# The Daily Star

# INTERNATIONAL

### Afghans lay foundation for nat'l army AFP, Kabul

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

A top Mujahedin commander, Atta Mohammad, told AFP the national army would be recruited on a voluntary basis, effectively ending the practice of forcing men and boys to fight

"After the establishment of the interim administration a new chapter has been opened in our history. so we must have a new army as well," Atta Mohammad said.

Mohammad, a senior Northern Alliance commander from near the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, said professional military officers had been appointed to assist the chairman of the commission tasked with drawing up the plans, Army Chief General Asif Dilawar.

The general, a former officer in Afghanistan's Soviet-aligned communist army, is preparing a mandate for the new army, he said.

Dilawar served as chief of the army under Afghanistan's procommunist governments of the 1980s.

### Journalist jailed in Russia AP, Vladivostok

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.

Pasko had been accused of divulging state secrets on the combat-readiness of Russia's Pacific Fleet to Japanese media. But the court found Pasko guilty of illegally attending a secret meeting of commanders of the Russian Pacific Fleet in 1997, where officers discussed the results of tactical naval maneuvers, and possessing notes that he made there. Judge Dmitry Kuvshinnikov dismissed four other counts of the indictment, saying they were unsubstantiated.



Activists from People for Peace holds placards during a peace march against war at New Delhi's India Gate on Tuesday. The protestors says that the sudden recalling of Indian High Commissioner from Islamabad and cancellation of Samhoutta Express and Lahore Bus service will only halts the peace process and raise tension between the two countries.

nents

the region.'

in Bethlehem.

# Israel to keep Arafat confined to quarters until killers arrested

## Palestinian leader barred from joining Bethlehem mass

#### AFP, Jerusalem

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.

Arafat, who missed his traditional attendance at Christmas mass in Bethlehem due to the controversial restrictions, is "restricted until he takes action against terrorists. It started before Christmas and will go on afterwards," Raanan Gissin said.

"We don't want to humiliate him or harm him. But he'll remain confined to quarters, confined to Ramallah, until either he or other people do the job. Ne're not asking him to do anything he hasn't promised to do.

Gissin said that Israel had given him the names of the two trigger-men from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) who assassinated tourism minister Rehavam Zeevi on October 17.

It is also demanding the arrest of the PFLP's political leader Ahmed Sadat and his deputy. Israel said all the suspects were living in Ramallah, within a kilometre (half a mile) radius of Arafat's West Bank headquarters.

He said Israel would move against the men "only as a last resort" and was giving Arafat the chance to re-assert himself as the leader of the Palestinian people after Israel deemed him "irrelevant" this month forfailing to prevent

bloody attacks. "Arafat made himself irrelevant. He can make himself relevant again," Gissin said. "We're going to give him a chance."

Meanwhile, Christmas midnight mass in Bethlehem's St Catherine Church was packed out on Tuesday, but the front row seat normally occupied by the Palestinians' Muslim leader Yasser Arafat was glaringly empty.

Instead, a black and white keffiyah -- the veteran leader's trademark headwear -- was draped over the vacant seat as Christians and supporters of

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, who brazened world criticism led by the Vatican to make sure Arafat missed the festivities.

The celebrations on Manger Square, outside the church Christians believe is built of Jesus' birthplace, had a forced feel in the knowledge that Arafat had failed to make the trip, despite his bravado promise to walk if necessary from Ramallah where he is stranded by Israeli forces.

Around 2,000 people stood on the cold square to listen to various choirs run through a medley of musical styles, from a proud national salute of Palestine to a jazzed-up version of "Jingle Bells" and "Away in a Manger" set to the tune of cowboy ditty "The Streets of Laredo"

The town made an effort to be cheerful, despite 15 months of blockade sparked by the Palestinian uprising against Israel's occupation of much of their land

Street vendors sold bitter coffee out of tin pots to shivering Palestinians while nuns chomped into soggy kebabs in eateries whose only wall decorations were photos of "martyred" Palestinian militants posing with assault rifles

Tourists rubbed shoulders with crowds of Palestinians, many of whom did not have tickets to the midnight ceremonies in the church complex. "Twenty Christians come to pray and 500 Muslims come to watch," wise

cracked one local.

