

Military command outside NATO not viable

WASHINGTON, May 24: The creation of a separate European military command outside of NATO is not viable, said US General John Galvin in an interview published here Saturday, Reports AFP.

Galvin, who will retire next month after five years as supreme allied commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) told US news and world report that he thought moves by France and Germany to create a force in Europe duplicating NATO would not be militarily viable.

"You can have one commander over two different units, but the reverse is impossible — two commanders commanding one unit," he said. "The creation of a duplicate force in Europe is not viable."

US Ambassador to NATO, William Taft, has suggested that France rejoin the military command, from which it withdrew in 1966, while US Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney said he supported and integrated European corps within the existing NATO structure.

Kenyan govt may collapse

NAIROBI, May 24: Most Kenyans believe President Daniel Arap Moi's government has lost control of the country and cold collapse because of ethnic clashes and other injustices, Roman Catholic bishops said in a comments published Saturday, reports AP.

"If these ideas are true, then the government has no legitimate claim to remain in power," the country's 18 bishops said in the statement issued Friday after a meeting in Nairobi.

The bishops accused leaders in the East African nation of "discrediting themselves" and "inciting bad feelings against tribes or groups or parties without any respect for truth."

Delhi bans LTTE to sabotage talks

'India trying to overthrow Premadasa'

COLOMBO, May 24: India is trying to overthrow Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa by collaborating with the island's main opposition party and a local newspaper group, a state-run weekly here reported today, says AFP.

New Delhi was "working closely" with the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and financing an unnamed newspaper organisation to destabilise the government, the Sunday Observer said quoting the dominant Tamil Tiger rebels.

The newspaper gave front page headlines to the claim by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that New Delhi had banned the Sri Lankan separatist movement to sabotage its talks with Colombo.

The Observer in a separate report quoted an unnamed administration official as saying the government would not have talks with the LTTE "just now" because a parliamentary committee was still trying to resolve the ethnic issue.

India outlawed the LTTE on May 14 after accusing the group of assassinating former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and supporting secessionist movements in southern India.

Ironically Colombo had been accusing New Delhi of arming training and providing safe haven to LTTE members between 1983 and 1987 when India and Sri Lanka entered into a peace pact which sought to end Tamil separatism in the island.

Although Sri Lankan security forces are currently

battling the LTTE in the island's northeast, Colombo has ruled out banning the guerrillas, arguing that it would prejudice a possible solution to the island's dragging ethnic conflict.

The Observer, which usually reflects government thinking, quoted LTTE's political wing leader Yougarnatnam Yogi as saying that India was playing dirty political "tricks" for its "own selfish motives".

The Indian government is going all out to overthrow the government of president Ranasinghe Premadasa, Yogi was quoted as saying over LTTE clandestine radio Friday.

Relations between Colombo and New Delhi have been strained over the question of dealing with the LTTE in recent months and India slammed Sri Lanka Friday for

misquoting its envoy here on the issue of banning the Tigers.

A Delhi report adds: A bomb exploded today at a TV station in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and leaflets praising the assassin of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi were found at the site, Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

The bomb, which exploded early today damaged a relay circuit at the station in Thanjavur district, but caused no casualties, the news agency said.

Leaflets praising Dhanu, the woman suicide-bomber who killed Gandhi at a Tamil Nadu election rally last year, and leaders of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers guerrilla group were scattered at the site of the blast, PTI said.

Thanjavur district authorities had received anonymous letters warning of possible bomb explosions at government offices ahead of the blast, it said, adding investigations were under way.

No claims of responsibility for the blast were reported, and there was no word on which group may have been involved.

On Wednesday, Indian investigators formally charged LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran and 40 others in the Gandhi assassination.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's envoy here Neville Kanakararatne said in an interview published Sunday that capturing Prabhakaran, a request for whose extradition India is considering, was a difficult task to accomplish.

