

## Sino-Indian talks on troops cut begin

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: India and China began talks Thursday on the details of how to cut their massive frontier forces and realign their Himalayan boundary, which has been an arena of two wars and tension for more than three decades, reports AP.

The two-day talks were being held after an exchange of visits by senior political leaders and officials to end strained relationship and to develop trade.

A Chinese team of 12 diplomats and army officers flew into New Delhi Wednesday for the talks. They will discuss delineating the border using modern cartographic tools.

Both nations agreed to maintain peace along a 4,056-kilometre (2,514-mile) cease-

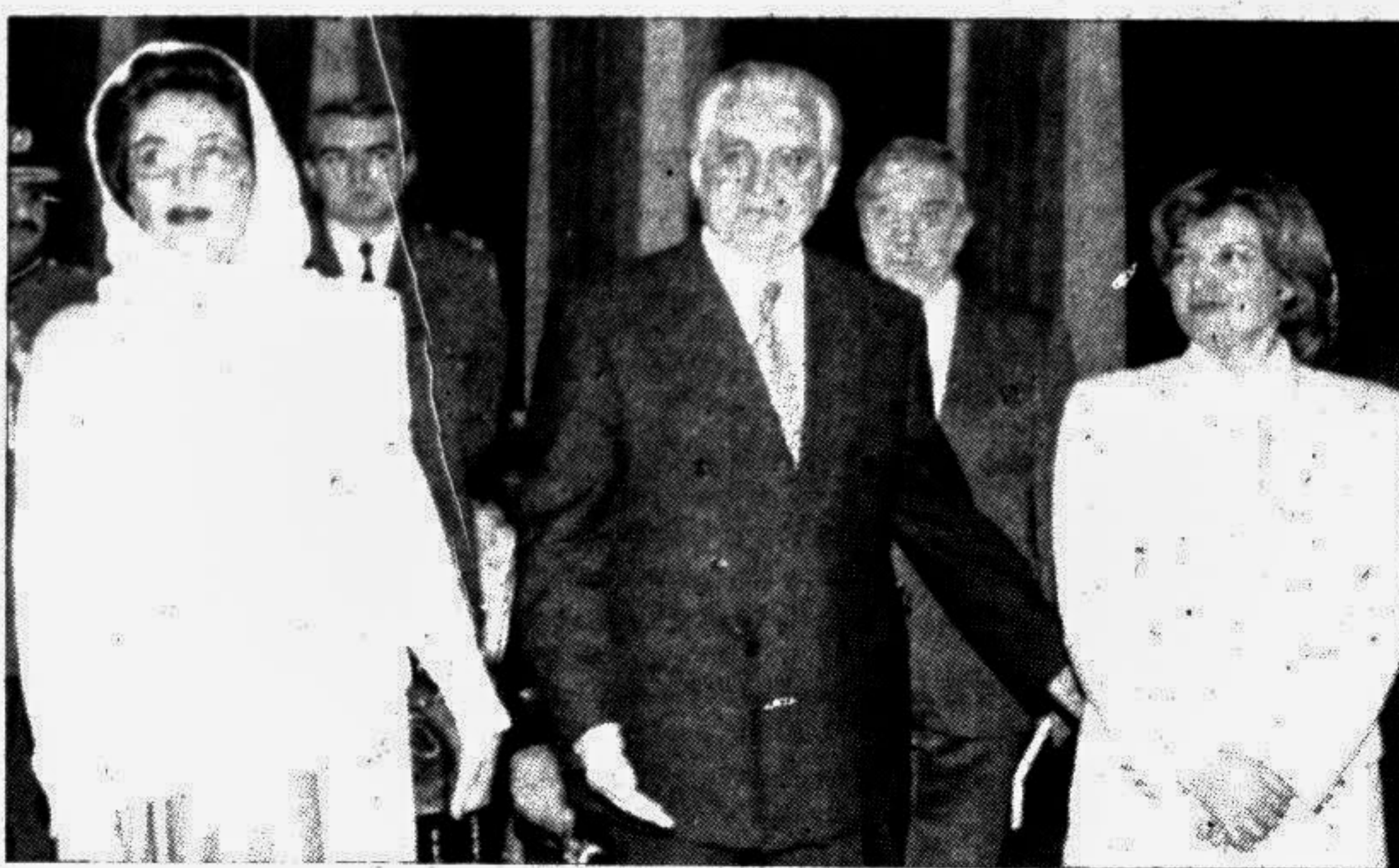
fire line when Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao visited Beijing last month.

The talks will help create a larger demilitarised zone and is a solid contribution to defusing the conflict situation in South Asia," said Babani Sen Gupta, a China expert at the Centre for Policy Research, an independent think tank.

