

New party chief Kesri says Rebuilding Congress first priority

NEW DELHI, Sept 24: The newly-elected president of India's Congress (I) Party today promised to rejuvenate the country's oldest political entity, reports AFP.

But a lone colleague hit out by disputing his leadership potential.

Sitaram Kesri, 77, picked for the top post Monday, said that his first priority would be to rebuild the 111-year-old party, which has steadily lost influence in recent years.

He replaced former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao, who quit as president in disgrace Saturday after a court linked him to a fraud case.

"A great honour has been thrust on me," Kesri added.

The Congress said Kesri's selection by the 19-member



Congress Working Committee (CWC) which runs the party, after a nearly five-hour meeting at Rao's residence was unanimous.

16 troops, 35 Tigers killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 24: At least 16 soldiers and 35 Tamil Tiger rebels died in new fighting in northern Sri Lanka, taking the toll from three days to 146 dead, officials said today, reports AFP.

Intense long range attacks continued today near Kilinochchi where the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has its political headquarters, officials said.

They said 15 soldiers were killed and 21 others wounded in fighting Monday and raised to 43 the number of security personnel killed since the latest drive was launched on Sunday.

The military estimated Tiger losses on Monday at 35 dead and about 100 wounded and raised to 95 the official estimate for the number of guerrillas killed in the past three days.

Eight civilians have also been reported killed in fighting near Kilinochchi and sporadic clashes elsewhere.

Major nuclear powers to sign N-test ban treaty

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24: Leaders of the world's declared nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China — are to sign a historic treaty Tuesday to ban nuclear test explosions worldwide, reports AP.

US President Bill Clinton is also expected to outline US hopes for the United Nations to play a larger role in combating drug trafficking and international terrorism when he addresses the UN General Assembly.

The president will defend our contribution to the United Nations and defend the work of the United Nations in general, Dick Clark, a senior director of the National Security Council, told reporters Monday in Washington.

Signing of the test ban treaty highlights the second day of the General Assembly's annual, three-week debate.

Supporters hail the treaty, hammered out during nearly three years of negotiations, as a triumph for the United Nations and the international community at large.

In the annals of history, it will be told that nuclear testing happened over a period of 40 years in the 20th century and then never again, Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland told the General Assembly on Monday.

Thatcher loses faith in Major

LONDON, Sept 24: Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher lost faith in her successor John Major within just 22 days of his becoming premier, The Times reported today, says AFP.

The paper quoted a book by her former aide to be published Wednesday, which also says she later suggested that the party — which she led for 15 years — should no longer call itself "Conservative" because the word failed to convey the dynamism of the changes she had brought about.

In "Diplomacy and disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher", George Urban reported that on December 19, 1990 — less than a month after Major took over at Downing Street — Thatcher was already deeply critical of the tone and direction of his administration.

"The new government — well, I think they have embarked on a course of great danger," Urban recorded her as saying in his book, which is being serialised in The Times.

Israel summons Egyptian envoy

JERUSALEM, Sept 24: Israel on Monday summoned the Egyptian ambassador to protest the fierce and often personal attacks by officials in Cairo against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reports AFP.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy told Mohammad Bassiuni, Egypt's ambassador to the Jewish state, that the verbal attacks on Netanyahu are very serious and could threaten the peace process, Israeli public radio reported.

Senior Egyptian officials, in some of the most vitriolic attacks against an Israeli leader since the two countries signed a peace accord in 1979, said Netanyahu and his hardline policies were threatening to throw the Middle East into war.

On Sunday Egypt's Undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry, Adel Al-Safii, recommended that Netanyahu see a "psychiatrist".

6 Russian troops killed in mine blast in Dagestan

MOSCOW, Sept 24: Six Russian Interior Ministry soldiers were killed today after their armoured personnel carrier hit a mine in Dagestan, an ethnic Russian region neighbouring rebel Chechnya, ITAR-Tass news agency said, reports Reuters.

The incident took place near the town of Khasavyurt, where Chechen rebels and Russia's security boss signed an accord last month aimed at ending the 21-month-old conflict. The truce accompanying the peace deal has generally held since then.

The Tass report, which quoted the Russian military command in Chechnya, gave no other details of the explosion.

US troops test-fire tanks in Kuwait desert near Iraq

KUWAIT CITY, Sept 24: Thousands of US troops test-fired tanks, artillery and rifles in the Kuwaiti desert near Iraq ahead of war games that were beamed up after the latest crisis with Baghdad, US Army officers said today, reports AFP.