Accord to implement START treaty

LISBON: The United States and four former Soviet republics Saturday signed an agreement to implement the START missile-reduction treaty, a step Secretary of State James A. Baker III hailed as reducing the risk of nuclear war, reports AP.

Baker and the four foreign ministers met in a six-minute ceremony at a hotel banquet room that ended with the secretary of state quipping: "Is that it?"

The protocol binds the four republics to the terms of nuclear arms cuts accepted by the Soviet Union before its disintegration last December.

It is "one of the most important international documents that have been worked on in recent times," said Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

The agreement sets the stage for hearings on Senate ratification and negotiations

with Russia to trim strategic nuclear arsenals below the decreases already mandated by the accord.

Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus have agreed to remove all of their long-range nuclear weapons within the seven years the treaty requires for cuts of about 38 per cent, overall, in Soviet long-range nuclear missiles, bombers and submarines and about 30 per cent of US arsenals.

All three already have transported all their short-range nuclear weapons to Russia for dismantling there.

"We have laid the foundations for further stabilizing reductions in strategic offensive arms and expanded the nuclear non-proliferation regime," Baker said in a statement.

The agreement "significantly lowers the risk of nuclear war," the secretary of state added.



US Secretary of State James Baker (R) signs a protocol to the arms reduction treaty START in Lisbon on Saturday. Baker signed this protocol with representatives from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. —AFP/UNB photo

I won't be 'xerox copy' of Cory: Ramos

MANILA, May 24: Wags call him Cory Aquino in pants, but Fidel Ramos, awaiting proclamation as the new President of the Philippines, promises he won't be a "xerox copy" of his political patron.

In an interview with AFP the former Defence Chief loyally defended his benefactor, but said he would be his own man provided all went well and he took over June 30, when Aquino's turbulent six-year term ends.

Ramos' victory still awaits confirmation by the Congress, which starts canvassing the May 11 polls on Monday. But a semi-official tally has given him a million-vote margin over his closest rival, Tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco.

Critics say a Ramos presidency would be a sequel to the aloof and indecisive rule of Aquino. Both are bland, be spectacled figures given to droning speeches, and were never politicians before running for President.

"I said there should be continuity in government policies, but that doesn't mean that I will be a xerox copy of Mrs Aquino."

Aquino, 59, defied her own family, the ruling party and the Roman Catholic church when she endorsed Ramos, a Protestant, to be her successor.

A housewife thrust into politics by her senator husband's murder in 1983, Aquino challenged the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in a 1986 snap election.

When Marcos blatantly rigged his victory, Ramos and other military officers mutinied triggering the "people power" revolt that put Aquino in power.

Ramos defended Aquino through the seven coup attempts of her term in office, which was also scarred by government in fighting and inefficiency and complicated by natural disasters and the souring of relations with main ally and aid donor, the United States.

But Ramos refuses to say a single word critical of Aquino. "You don't expect me to bad-mouth Mrs. Aquino?" He told one foreign journalist.

A civil engineer trained

at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Ramos promises to mend relations with Washington, offering it access to Philippine bases after the U.S. military pullout at the end of 1992.

Asked to describe his style, Ramos, fondling one of his ever-present cigars, said the country would see "steady, hands-on, firm leadership" under him, and explained that the "continuity" he promises did not mean stagnation.

Drawing a graph on the back page of a magazine, he plotted a curve moving up and down from the time the Philippines gained independence in 1946 to the 1992 elections. It dipped at the start of every new Presidency.

Rigging clouds Kurd election

SALAHUDIN, Iraq, May 23: Their first taste of democracy was bittersweet, but Kurds in northern Iraq are joining forces — at least for the time being to keep the process alive, reports AP.

Charges of fraud have clouded Tuesday's election for a president and legislative body. And the vote was split between the two major parties, leaving the leadership struggle between two main guerrilla chiefs unresolved.