But many were in no mood to laugh, the large posters of Arafat on walls overlooking the square only emphasising the sudden absence of their leader, trapped for more than three weeks in Ramallah to the north after Israel, enraged at more suicide bombings, destroyed his helicopters,

### **Bus-train** collision kills 28 in China AFP, Beijing

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.

The tragedy took place Sunday on a stretch of railroad near the city of Artux not far from the border with Afghanistan, said the official, a spokesman of the transportation bureau in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi. Shortly before noon, train no. K-

887 slammed into a bus at an unguarded crossing, shattering the vehicle

In the ensuing hours, bodies -some of them decapitated -- lay scattered in the high snow, the sina.com website reported.

The Xinjiang official told AFP that 28 people were killed on the spot, while 11 were seriously injured and two remained in critical condition.

He said it was unclear if all the casualties were passengers on the

### 5 Thai policemen killed as gunmen attack posts AFP, Bangkok

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

The unidentified attackers besieged five police outposts, in Yala, Pattani and three checkpoints in Narathiwat province, at about 7:30 pm Monday, local police said.

Thai Interior Minister Puracha Piemsoomboon said the strikes were likely carried out by Muslim separatists seeking revenge for the shooting death of a Muslim leader by Thai police last month.

"They might have been taking revenge for when their leader was shot by police last month." he told reporters.

Purachai said he believed the attack was aimed at police and not civilians working at the checkpoints.

"When they attack government officials, we will take legal action and we definitely have measures to take action against this group," the

# Pope calls on all faiths to work for peace

#### AFP, Vatican City

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 secu-

rity in St Peter's Square. their cheeks Prayer messages were read by Catholics from several continents in languages including Russian, Swahili, German and Tagalog (Philippine) Land where Jesus was born.

Speaking gravely in a firm voice, the pope said his heart was troubled by "the persistence in several regions of the world of war, social tensions, and the distressing conditions in which so many human beings live.

"We are all looking for a response that would reassure us," he told a crowd of thousands in the imposing basilica. In the most moving part of the ceremony John Paul gave his

"A diplomatic demarche has blessing to a dozen little children been made by the state secretariat

to prevent this ban imposed arbitrarily," Navarro-Valls said.

children represented all five conti-During the midnight mass, the pope and pilgrims prayed that the Smiling and clearly enjoying the leaders of nations and heads of moment, the pope kissed them international bodies would commit tenderly on the forehead and patted themselves to the common good, to the dignity of men and women, to In his homily the pontiff stressed respect for the land, and to children, the universality of the Christmas "too often victims of impropriety and

message as a symbol of peace, violence.' saying it was "a holy night for all." He The mass was accompanied by did not explicitly mention the Holy Christmas carols in Italian, French, English, German, Spanish and On Christmas Eve his spokes-Polish.

Long lines had formed in St Peter's Square on Monday as authorities stepped up security for the Christmas mass.

create a less tension-filled climate in Those who arrived early were The Vatican criticised as "arbirewarded with a brief appearance of trary" the Israeli decision to prevent the pontiff as he lit the "candle of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat peace" in the window of his apartfrom attending Christmas services ment overlooking St Peter's Square. Police officers began checking every entry point from early after-

noon

Every one of the some 8.000 pilgrims at the mass was searched security officers and passed through metal detectors. Scores of security officers and

policemen, some of them in plainclothes, watched the square, where a manger with a giant crib was blessed by the pope after the mass. Security had already been increased the day after the

September 11 attacks in the United States One source said security around

the pope, who was shot and injured in an attack in May, 1981, is a "mission impossible.' The pontiff is "extremely difficult

to protect, as his role is to welcome the faithful and encourage them to take part in ceremonies." the source said

Virgilio Noe was to replace the pope in celebrating the traditional Christmas mass on St Peter's Square.