US officials Babel newspaper meanwhile accused the United States of massing its troops in preparation for an attack aimed at setting up a military base in southern Iraq.

Some 3,000 extra troops sent to Kuwait in the last week have been test firing or "zeroing" tanks, fighting vehicles, artillery and rifles ahead of full live-fire exercises to begin Friday, Sergeant James Yocum said.

"Our main thrust is training coalition forces. There's an element of deterrence, too," Yocum said without saying when Kuwaiti troops would join

the war games. The new forces from the US Army's First Cavalry Division are joining 1,200 troops who have been training since August in the oil-rich Emirate which Iraq occupied in 1990-91.

With another several hundred support staff looking after US military equipment at Camp Doha, there are now between 4,500 and 5,000 US soldiers in Kuwait, US officials said.

There are now 4,200 troops from the First Cavalry Division, enough for a brigade which can train with the hundreds of tanks and other armoured vehicles stockpiled at Camp Doha under an agreement with Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf War.

The reinforcements have been test firing equipment up to 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Iraq in the vast Udayri Range.

Yocum said. "It's not a provocative move. We're just using the range we need to fire our weapons," he said, adding that different weapons were being tested in different parts of the desert.

After an August 31 Iraqi incursion into northern Kurdish safe havens, US forces in the Gulf fired missiles at air defence sites in southern Iraq and then expanded a southern no-fly zone they have imposed since 1992.

Iraqi forces responded by firing missiles at several warplanes flying over Iraq, but President Saddam Hussein on September 13 suspended his order to have them shot down.

US officials said Iraq has fired no missiles at US warplanes since then and in the last several days they have reported a decrease in tension.

Communists call on ailing Yeltsin to quit

MOSCOW, Sept 24: Russia's communists opened a new political barrage against ailing President Boris Yeltsin on Monday, calling on the president to quit and accusing the Kremlin of misleading the electorate, reports Reuters.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, runner-up to Yeltsin in Russia's July presidential election, said a comment from a top doctor that Yeltsin probably had a heart attack during the campaign showed the Kremlin had deceived voters.

"Concealing the heart attack amounts to falsification. The elections were not fair," Zyuganov told Reuters at the council of Europe's Parliamentary assembly in Strasbourg.

In Moscow, the Communist Speaker of the state Duma lower house of parliament said Yeltsin, 65, should step down if the surgeons refused to operate and told him he had to simply

take out his life by avoiding stress and overwork. "The situation in Russia is such that the president cannot have an easy work schedule," Gennady Seleznyov told reporters.

Earlier AP adds: Boris Yeltsin is pushing for his bypass surgery to be performed soon, but his chief surgeon said Sunday the procedure is too risky to rush and perhaps could be canceled.

Yeltsin had said the surgery would take place at the end of September. However, Dr Rinat Akhchurin said it may not be performed until mid to late November, depending on results of heart tests to be done this week.

Asked whether the surgery might be canceled, Akhchurin told the Russian NTV network's Ito show: "It's possible, but we would have to create (lifestyle changes) for the patient which he himself would not tolerate."

Typhoon Willie leaves 38 killed, 96 missing in China

BEIJING, Sept 24: At least 38 people have been confirmed dead and 96 are still missing after typhoon Willie slammed into the southern Chinese island province of Hainan, press reports said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The worst storm to batter Hainan in the last decade, Willie cut swathe of destruction through the semi-tropical island, although final damage figures have yet to be made available, the reports said.

Thousands of people were left stranded after the typhoon, which struck on Friday with force 12 winds, sparked floods that inundated more than 100 villages.

Rescue and evacuation work is continuing with army troops being brought in to help with relief efforts.

Some 400 millimeters of rain fell in Chengmai country alone, causing local rivers to overflow, flooding most parts of the county seat and cutting off electricity, water and transport

links. Six people were confirmed dead in Chengmai, the reports said, adding that more than 10,000 others had been rescued by troops.

Most of the fatalities are recorded in Changliang Li county where floods washed away 45 houses and capsized 53 fishing boats, drowning 30 people.

In the provincial capital, Haikou, 70 per cent of streets were flooded and severe damage to grain silos and fields promoted panic buying, with prices rising six fold in local markets.

Severe summer flooding across large areas of southern and central China left around 1,400 people dead by the end of August.

AP adds: Typhoon Willie dumped more than 40 centimeters (15 half inches) of rain on some parts of the island over the weekend. Rescue teams continued to evacuate residents of villages along swollen rivers on Monday, the newspaper said.

