

Afghans lay foundation for nat'l army

Afghanistan's defence ministry has begun laying the foundations of a national army -- a task that involves integrating tens of thousands of fighters from the ranks of ethnic warlords throughout the country, officials said Tuesday.



Activists from People for Peace holds placards during a peace march against war at New Delhi's India Gate on Tuesday.

Journalist jailed in Russia

A military court in Russia's Pacific port of Vladivostok sentenced military journalist Grigory Pasko on Tuesday to four years in a maximum-security prison for treason in the form of espionage and stripped him of his military rank.

Pope calls on all faiths to work for peace

Pope John Paul II celebrated Christmas mass in St Peter's Basilica at midnight, calling on Jews, Muslims and Christians to work together for peace, amid tight security in St Peter's Square.

Israel to keep Arafat confined to quarters until killers arrested

Palestinian leader barred from joining Bethlehem mass

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will remain "confined to quarters" in Ramallah until he arrests the killers of an Israeli cabinet minister and other top radicals, an Israeli government spokesman told AFP Tuesday.

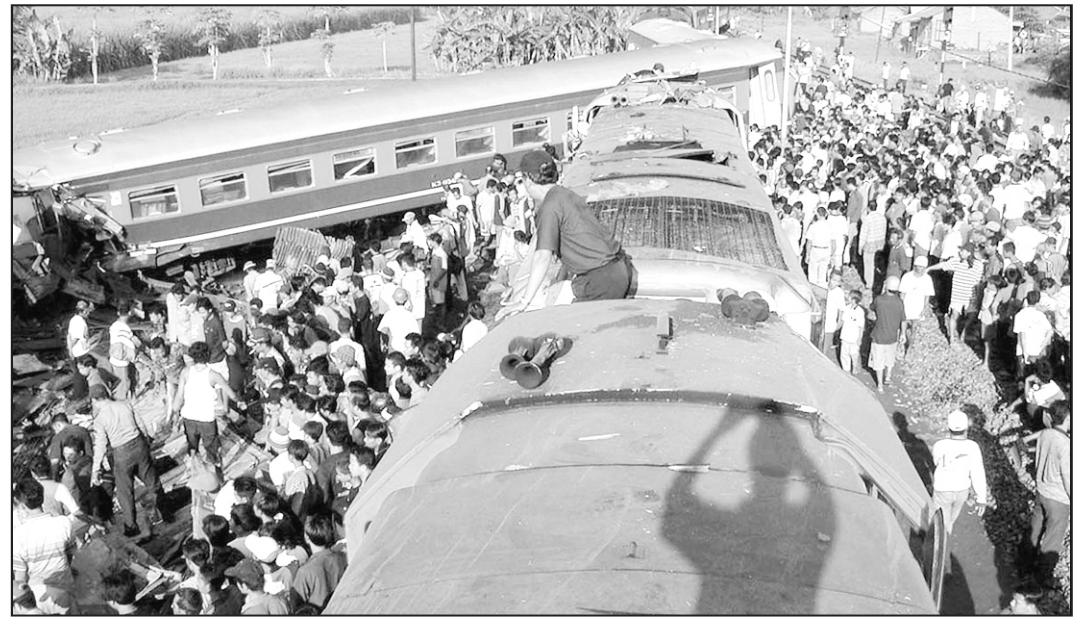
The Palestinian cause swarmed through St Catherine Church, as well as the Orthodox Church of the Nativity which it opens onto. Arafat was spending his first Christmas away from Bethlehem since his Palestinian Authority took charge of the West Bank town in 1995, blocked from visiting by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Bus-train collision kills 28 in China

Twenty-eight people were killed and 11 injured when a bus collided with a train in western China's Xinjiang region, a local official said on Tuesday.

5 Thai policemen killed as gunmen attack posts

Gunmen opened fire in simultaneous attacks on police checkpoints in three southern Thai provinces, killing five officers and a civilian guard, officials said Tuesday.



Indonesian police and volunteers search for more victims of a train accident in Brebes, in Indonesia's Central Java island on Tuesday.

42 killed in Indonesia as trains collide

At least 42 people were killed and dozens injured Tuesday when two trains packed with holidaymakers collided on the Indonesian island of Java, police said amid reports that one of the trains ran a red light.

The general hospital in Brebes had 28 dead and 29 injured, two private hospitals in neighbouring Tegal, 30 km northeast of the accident site, each had two dead and a total of 20 injured and the general hospital in Cirebon, 35 km north-west of Ketanggungan, had two injured.

