

news digest

Birth rate

New Delhi, India—In the wake of a political furor over compulsory sterilization, India's new government pledged Saturday to curb the nation's birth rate through traditional, voluntary contraceptive methods. But Health Minister Raj Narain emphasized that lowering India's annual birth rate, estimated at 14 million, remains a top priority of the government of Prime Minister Morarji Desai.

India's population of 620 million, nearly three times that of the United States, lives in an area less than a third the size of the 50 American states. "We are totally against, fundamentally against compulsory sterilization," Narain told reporters. He said the government will increase distribution of free contraceptives and encourage Indians to have small families for their economic well being.

Vance returns

Washington—President Carter welcomed Secretary of State Cyrus Vance home Saturday from arms negotiations in Moscow and said he believed the Soviets "will ultimately agree with us." Carter, accompanied by his wife Rosalynn, made a special point of expressing thanks to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko "for very productive negotiations on a number of issues outside strategic arms limitations."

In brief remarks at Andrews Air Force Base, Carter continued to back his comprehensive arms proposal for deep cuts in strategic arsenals of the superpowers. He said

it was a "necessary first step" to reduce the dangers of nuclear war. "We will do everything we can to strengthen our ties of friendship and mutual trust with the Soviet leaders," Carter said.

"I believe that the Soviets will ultimately agree with us to the benefit of the American people and Soviet people and the rest of the world to reduce their dependence on these nuclear weapons." Vance, who made stops in Brussels, Bonn, London and Paris as well as Moscow, said the search for arms control was "an ongoing process" which could take "a long time in the future."

Creeping taxes

Washington—Taxes on farm real estate have crept up consistently since World War II and have shown no evidence of leveling off despite attempts by some states and local units of government to find alternative sources of revenue. In 1975, according to a new study by the Agriculture Dept., the farm real estate tax bill was more than \$2.85 billion, up 7.7% from \$2.65 billion in 1974.

A further increase undoubtedly occurred in 1976 and still another gain is expected this year, according to USDA analysts. The analysis of 1975 farm real estate taxes was prepared by the department's Economic Research Service, based on surveys made last spring and summer among more than 37,100 farmers and 3,400 local tax officials.

Jesus film praised

New York—A wave of praise by religious leaders for the television movie "Jesus of Nazareth" has drowned out earlier controversy. Even the most vocal protester has changed his mind after seeing the film. The surge of acclaim has come from various parts of the church spectrum—conservative and progressive, Protestant and Roman Catholic, as well as Jewish—following previews of the six-hour presentation.

It "outranks all previous film versions of the gospel," says the Rev. Dr. Ben Armstrong of Morristown, N.J. executive secretary of the National Religious Broadcasters. The \$18 million production, with a score of

film celebrities in the cast, will be aired by NBC-TV in two segments, the first last night and the second on Easter Sunday.

Sun's power

Washington—The sun's clean and inexhaustible power can supply 40% of the world's energy needs within 25 years and 75% in 50 years if a drive to develop it starts now, a new study says. The transition to solar energy "would not be cheap or easy, but its benefits would far outweigh the costs and difficulties," said the 79-page study by Denis Hayes, a researcher at a nonprofit study group called the World Watch Institute.

The study said there could be a dramatic expansion in the next 50 years of energy collected from sunlight, wind, water and burning organic matter—all direct or indirect sources of solar energy. "If the 50-year timetable is not met," Hayes wrote, "the roadblocks will have been political—not technical."

Tornado damages

Tornadoes touched down in at least four Midwestern states Saturday, causing heavy property damage, killing a child and injuring at least a dozen persons. One twister demolished a 12-block section of Augusta, Mich., in Kalamazoo County, and killed a child who was riding in a car in Eaton County, authorities reported.

Tornadoes struck five other Michigan communities—Comstock, Galesburg, Milford, Howell and Bath Township—but none was hit as hard as Augusta. Authorities in nearby Galesburg said at least eight houses were damaged or demolished by the twister, which cut a northeasterly path for at least five miles through Kalamazoo County. The tornado was preceded by golf-ball-size hail, authorities said. Rooftops were ripped from houses in the Milwaukee suburb of Brookfield, Wis., in storms described by local authorities as tornadoes.



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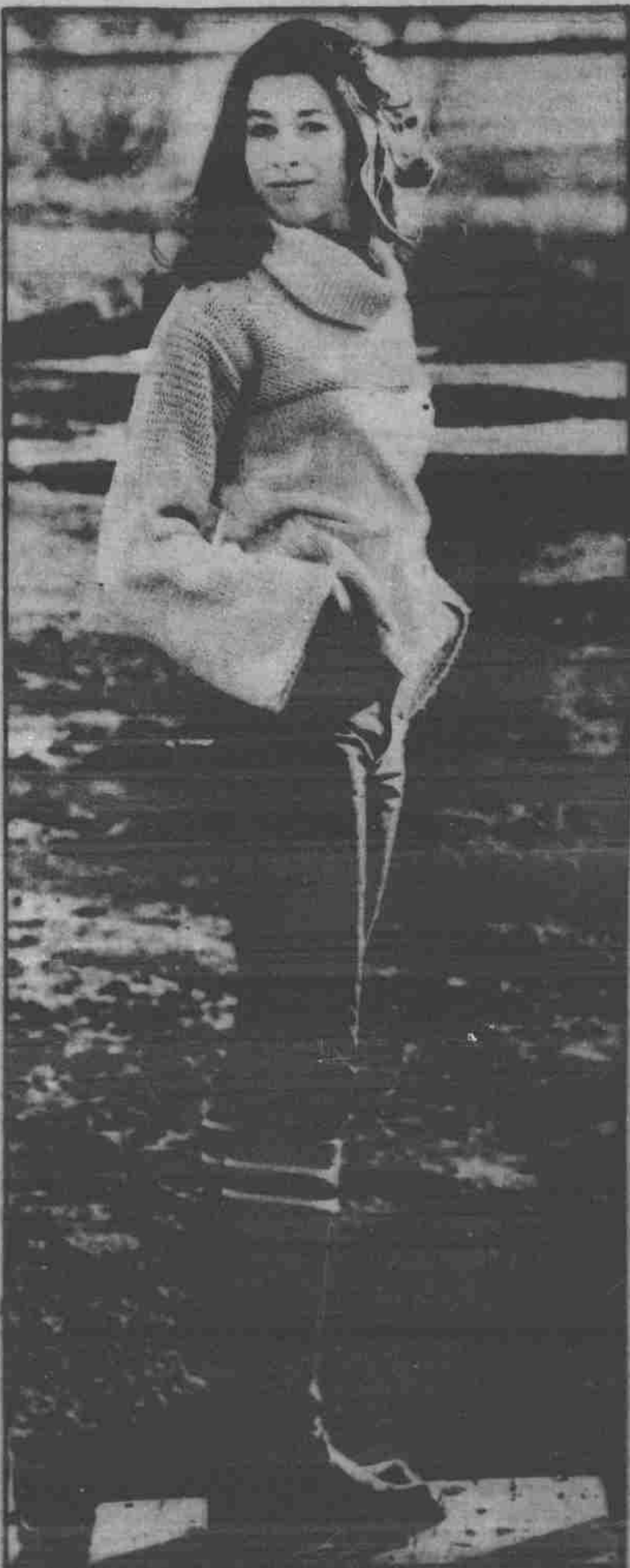
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