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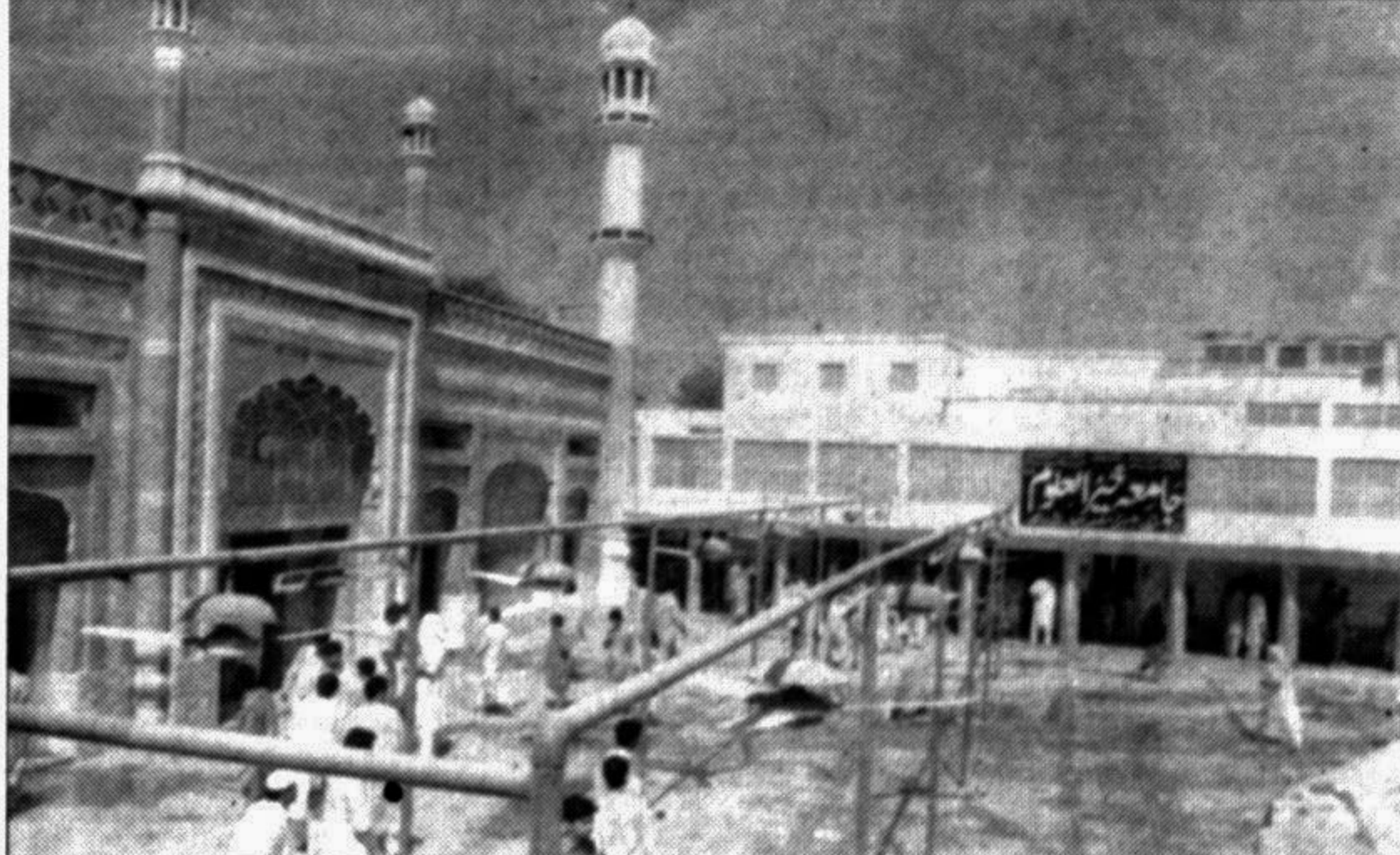
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A view of a Sunni Muslim mosque with the blood stains on its floor Monday where 21 people were massacred during prayer in Multan. Three armed men entered the mosque as the prayers began and fired indiscriminately killing 21 people and injuring 45. Later the attackers fled from the scene in a car. — AFP/UNB photo

Christopher, Primakov announce missile defence deal

NEW YORK, Sept 24: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his Russian counterpart announced a "milestone" agreement clarifying the legality of certain American weapons used to defend against slower-flying ballistic missiles.