Laden could not have acted alone: Syria

The Syrian foreign minister said he doubted that Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network acted alone in the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, saying Monday "there should be assistance that had been offered to them from persons and institutions" inside the country.

Fernandes flays watchdog for attacking defence deals

Embattled Defence Minister George Fernandes has flayed a national watchdog for criticising India's wartime defence spending, saying the deals were not as simple as Christmas shopping, the Press Trust of India said Tuesday.

dollars during a conflict in Kashmir in 1999. Fernandes, who was only re-appointed as defence minister in October after quitting in March when several army officials were implicated in bribe-taking, did not actually name the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) watchdog, but his comments were clearly aimed at its findings.

Japanese PM to visit SE Asian nations in Jan

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will visit five Southeast Asian nations next month, a trip originally scheduled for September but postponed after the terrorist attacks in the United States, an official said Tuesday.

Russia seeks to boost ties with Arab world

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday assured visiting Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani that Moscow was striving to strengthen its ties with the Arab world.

relations with Russia, which was traditionally "a supporter and ally of the Arab world." The two leaders' talks focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in post-war Afghanistan.

34 killed in torrential rains in Brazil

At least 34 people have died in flooding and landslides caused by torrential rains that continued to batter Rio de Janeiro state in south-eastern Brazil on Monday, officials said.

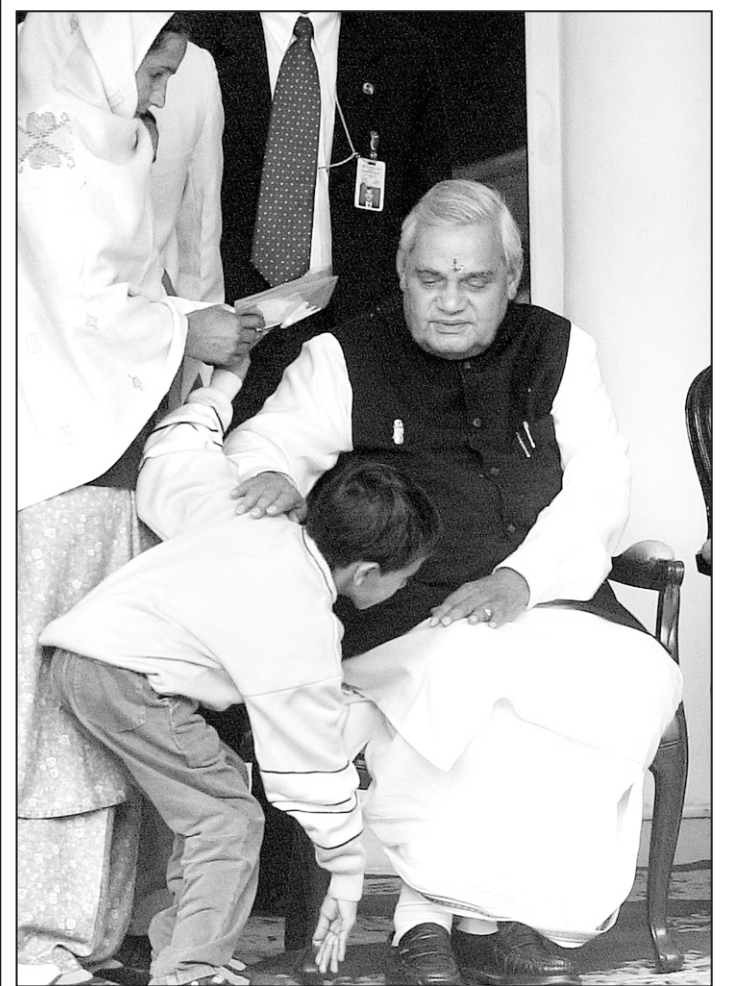
540 killed in fighting in Tenga forest

The Burundi army has retaken the rebel stronghold in Tenga near Bujumbura, national radio reported, quoting a military commander as saying that 515 rebels and 28 soldiers had been killed in the fighting.

Tigers, troops honour truce

Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels Tuesday began observing their first bilateral truce in six years, raising hopes of talks to end decades of bloodshed, officials said.

"Security Forces hope that peaceful cordiality among all communities would prevail throughout the festive season and far beyond leading to a nation of peace and prosperity," the ministry said. The military was expected to refrain from launching fresh anti-rebel operations, Karunaratne said adding, however, that there would be no redeployment of troops.



A boy touches Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's feet to take blessing during the Indian leader's birthday celebrations on Christmas Day at his residence in New Delhi on Tuesday.