"The talks ... represent an incremental normalisation of Sino-Indian relations," he said in an interview.

The military buildup began after a 21-day war in 1962. Though visits by top leaders since 1988 have eased the strains, many issues have remained unresolved.

The Indian army has stationed five mountain divisions or about 50,000 men along the Chinese border.



Croatian President Franjo Tudjman (C) welcomes Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller (R) and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto after their arrival in Zagreb on Wednesday following their visit to the besieged Bosnian capital earlier on Thursday. — AFP photo

## Tehran starts talks with Sunni Muslims

TEHRAN, Feb 3: Government officials opened talks with leaders of the minority Sunni Muslim sect Thursday in the eastern city of Zahedan, after clashes there between police and demonstrators, sources said, reports AP.

The area was calm but tense two days after thousands of Sunnis protested the reported destruction of an important Sunni mosque, said people contacted in Zahedan, in Iran's easternmost Baluchistan province.

Iran's main opposition group, the Mujahideen Khalq, faxed a statement to the Associated Press in Cyprus on Wednesday saying the clashes were sparked by protests over religious persecution. It said at least two people were killed, 14 wounded and 100 arrested.

## Off the Record

### Using permanent hair dyes not risky

NEW YORK: Using permanent hair dyes does not increase women's overall risk of dying from cancer, according to a large study by the American Cancer Society, reports Xinhua.

But the study, published Wednesday in the journal of the National Cancer Institute, found that a woman who had used black hair dye for 20 years or more had about four times greater risk of dying from non-hodgkin's Lymphoma and multiple Myeloma than those who never used dye.

That group of women, all 30 and older, represented only 0.6 per cent of the 1,800,000 women in the study who dyed their hair at all. And there were only five deaths involved, according to the report.

For over ninety-nine per cent of women, there's no evidence that hair dyes increase the risk of fatal cancers, said Dr Michael Thun, leading researcher in the study. In a small subset of those who used black hair dyes for twenty years, you had cases of two immune system cancers, so it wasn't hundred per cent clean bill of health for hair dyes.

### First on-stage performance

LAS VEGAS: Popstar Michael Jackson will appear in a televised special later this month in his first performance since he paid millions of dollars to settle a child molestation suit, reports AP.

Jackson and his family will tape the "Jackson family honours" at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas on February 19 and the show will be broadcast on February 22, according to a family statement issued Tuesday.

The singer's parents will both perform for the two-hour show, as well as seven of his brothers and sisters.

A Jackson spokesman said estranged sister Latoya has not responded to an invitation to join them.

"This event marks our family's first on-stage performance in two decades," said Jermaine Jackson, a co-producer of the show.

"The 'Jackson family honour' is an opportunity for us, along with some of the country's greatest stars, to come together to help those less fortunate," he added.

Proceeds from the show will go to charity, including a relief fund for the victims of the Los Angeles earthquake.



### Mayflower Madam teaches tricks of trade

CHICAGO: Men wearing purple suits and lizard boots and women with big hair and too much makeup sat down to learn the tricks of the trade, so to speak from the Mayflower Madam, Sydney Biddle Barrows, reports AP.

Wearing pearls and a prim but stylish black suit and sprinkling her rapid-fire speech with an occasional high-class "rather," barrows looked and sounded more like headmistress than head of a call-girl ring.

But Barrows, who made headlines 10 years ago for running an elite New York prostitution business, knows what sells. And for \$15, about 80 people learned Wednesday night "How to Get a Job as an Escort."

First things first: "There is no such thing as a legitimate escort service," she said.

A male student asked barrows if there's any market for an escort service without sex. "Nope," she said.

In a hotel conference suite appropriately called the Consort Room, the 42-year-old Barrows talked unabashedly about sex-for-hire, "the pros and the cons, the ins and outs, so to speak."



Undated file picture shows the Bambinello (Little Child), one of Rome's most celebrated sacred objects, which was stolen from the Ara Coeli church Wednesday. The 15th century wooden statue of the Infant Jesus, carved from olive wood from the garden of Gethsemane, baptised in the Jordan by a Franciscan monk, and saved from shipwreck by a miracle on its way to Italy, is today the center of a popular cult. It was stolen once before: in 1798 by French soldiers. — AFP photo

## Delhi steps up security ahead of youth Congress march

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The Indian authorities stepped up security today ahead of a march by thousands of ruling party activists to the border with Pakistan to protest its alleged backing for Muslim rebels in Kashmir, reports AFP.

Home Ministry sources here said security was being tightened in the northern Indian state which borders Pakistan.