"This important progress assures that we can effectively defend against theater ballistic missiles while ensuring the integrity of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty," Christopher said Monday after meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

"We reached a milestone," he said. Washington and Moscow have argued for years over identifying those anti-missile defensive systems, such as the US Army's Patriot air defense system, that are allowed under the 1972 ABM Treaty and those capable of shooting down long-

range missiles, which are expressly limited under the treaty.

Lynn Davis, a State Department official, told reporters later that Christopher and Primakov had confirmed a detailed agreement worked out in June and that they expect the documents to be formally signed by the end of October.

In practical terms, Ms. Davis said, the accord clarifies the legality of a new-generation anti-missile system under development by the Pentagon called the Theater High Altitude Area Defence system, which is designed to shoot down incoming ballistic missiles at far greater ranges than the Patriot is capable of.

The deal applies to those anti-missile missiles that fly at speeds no greater than 3 kilometers per second. Discussions on faster-flying missiles will be the next step, the officials said. Those talks are to begin in October.

Primakov, appearing before reporters, with Christopher, said the accord will have a "significant, positive effect" on debate in the Russian Duma, the national legislature, on ratifying the START II nuclear arms reduction treaty which the US Congress already has ratified.

In their 3 1/2-hour meeting at a New York hotel, Christopher and Primakov also discussed but reached no new agreements on NATO's expansion plans, Russia's relations with NATO, the Bosnian elections and the situation in Iraq, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

Earlier Monday, Christopher welcomed assurances by Turkey's foreign minister that her country supports US policy on Iraq and is not encouraging Saddam Hussein to extend his influence in northern Iraq.

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Turkey, US for Saddam's limited role in northern Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24: Ankara and Washington, expressed agreement Monday that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's role in northern Iraq should be limited and that civilians in the region should cooperate to fill a power vacuum caused by an Iraqi offensive, reports AFP.

In comments to reporters here following a meeting with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Turkish Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller backed pedalled on a statement that her country had asked Saddam to reassess central authority in the northern region.

She had told Saturday's New York Times: "We have sent a delegation to Saddam to tell him that if he can impose central authority there, OK," in a statement which caused concern in Washington.

But on Monday, she said that

sh — and Christopher had agreed that Iraqi-backed Kurdish leader Massud Barzani should cooperate with ethnic Turkmen to fill the power vacuum, with a view to setting up a civilian "local administration."

Christopher's spokesman Nicholas Burns said that Ciller had cleared up the "misunderstanding" concerning Saddam's role in the north. "Both countries hope to create stability in northern Iraq without Saddam Hussein," he said.

"Turkey and the US firmly agree that Saddam Hussein's influence on northern Iraq should be minimised and that we should support the efforts of Barzani and the Turkmen," he told reporters.

Ciller said she and Christopher agreed during their 40-minute meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly

that such a move should prevent an influx of refugees into Turkey as happened during the last major Iraqi drive into Kurdish areas in 1991, after the Gulf War.

"We agreed that Turkmenans who live there in northern Iraq should cooperate with Barzani to fill the power vacuum that exists there," Ciller said.

She said that the needs of the roughly one million Turkmenans in northern Iraq needed to be recognised along with those of the Kurds and Arabs in the region.

Baghdad reasserted control over Arbil, the major town in the allied-protected northern region, at the end of last month after Barzani suddenly allied himself with Iraqi forces.

Barzani had talks on Iraq with Turkish and US officials in Ankara last week.

Off the Record

Unblushing lover

COPENHAGEN: A Danish man believes there "Ain't No Cure for Love," but a court hopes a 1,000-kroner (173 dirrs) fine might do the trick, reports AP.

The fine was levied after the man asked Danish national radio to play that Leonard Cohen song and dedicate it to his former girlfriend, even though he was under order not to contact her in any way, the Berlingske Tidende newspaper reported Monday.

The lovers, who were not identified, broke up in 1991 after a six-year relationship, the newspaper said. Despite her begging to stop sending love letters, he twice earlier had messages aired on the same radio programme. In 1993, police issued a restraining order forbidding him to contact her.

When the radio broadcast his dedication of the song in April 1994 it was unaware of the restraining order, the newspaper said.

With a little meat, a little cheese, a little pasta

LOS ANGELES: Stanley Tucci spiced up his new movie, "Big Night", with a little meat, a little cheese, a little pasta, reports AP.

The movie is about two brothers who rely on one big dinner to save their Italian restaurant in the 1950s. One of the stars is timpano, a dish of meat, cheese and pasta specific to the Tucci family's home town in the Calabria region of Italy.