"We had to accept the cancellation of the whole operation, which would be very bad for the whole image and cause irreparable damage, or seek an accommodation to get the assembly on the ground and make it a forum to prepare for another election," said Hoshiyar Zebari, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, one of the ruling parties.

EC to impose sanction on Serbia

Fresh fighting in Bosnia

BELGRADE, May 24: Fighting resumed across Bosnia-Herzegovina Saturday as the European Community said it would impose sanctions on Serbia to force it out of the republic's civil war, reports AP.

In Lisbon, Portugal, EC spokesman Fernando Balsemão said specific sanctions had not been determined. Earlier, an EC source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said options included trade and energy embargoes. Further discussion was scheduled for Tuesday in Belgium.

The EC countries and United States have already called back their ambassadors from Belgrade, the Serbian and federal capital. US Secretary of State James A. Baker III on Friday announced the closing of Yugoslav consulates in New York and San Francisco and a

suspension of "contacts" with the Yugoslav military.

On Saturday, the community pledged \$76.2 million in aid for refugees throughout the former Yugoslav federation.

The war in Bosnia is an "affront to our collective conscience," Baker said in Lisbon, where he was attending discussions on Soviet aid.

EC mediators also held separate peace talks in Lisbon with representatives of Bosnia's three warring factions. No breakthroughs were reported. Portugal holds the rotating EC presidency.

In Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said it is withdrawing its remaining staff from Bosnia. Twelve UN relief trucks were hijacked late Thursday by militiamen.

About 650,000 people have

fled their homes in Bosnia since the fighting started.

An agreement Friday to withdraw Serb-led federal troops from Sarajevo was delayed to give wives and children in the blockaded barracks more time to pack, an army officer in Sarajevo said in a telephone interview.

The officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the evacuation might start early Sunday. Several previous evacuation plans have failed, mostly because of renewed fighting.

Sarajevo appeared relatively quiet Saturday, but the Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency said Bosnian defense officials reported clashes between their forces and ethnic Serbs in the suburb of Dobrinja.

BRIEFLY

27 killed in train mishap: Twenty-seven people aboard a passenger train were killed and 25 injured when it collided with a cargo train in western Iran early on Saturday, Tehran radio said, Reuters reports from Nicosia.

The passenger train was heading for Ahvaz in the oil-rich Khuzestan province from Tehran when it crashed near Doroud, 320 km (200 miles) southwest of Tehran, at 2 a.m. (2130 GMT Friday).

Caste riots kill 3 in India: At least three people were killed and 14 more wounded when police opened fire to quell caste riots in the southern state of Karnataka on Saturday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The trouble erupted after an upper caste tea shop owner refused to serve tea to a group of lower caste Hindu untouchables or Harijans.

Thais visit sites of clash: Tens of thousands of Thais visited Sunday the sites of last week's clashes between soldiers and demonstrators to pay tribute to the scores of anti-government protesters who were killed, reports Reuters from Bangkok.

"Most people are angry, but we come here to express sorrow," Duang Kamon, a 20-year-old student said. People filled the begging bowls of saffron-robed Buddhist monks with lotus flowers, incense and food.

Clash claims 4 in Algeria: Four people died in a clash between Algerian security forces and Islamic fundamentalist activists in a mountainous region east of Algiers on Saturday, officials said, AFP reports from Algiers. They said the dead were three of the Islamic activists and one Gendarme. A second Gendarme was injured during the clash, which took place on Zbarbar mountain in the Lakhadria region, 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Algiers.

The officials said three other members of the Islamic group escaped after the clash. Further details were not immediately available.

Quake hits eastern Egypt: A mild earthquake jarred eastern Egypt early Sunday, waking up people but causing no reported damage or casualties, reports AP from Cairo.

The seven-second earthquake measuring 4.1 on the Richter scale was felt by some residents of Cairo, some 150 kilometers west of the epicenter. It occurred at 2:10 a.m. Sunday (2310 GMT Saturday).