The youth wing of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party said tens of thousands of people would march to the border on Saturday.

A spokesman said the participants would take buses through security-cleared areas in Punjab, and would set off on foot a short distance from the border.

"Security will be very tight. There is no threat this time," the spokesman said referring to previous attacks by Sikh guerrillas on Youth Congress members in the state torn by a decade of Sikh separatist strife.

The ministry sources said paramilitary troops would reinforce the police, and the Youth Congress activists will not be allowed to enter the "no-man's land" dividing the two countries at Atari.

Youth Congress President Manjinder Singh Bitta has pledged that the marchers will not try to breach the border or provoke Pakistani Rangers.

"People from all over India will participate, but the majority will come from Punjab's border districts," the Youth Congress spokesman said at party headquarters, a buzz with preparations for the protest.

Saturday's march will kick

off a month-long campaign of rallies and demonstrations by the Youth Congress across India's 25 states to protest Pakistani backing for the bloody Muslim secessionist struggle in Kashmir.

The Youth Congress plans to hold a second march to the Pakistan border at a later date.

PTI adds: The Madhya Pradesh Governor Mohammed Shafi Quereshi today said India should not allow interference by Pakistan in the country's internal affairs.

Speaking to newsmen, Quereshi, previously Jammu and Kashmir Congress-I president, said Pakistan wanted to foment insurgency in Kashmir valley and criticised Islamabad for raising the Kashmir issue at international platforms.

The governor said the neighbouring country has been taught a lesson for three times in the past and asserted that Kashmir cannot be separated from the country at any cost.

Only six districts of the valley were affected by militancy while eight others were normal, Quereshi said.

The government rejected Pakistan's argument that Kashmir should be given to it since the state had a majority of Muslim community. Whole Pakistan accounted for 11 crore Muslims while India has 13 crore Muslims spread across the country.

AFP from Islamabad reports: President Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari on Wednesday said that the present government was trying to build every possible pressure on India to compel it to resolve the Kashmir issue in accordance with the United Nations resolutions.

## BRIEFLY

**Mahathir arrives Manila:** Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad arrived in Manila yesterday with a large business contingent for a four-day official visit aimed at strengthening ties with the Philippines and scouting for investment, AFP reports from Manila.

The Malaysian leader was welcomed by Philippine Vice President Joseph Estrada and a 21-gun salute from an honour guard.

Mahathir, the first Malaysian head of government to visit the Philippines, was scheduled to meet with President Fidel Ramos at the Presidential Palace later yesterday and speak before Philippine business leaders on Friday. Ramos has earlier visited Kuala Lumpur in 1993.

**98 feared drowned in China:** Ninety-eight people are feared to have drowned in a collision between a tug and a passenger boat on the Yangtze river in southwest China, a local journalist said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The boat, Chuanyun 21, which had been carrying 173 passengers and crew, sank immediately after the accident, which occurred near Wanxian, in eastern Sichuan late Tuesday, the editor of the Chongqing daily said in a telephone interview.

Rescuers picked up 72 survivors late Tuesday and another three on Wednesday morning, but 98 persons are unaccounted for, he said, adding that there is little hope for finding them.

**30,000 Lankans to work in Lebanon:** Sri Lanka will send a 30,000 strong workforce to Lebanon under an agreement reached by the two governments, according to the national news agency Lankapuvath on Wednesday, Xinhua reports from Colombo.

Tourism Minister Gamini Lokuge, who just returned from his visit to Lebanon, was quoted as saying that the workers, mostly in demand for Beirut building projects, will include carpenters, masons, drivers and unskilled workers as well.

The arrangements for sending 30,000 Lankan workers will be made before March, the deadline set by the Lebanese authorities, he said.

**Blast rocks Athens Goethe Inst:** A powerful bomb blast rocked a building housing the German Goethe Cultural Institute in central Athens before dawn yesterday, police said, Reuter reports from Athens.

The building suffered serious damage from the blast which smashed windows in a 100 metre (yard) radius, police said. The institute was closed at the time and there were no injuries.

The extreme-left group revolutionary popular struggle (ELA) claimed responsibility for the explosion in a telephone call to an Athens newspaper.

**Germany to reduce size of army:** Germany will reduce the size of its army to 3,415,000 men by the end of this year to save money, Defence Minister Volker Ruehe said Wednesday, AFP reports from Bonn.

He told the Bundestag (lower house) Defence Committee that the army would have to save 1.25 billion marks (0.7 billion dollars) out of total defence cuts of five billion marks decided in January.

This meant that the army would be spending 1.65 billion marks less on personnel, 220 million marks less on equipment and 100 million marks less on operations abroad, Ruehe said.