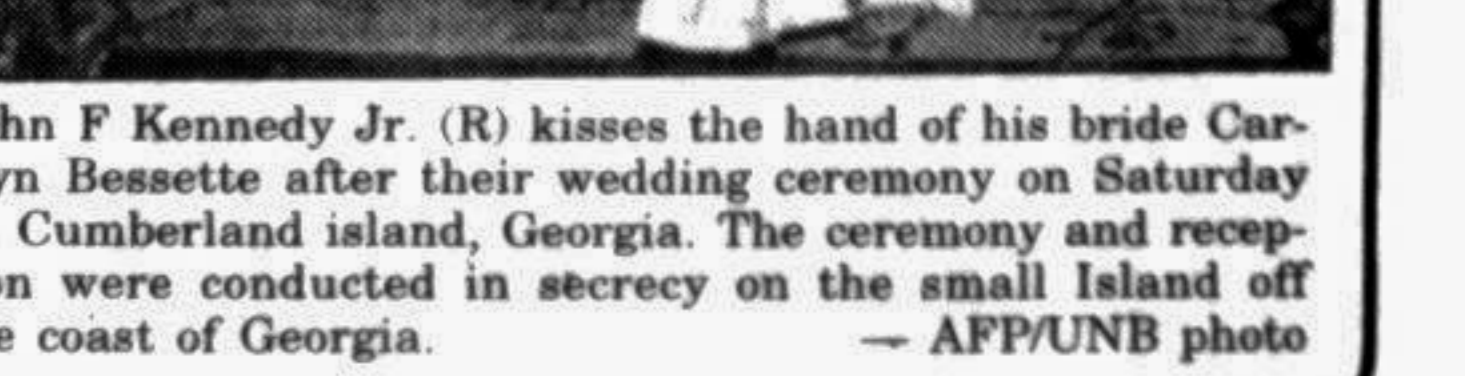
"I just wanted to make a movie that tells a simple story, that takes its time and that doesn't rely on violence and sex to sell tickets," said Tucci, who won an Emmy nomination last year for his role as sinister businessman Richard Cross on "Murder One."

Stop worrying about your memory

LONDON: A new memory pill for forgetful older people could be around the corner, a British science magazine said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

New Scientist magazine said three separate research teams had studied sea slugs, flies and mice and found their long-term memories were all driven by proteins called Creb.

Creb-1 proteins increase the ability of an organism to remember, while Creb-2 blocks long-term memory. If the same proteins stimulate and block memory in humans, they could be used to develop an anti-forgetfulness drug, new scientist said.



John F. Kennedy Jr. (R) kisses the hand of his bride Carolyn Bessette after their wedding ceremony on Saturday on Cumberland island, Georgia. The ceremony and reception were conducted in secrecy on the small island off the coast of Georgia. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Typhoon kills 11 in Japan: A powerful typhoon that passed by Japan's east coast during the weekend has left 11 people dead or missing and 44 others injured, the national police agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Eight people were confirmed dead and three missing after the passage of Typhoon Violet, which dwindled into a tropical depression off Hokkaido, northernmost island of Japan, in the sea of Okhotsk. It caused 207 landslides while damaging roads at 47 locations. A total of 84 houses were damaged or destroyed, and 3,219 houses were flooded.

Indian police seize 81 kg heroin: Indian police have seized 81 kilogrammes (178 pounds) of heroin valued at around 23 million dollars, one of the biggest drugs hauls ever intercepted in the country, newspapers said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The heroin was discovered on a truck in the Azadpur area of Delhi following a tip-off. Ramesh Ramachandra, a director general of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), said he suspected the drugs had crossed the border from Pakistan in the northern state of Punjab.

Turkey for tighter ties with Libya: The head of Turkey's Islamic-led government pledged on Monday to improve ties with Libya, AP reports from Ankara.

"We are determined to take Turkish-Libyan relations to the highest level," Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan told reporters after a meeting with Libyan Ambassador Ahmed Abdulhamid Al-Atrash. Erbakan did not specify how the relations would be stepped up.

Cholera outbreak claims 49 in Bihar: An epidemic of Cholera has killed 49 people in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, the United News of India (UNI) reported yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

More than 800 had taken ill from the disease, which broke out about a month ago in 73 villages, the news agency said.



People belonging to Murtaza Bhutto's party provides first medical treatment to an injured activist who received bullets in his leg fired by the police in Larkana, Monday. At least one supporter of the slain Murtaza Bhutto was injured when shooting started outside Murtaza's Larkana home to control the angry mob. — AFP/UNB photo