On Tuesday morning Cardinal Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Monday.



dressed in national costume and

carrying golden chalices. The

man Joaquin Navarro-Valls said

Vatican representatives had under-

taken diplomatic steps to "help

42 killed in Indonesia as

PHOTO:AFF Pope John Paul II celebrates the midnight Christmas mass in the Saint

AP, Damascus

institutions" inside the country.

coalition led by President Bashar

Assad's Baath party, Farouk al-

Sharaa accused Washington of a

"hidden agenda" in its war against

terrorism, such as a desire to control

vast oil reserves in the Caspian Sea.

presented irrefutable and clear proof

about the September accident." al-

Sharaa said. "It has presented

evidence that can be called pre-

"The United States has not

minister added Laden could not have acted alone: Syria

sumptuous evidence which has



Indonesian police and volunteers search for more victims of a train accident in Breses, in Indonesia's Central Java island on Tuesday. At least 42 people were killed and dozens of others injured when two passenger trains packed with holiday makers collided.

# Fernandes flays watchdog for attacking defence deals

#### AFP, New Delhi

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.

In an interview with the news agency, the minister said planned defence purchases were now suffering due to a damning report by the national watchdog which probed military deals worth millions of

34 killed in

in Brazil

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

torrential rains

torrential rains that continued to

batter Rio de Janeiro state in south-

#### dollars during a conflict in Kashmir in 1999

Fernandes, who was only reappointed 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. "Military purchases are not like

Christmas shopping... Weapons or any other equipment are items of long gestation --- from order to

delivery

shelf.

#### AFP, Jakarta

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.

"So far we have now 42 killed and 25 others injured," Central Java police chief, Inspector General Erwin Mappaseng told Metro TV from the site of the accident

The two economy class trains collided at Ketanggungan station, some 20 km south of Brebes and 270 km east of Jakarta at 4:30 am (2130 GMT Monday), state train company PT KAI said

Transport Minister Agum Gumelar told Metro TV at the crash

site the Mpu Java train from Jakarta had ignored a red light and crashed head on into a train waiting at the station and on the wrong track.

The driver of the train suffered only light injuries and was being questioned, director general for land transportation Susmono Susilo told SCTV private television.

Susilo said that KAI will pay for all medical and funeral costs of the victims The front engine of the Mpu

Java train was heavily damaged with several carriages derailed. local TV reports showed. The Jakarta-bound Gaya Baru was also damaged but remained on the track A check at five hospitals in the

area showed only 32 dead and 51 injured.

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 northwest of Ketanggungan, had two injured.

The general hospital in Brebes

An official at the Brebes station said the Gaya Baru train had at least 1,153 passengers in nine passenger carriages and a restaurant car.

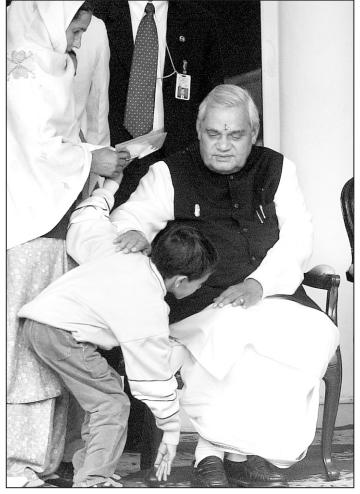
The Mpu Jaya train had 11 passenger carriages and a restaurant car but the number of passengers was not immediately available. Sugeng said police were on the

site helping victims and investigating the cause of the accident.

some ambiguity ... based on travels The Syrian foreign minister said he and on money moved between doubted that Osama bin Laden and Europe and the USA. "Is it possible that bin Laden and his al-Qaida network acted alone in the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, saying Monday "there

Taliban were alone behind this complicated act? I say no. There should be assistance that had been should be an assistance that had offered to them from persons and been offered to them from institutions and persons inside the USA. Addressing a meeting of the al-Sharaa said. He did not elabo ruling National Congress Front rate

Although Syria is on Washington's list of nations considered to be sponsors of international terrorism, the United States savs it has enlisted Damascus' help in combating terrorism. But the two countries differ sharply over Syria's support for Lebanese Hezbollah guerillas and two militant Palestinian groups also labeled terrorist by the US State Department.