**45,859 AIDS cases in Brazil:** A total of 45,859 cases of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) were registered in Brazil from 1980 to 1993 with 810 cases reported last December, Xinhua says from Rio de Janeiro.

A Health Ministry bulletin released Wednesday says the country's southeastern region, where the biggest urban centres are located, has 66.2 per cent of all the AIDS cases.

Lair Guerra, coordinator of the Health Ministry AIDS programme, said Tuesday that testing of an anti-AIDS vaccine will start this year.

**'US heroin epidemic':** A senior US drug official warned Thursday of the "frightening possibility of a new US heroin epidemic" as more sophisticated criminals smuggle abundant supplies of the drug to the United States, Ap reports from Hong Kong.

Robert Gelbard, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters, said the end of the Cold War has opened borders, boosted trade and weakened police repression, making life easier for criminals.

"We face today the greatest threat from international organised crime in our history," he said in a luncheon speech.

## Strike paralyses Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 3: Pakistan's biggest city was largely shut down Thursday due to a strike call by a political opposition group, and drive-by shootings left at least one dead and 10 wounded, reports AP.

The normally congested streets of Karachi were mostly deserted, except for military vehicles stationed at many of the main intersections. Many of the vehicles were mounted with heavy machine guns.

Attackers fired on a commuter bus, killing one person and injuring five, government officials said. Five more people were hurt in a number of drive-by shootings around the southern port city, home to some 10 million people.

The attackers were not identified. But they were believed linked to the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), the opposition group that called the one-day strike to protest recent actions by the Sindh Provincial government.

The atmosphere in several neighbourhoods was tense as the security forces cordoned off the areas and searched house-to-house, arresting more than 100 people, according to officials.

The government in Sindh Province recently announced new administrative districts and the MQM feels the realignment dilutes its power and discriminates against its followers.

The movement represents Muslims who migrated from India when the Asian subcontinent was partitioned in

## Russian newsmen barred from cabinet meet

MOSCOW, Feb 3: Russian journalists were barred from a Cabinet meeting Thursday for the first time since the 1991 Soviet collapse, reports AP.

The media ban appears to reflect the Cabinet's new, more Soviet style. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin recently reorganised the Cabinet, shutting out reformers and giving key posts to former Communist bureaucrats.

The state news agency ITAR-Tass reported with thinly veiled indignation that its reporters were barred from the session at the Russian White House, the former parliament building.

21 Iranian diplomats asked to leave Jordan

AMMAN, Feb 3: Jordan has ordered 21 of the 26 Iranian diplomats based here to leave by the end of the month, the Foreign Ministry said today, reports AP.

Jordanian political sources said the government ordered out the Iranians because of their contacts with Islamic fundamentalists.

The ministry informed the Iranian authorities about the move at the beginning of January, giving the diplomats two months to leave.

The official reason was that Jordan wanted to reach a balance between the number of diplomats in each country, as Jordan had only two in Tehran.

Jordan and Iran resumed diplomatic relations in January 1991 after a 10-year break.

Tehran severed relations with Amman because of its support for Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-88.

The Iranian embassy in Amman reopened in March 1991 and Jordan's embassy in Tehran soon after.

## Georgian Dy Defence Minister killed in explosion

MOSCOW, Feb 3: Georgian Deputy Defence Minister Nikolai Kekelidze was killed early today in an explosion at his home in Tbilisi just hours before Russian President Boris Yeltsin arrived in the city for talks focussing on military matters, the Georgian Interior Ministry said, reports AP.

Itar-Tass quoted the ministry as saying that the explosion had been caused deliberately.

The blast, which occurred around 4:00 A M (0100 GMT), also killed another member of the minister's family.

Kekelidze was mainly responsible for supervising Georgia's military industry.

Yeltsin arrived in Tbilisi today for talks with Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze that are set to focus on Moscow's plans to station some 18,000 troops in the Caucasus.

A friendship and cooperation treaty is also to be signed between the two countries during the visit. Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev arrived in Tbilisi Wednesday to prepare for the summit.

Yeltsin's security contingent had earlier expressed worries about being able to assure the President's protection in Tbilisi, where a number of uncontrolled armed groups roam after two years of civil war and regional conflicts.

In December, a quarrel between Defence Minister Georgi Karkarashvili and Security Minister Igor Georgadze turned into a settling of accounts, with several clashes between members of the two ministries and a bomb explosion at the Security Ministry which left one person seriously injured.

Reuter adds: Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze, desperate for Russian help to keep his battered country to-

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gether, says the deal is "the most important even between Georgia and Russia of the past 200 years."