"I woke up with a start to find the bed shaking," said a Cairo housewife who only gave her first name, Magda. "But it was over very quickly and there was no damage in the house or around us."

There was no reported damage or casualties in eastern Egypt either. Experts expected that the earthquake would be followed by weaker tremors.

Low turnout in Lithuanian referendum

VILNIUS, Lithuania, May 24: A referendum aimed at creating an American-style executive presidency failed to garner enough support, preliminary results showed Sunday, reports AP.

Only 57.5 per cent of the country's 2.5 million eligible voters went to the polls Saturday to cast ballots, said Vaclovas Litvinas, deputy chairman of the electoral commission.

The turnout was enough to make the referendum valid, but not enough to give Lithuanian leader Vytautas Landsbergis a victory in restoring an executive presidency.

Veterans of Hitler's army remember fallen comrades

GRAZ, Austria, May 24: Bent but proud, veterans of Hitler's army, including hundreds who served in the elite Waffen SS, laid wreaths Saturday at a memorial to fallen comrades, as a speaker intoned: "We were betrayed!", reports AP.

About 500 former soldiers and their wives gathered in pouring rain at the Soldiers' Cemetery in Graz for the ceremony in honour of the 40th anniversary of the Kameradschaft IV old comrades association.

Invoking spirits and natural forces communing with the fallen, the ceremony's unidentified official speaker called out: "don't tell them we were betrayed!"

The event's organizer, Franz Scheucher of the Kameradschaft's Styria province chapter, said the soldiers who had only done their duty felt stabbed in the back after the war.

"My generation felt betrayed," Scheucher told reporters. "We were left in the lurch."

The commemorative meeting — the fourth since the Kameradschaft was formed after the World War II — attracted attention after two well-known politicians promised to act as

trons.

After a public outcry over their participation, Styria provincial Gov. Josef Krainer and Franz Wegart, speaker of the provincial assembly, were released from their commitments by the group last week.

Austria recently put teeth into its anti-Nazi laws, in part to challenge foreign views that supported their absorption into Nazi Germany in 1938 — have not learned from the war. The Interior Ministry earlier this month began investigating whether the Kameradschaft violated laws against reviving Nazism.

Wegart attended the gathering Saturday and called the veterans "honorable people," who are constantly "cursed and spat upon."

The men in the group, most in their late 70s and early 80s, wore iron crosses and other World War II German military decorations. Some sported ties with the Iron Cross insignia.

Many were missing limbs. Some had to be supported by their wives at the granite memorial erected to honor the World War II dead. Most refused to speak to reporters.

Those who did expressed pride in their wartime service.

"We fought to deliver the world from the Bolsheviks," said one man in his late 70s, dressed in the uniform like green suit coat commonly worn by older Austrian men, his chest bedecked with medals.

The SS were an elite army formation of nearly 1 million men under the command of Heinrich Himmler, the man entrusted by Adolf Hitler to liquidate Jews.

Waffen SS troops normally were on the battlefield. As such, say former members, they were separate from the black-shirted "Death's Head" units which guarded Nazi concentration camps and death camps.

But some units were implicated in atrocities on the front line. The Nuremberg trials, which passed judgment over Nazi leaders, deemed the Waffen SS a criminal organization.

Asked whether the Waffen SS was involved in war crimes, the elderly veteran snapped: "Nonsense!"

Like most participants, he refused to give

his name. Several denied that the Holocaust occurred. Some grudgingly said it must have happened because so much had been written about it. Their words lacked conviction, and they seemed to be spoken for the benefit of reporters.

One silver-haired woman berated a reporter and tried to knock his notebook from his hands as the procession made its way back to the front gate of the cemetery.

"Don't say anything to them," she hissed at a nearby veteran. "They just write lies anyway."

Others were more conciliatory. "Every death is a lamentable thing, no matter which side lost a man," said Benno Artnr, a doctor from Lieboch, just outside Graz. "The question is: can't we forget past wrongs after all this time?"

