.

Programme to combat child trafficking soon: ILO

BANGKOK, Dec 7: A programme to combat trafficking of children in Asia and their exploitation in prostitution and sweat shops will be launched in January, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) announced here Friday, reports AP.

Political sensitivities concerning efforts to link trade and labour rights were irrelevant in these cases, said Michel Barton, ILO Public Information Director.

"Certain types of exploitation in child labour are absolutely unacceptable. Trafficking in children for prostitution is criminal activity," he said.

Poverty and underdevelopment pushed children into the workplace, which might be a better option in some cases than starvation or abandonment, but extreme forms of exploitation could not be justified under any circumstances, he said.

The new programme would cover two subregions where large numbers of children are exploited - Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in South Asia, and the countries of the Mekong river basin: Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Laos Thailand and Vietnam.