But Interfax news agency said the chairman of Russia's lower house of parliament, the state Duma, and the leaders of all political faction represented there sent Yeltsin a letter on Wednesday saying they could block the deal.

State Duma chairman Ivan Rybkin and the party heads said the treaty could destabilise the underbox Caucasus region, where fighting has been raging for much of the last five years.

Many Russian politicians and military leaders are worried that the conflict could spread into southern parts of Russia.

Yeltsin has said he hopes to be able to work with the new Duma.

## Arab girl shot by mistake in Gaza

JERUSALEM, Feb 3: Israeli soldiers shot a 10-year-old Arab girl by mistake during a car chase in Gaza on Wednesday, Israel television and Palestinian sources said, reports Reuter.

Palestinian sources said she was hit in the face by three bullets and taken to a hospital in Israel in serious condition.

The television and Palestinian sources said soldiers firing at a suspect car hit another vehicle in which the girl was travelling.

The army confirmed that a 10-year-old girl arrived at a hospital with bullet wounds to the head. It said the incident was being investigated.

## War-wounded kids get treatment in a German peace village

OBERHAUSEN (Germany), Feb 3: Abdul Maruf, an Afghan boy with soulful brown eyes, watches as about 20 other war-wounded kids sing a Bavarian hiking song in broken German. Abdul's thoughts are back in Kabul, reports AP.

The 12-year-old is recovering from a knee wound he suffered when an artillery round hit his house in the Afghan capital last year, killing his parents.

Abdul is among 181 kids who are being treated at Friedensdorf International, a foundation that has been helping wounded children from the world's war zones for the past 27 years.

"I want to tell you a story," Abdul says to a visitor after the sing-along in the rumpus room of Friedensdorf's rehabilitation home. Then he relates what happened in Kabul.

He doesn't usually talk about it. But he felt a sudden need. Abdul is just starting to come to grips with his parents' death.

As young as 2 and as old as 14, the war victims clutch donated teddy bears and dolls when they crawl into cozy bunk beds inside the dormitories at Friedensdorf, German for "Peace Village."

Screams from a child having a dream about war sometimes pierce the nocturnal serenity. The lights come on.

Other kids in the room and night staffers comfort the child.

Abdul is relatively lucky. His shrapnel wound will heal. Khader Khan, a 10-year-old, lost a leg during a rocket attack in Kabul last year. Khader sat in his wheelchair with a blank look during the sing — along one empty pant leg hanging limply. A child put a silly hat on Khader's head. A faint smile appeared beneath the hat but quickly vanished.

"It's hard to break the tie with him. You can imagine what he must be feeling in his heart," said Holger Willjung, who coordinates rehabilitation sessions for the injured children.

in a country with many humanitarian organisations, Friedensdorf is one of the best-known.

Of the 181 children staying at the foundation's convalescent facilities on a grassy hill near Oberhausen, a German steel town outside Dueseldorf, 110 are victims of factional fighting that started in Afghanistan in 1992. Others are from Bosnia, Sudan and nine other countries.

Wolfgang Mertens, a Friedensdorf spokesman, says the foundation wants to fly into Kabul to rescue children wounded in the most recent fighting, but it's impossible without a cease-fire.

More than 4,000 people have been wounded, and hundreds more are feared dead in fierce new battles that broke out last month in Kabul.

The Friedensdorf foundation, financed by donations, takes injured children out of crisis regions and delivers them to hospitals in Germany and Austria for surgery. They are usually hospitalised for about six months, learning German from doctors, nurses and social workers.

The children are then brought to the cluster of buildings here where they convalesce for up to two years. There's no charge to the children's families.

Physical therapists try to bring the children back to full strength. Amputees are fitted with artificial limbs. With games, trips to the cinema and to local restaurants, Friedensdorf workers try to make it a happy place. It's not easy.

The families of these children want their loved ones back home, so the kids leave Friedensdorf when they reach optimal health.

"It tears you up sometimes to see them go," says Friedensdorf staffer Beate Kleinbrahm.

Abdul after he leaves will be living with his uncle. Abdul hopes Kabul will be calmer by then. If not, says Abdul he may go to live with relatives in Iran.

China frees 3 Catholic clerics

HONG KONG, Feb 3: Chinese authorities have freed three Roman Catholic clerics who led prayers in defiance of the ruling Communist Party, a US-based religious group said Thursday, reports AP.

News Network International, a private news agency based in Santa Ana, Calif, said one of those freed was Bishop Su Zhiming, detained January 20 after meeting US Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J. in Beijing.

The agency said its information came from church sources in Hong Kong.

China bans worship except in state-sponsored churches. The Communists broke ties with the Vatican shortly after seizing power in 1949.