Anne Waldorf, of Matz, part of a busload of German veterans and their wives, expressed wonder at the media interest.

"They're just a bunch of old men who have nothing better to do," she said. "They just gather and are happy to see each other. They don't talk about the war anymore."

Off the Record

Winnie was at a rendezvous while Mandela was in jail

JOHANNESBURG: Winnie Mandela and her alleged lover shared a bungalow on the estate of US pop singer Dionne Warwick last year, the South African newspaper Sunday Times reported here Sunday, says AFP.

On both occasions she and Dali Mpofo, who was her second-in-command in the ANC's Social Welfare Department, traveled first class, the usually-reliable Sunday Times said.

It added that the ANC was investigating an alleged fraud involving some 400,000 rands (142,857 dollars) worth of cheques issued during the time Winnie and her alleged lover were in charge of the ANC's Social Welfare Department.

The newspaper quoted a senior ANC source as saying that shortly before Winnie resigned her post on March 17, "dozens" of summonses were delivered to her office from clothing stores and jewellers.

They want married priest

DUBLIN: A majority of Irish Catholics disagree with their Church's insistence on a celibate clergy and think priests should be allowed to marry, according to an opinion poll published on Saturday, reports Reuters.

A clear majority of those questioned for the Sunday press poll — 69 per cent — said priests should have the right to marry while only 17 per cent supported the traditional view that Catholic priests should remain single and celibate.

In another challenge to church doctrine, 60 per cent said they supported the ordination of women priests.

Scarred tree now a shrine in Bangkok

BANGKOK: They come each day with flowers, flags, incense and prayers, reports Reuters. The people of Bangkok have turned a scarred tree into a shrine, a memorial to a pro-democracy demonstrator who died in a hail of gunfire last Monday.

Hundreds of Thai people each day pay homage at the site of the young man's violent death. He died after his commandeered bus crashed through a razor-wire barricade. Behind the barrier stood hundreds of armed soldiers, bayonets fixed.

In what witnesses described as suicide mission, seven buses crashed through the military barricades. Later a hail of bullets from the security forces killed scores of demonstrators.