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. A large contingent of school children and admirers greeted Vajpayee to mark his 77th birthday.

Fernandes, who has often been at the centre of political storms for his outspoken comments, said the army was suffering due to CAG's report, which even smelled a rat in the purchase of 500 coffins for soldiers killed in the 1999 conflict.

"And anyone who has no knowl-

edge of the use or the acquisition of

weapons must have at least this

much basic knowledge; that you

don't get ammunition, guns off the

agency quoted the defence minister

as saying in New Delhi

You have to order," the news

Japanese PM to visit SE Asian nations in Jan AFP, Tokyo

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.

Leaving on January 9, Koizumi will visit the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore and return on January 15, the foreign ministry official said.

"He is going to exchange views on many different issues with the top leaders of these countries," she said.

### Russia seeks to boost ties with Arab world AFP. Moscow

relations with Russia, which was traditionally "a supporter and ally of

Russian President Vladimir Putin on the Arab world. Tuesday assured visiting Qatari The two leaders' talks focused Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa alon the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Thani that Moscow was striving to and the situation in post-war Afghanistan. strengthen its ties with the Arab

Russia is the co-sponsor of the "We view the meeting today as collapsed Middle East peace prothe continuation of Russia's policy cess along with the United States. On Monday, Qatar's Foreign towards strengthening relations with the Arab world, even more as Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem you have been elected as chairman bin Jabr al-Thani called for greater the Organisation of Islamic Russian involvement in the Middle East, the press office for Russia's

lower house of parliament said. Sheikh Hamad, whose country currently chairs the OIC, replied that

### Qatar had long sought to upgrade

# Tigers, troops honour truce

of hostilities" period.

Karunaratne said.

Conference," Putin told him.

world

#### AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels Tuesday began observing their first bilateral truce in six years raising hopes of talks to end The army launched a campaign decades of bloodshed, officials in late November to flush out Hutu said.

> The truce was holding in its first 12 hours with a major incident reported 24 hours earlier in the north-western region of Mannar where a policeman was shot dead by the Tigers, the defence ministry said.

several places that we were told had "Sri Lankan security forces note the lack of hostilities in North and East with the commencement of the

cessation of hostilities ...," the ministry said. It said soldiers in the embattled

"No air targets will be engaged,

but naval operations will continue to

prevent the Tigers trying to smuggle

in arms and ammunition." defence

ministry spokesman Sanath

by to assist the navy in the event of a

confrontation with the Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

He said the airforce was on stand

peaceful cordiality among all communities would prevail throughout northern and eastern regions were the festive season and far beyond under strict instructions to hold their leading to a nation of peace and fire during the one-month "cessation prosperity," the ministry said.

"Security Forces hope that

The military was expected to refrain from launching fresh antirebel operations, Karunaratne said adding, however, that there would be no redeployment of troops.

The new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe announced Friday that it would reciprocate the truce declared by the LTTE on Wednesday to create conditions for talks.

would be taken to prevent the rebels reinstalling themselves in Tenga,

but declined to give details.

rebels of the National Liberation

Forces (FNL) from the dense Tenga

forest area, six kilometres (four

ist on national radio, who was on the

press trip, said "We were shown

Prime Ndikumagenge, a journal-

miles) northeast of the capital.

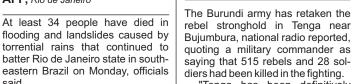
been the hardest to take.'

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.

More victims could be found as rescue workers search through the destruction wrought since rains began on Sunday, said Colonel Jorge Lopes, state civil defence radio said late Monday The general said measures

# 540 killed in fighting in Tenga forest

### AFP, Bujumbura



"Tenga has been definitively liberated," General Major Samuel Gahiro was guoted as saying during a guided tour of the area for journalists in the public services media, the