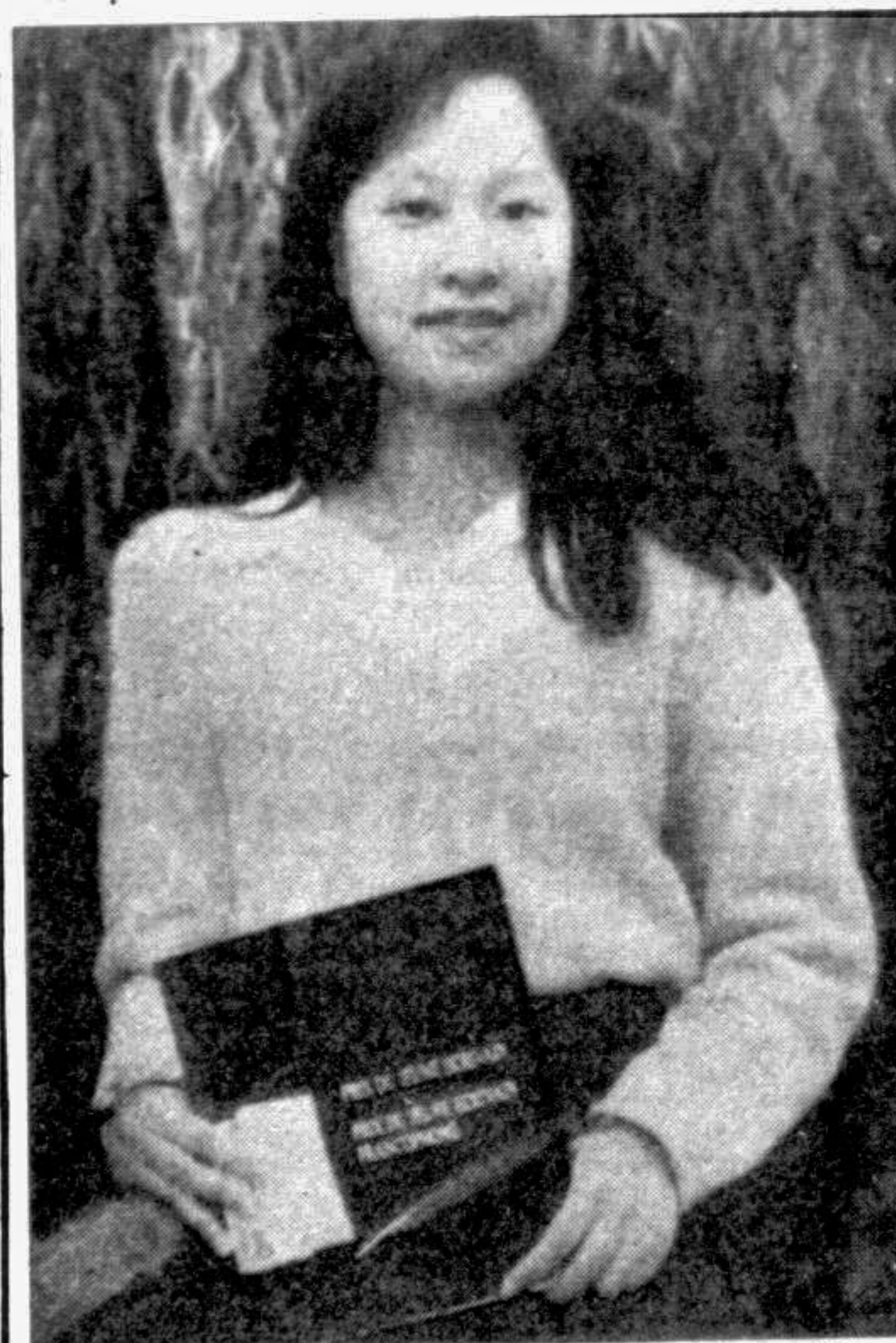
The tree, still streaked with blood where the bus crashed, is decorated with hundreds of Thai flags of blue, white and red.

"This is the tree symbolising sacrifice to the military... It's scarred with bullet," one middle-aged man said.

Grandson of Queen Victoria accomplice of "Jalk the Ripper"

LONDON: Jack the Ripper, the serial killer who terrorized 1890's London with the grisly murders of prostitutes, was in fact two men-one of them Prince Albert, grandson of Queen Victoria, according to a book to be released Monday, reports AFP.

In the book, portions of which were carried by the Sunday Express, author David Abrahamson, an 89-year-old psychiatrist, said Prince Albert was a "passive accomplice" to the murders by his Cambridge tutor and homosexual lover, James Kenneth Stephen, a cousin of novelist Virginia Woolf. He also quoted the testimony of a person who saw the last of Jack the Ripper's victims just before her murder in the company of an "extraordinarily well dressed" man. The witness's account of this man was an "overwhelmingly precise description of Prince Albert," he writes.



FRANCE: Xiaoyi Yuan, 19, from Shanghai, poses Thursday after being awarded France's prize for best young writer (Prix Du Jeune Ecrivain) for her novel "La Pluie de Crespuscule" (Rain at Dusk) written in French. She is the first foreign national to win the prize. — AFP/UNB photo

Jordan rockets Golan Heights

JERUSALEM, May 24: A Katyusha rocket, apparently fired from Jordan, landed harmlessly in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, an army statement said Sunday, reports AP.

The rocket landed in the south of the Golan on Friday morning but the army delayed publication of the incident until Sunday without explanation. The terse statement said the rocket caused no casualties or damage.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Middle East War and annexed it in 1981.

The last reported rocket attack from Jordan was in September 1989, and the frontier has been quiet since a spate of infiltrations during the Gulf War.