

US urges Arab states to break ice with Israel

WASHINGTON, Oct 27: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is urging Arab leaders to recognise Israel now that it has agreed to cede more land to the Palestinians, reports AP.

She also wants them to help the Palestinians develop the West Bank and Gaza.

Arab momentum in establishing diplomatic and economic ties to Israel was halted after Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud coalition ousted Shimon Peres as prime minister in 1996 elections. His refusal to relinquish more land and his opposition to a Palestinian state prompted the Arab freeze.

But now that Netanyahu has signed an agreement with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to give up another 13 per cent of the West Bank, Albright wants the Arabs to reciprocate.

"Secretary Albright believes with the peace process now reinvigorated Arab states should do more to normalise relations with Israel, assist the Palestinians economically where possible and participate in the multilateral peace process track," her spokesman, James P. Rubin, said Monday.

The Clinton administration is not gearing up to push Israel

to make a land-for-peace deal with Syria. First, a senior US official told reporters, "We now have to digest" the West Bank accord and get ready for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on an overall settlement.

Under the Wye accord, the talks, which will deal with Palestinian demands for a state and a capital in Jerusalem, are due to open Nov. 2. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said President Clinton would join the negotiations at some point. Clinton spent some 80 hours mediating between Netanyahu and Arafat in Maryland before the agreement was reached last Friday.

The statement issued by Rubin at Albright's direction reflected what senior US officials consider to be a passive and unhelpful response from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and several other Arab countries to the Israeli-Palestinian accord.

Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk met Monday with 10 Arab ambassadors but there was no change in their position. King Hussein of Jordan, who signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1996, attended the summit talks and urged Netanyahu and Arafat to reach a settlement.

Otherwise, Arab leaders have kept their distance. Egypt, the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, in 1979, gave lukewarm approval to the agreement. Algeria called the deal a step toward peace. On the other hand, the Syrian media, which takes its cues from the government, and Lebanon were critical.

The main targets of the US appeal were Morocco and Tunisia, which established relations with Israel under its conciliatory Labour governments. Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf nations, some of which had economic ties to Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

The senior US official told reporters "the peace process is not a spectator sport," that the Palestinians need development help and that the Arab nations should realise "Israel is in the region and has to be recognised."

After concluding the agreement Arafat flew immediately to Europe to solicit economic help, while Netanyahu is expected to ask Congress for aid to help finance the withdrawal of Israeli troops from another chunk of the West Bank and security measures to protect Israelis against terrorist attacks.

60 feared dead as boat capsizes in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Oct 27: Two boats carrying worshippers who had just completed an early morning river ritual collided in northeastern India Tuesday, leaving at least 60 people, missing and feared dead, police and survivors said, reports AP.

Sri Kant Jha, 26, was one of ten people who swam to safety after their boat carrying 70 people sank after hitting another boat head on in the Guwahati, the Assamese state capital, 2,100 kilometres east of New Delhi. The other boat, carrying 20 people, was undamaged.

Jha said he heard a loud thud and before he knew what was happening, he was in the water. He said five of his relatives were missing.

Both boats had been hired by pilgrims from the neighbouring state of Bihar for an annual Hindu ritual involving scattering flowers and floating oil lamps on the Brahmaputra, considered holy before dawn. The pilgrims on the two boats knew each other, Jha said.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear. Police and army divers were searching the river, swollen by recent rains. By late Tuesday morning, they had so far found no bodies or other survivors.

China detains prominent dissident, associate

BEIJING, Oct 27: Police detained one of China's most prominent dissidents and an associate Tuesday, disrupting their plans to set off on a cross-country trip to protest the harassment of a fellow activist, reports AP.

More than 10 police went to Xu Wenli's home, took him away for questioning and searched his home for two hours, confiscating a fax machine, papers, magazines and photos, said Xu's wife, He Xintong.

Zhang Hui, an associate of Xu's who spent the night at their home, also was detained, she said. She did not know how long they would be held.

She said the detentions demonstrated that Chinese authorities have no intention of relaxing their grip despite their signing earlier this month of a UN human rights treaty, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"This is their real face," she said in an interview. "The Communist Party says one thing but does another."

Xu, Zhang, and at least three other Beijing dissidents had planned to drive to eastern Shandong province in Xu's jeep in a show of support for another democracy activist, Xie Wanjun, who has been harassed for his activities.

Xie was detained last month and held for 15 days for attempting to file an application with the authorities to set up an opposition group, the China Democracy Party.

Since July, dissidents have tried the register branches of the party in at least nine provinces and major cities, challenging a virtual 49-year ban on organised opposition to the ruling Communist Party.

Authorities have rejected all the applications and detained at least 20 dissidents, mostly for short periods of time.

After his release, Xie ordered to move out of his home by November 1 and his wife was sacked from her job as a teacher. Xie accused police of forcing his former employer to evict him from his home.

In a telephone call Monday, Xie also said his home's electricity and telephone had been cut off, said Xu's wife.

"It's too much," she said.

As many as 30 dissidents from Beijing and elsewhere in the country planned to set off Tuesday for Shandong's Dongying county, some 450 kilometres (280 miles) south of Beijing, to protest Xie's treatment, Xu said Monday before he was detained.

Police sought repeatedly in recent days to dissuade Xu from making the trip.

Off the Record

Million penny dream comes true

HAZLETON, Pennsylvania: A 10-year-old boy's dream of collecting a million pennies for charity came true — and then some, reports AP.

Matthew Nonnemacher of Hazleton gave dollars 18,196.91 to the United Way charity of Greater Hazleton after the community-wide penny drive he created for Saturday's Make A Difference Day.

That's 1,819,691 pennies.

Most of the pennies were counted by employees at First Federal Bank, and it took a while — more than a dozen hours late last week.

Asked why he went to all the trouble, Matthew kept it simple: "To help people."

The Titanic sinks, again!

LONDON: The Titanic has sunk again or at least, a scale model of the ocean liner moored on a village lake, reports AP.

The model version, 5 metres long with working funnels and a total of 1,300 lights, was a star attraction as it serenely sailed the lake in Matlock, central England.

It came complete with a polystyrene iceberg for dramatic effect, and won first prize at the town's annual illuminations, which draw tens of thousands of people very summer.

However the high winds and heavy rain that lashed Britain at the weekend proved too much for the Titanic, and it disappeared into the muddy bottom of the lake.

"The last I saw of her, she was upside down in the water," said her maker Paul Henshall, quoted by the British press Tuesday.

The real Titanic sank in 1912 on its maiden transatlantic voyage with the loss of more than 1,500 lives.

What spies resort to...

BAGHDAD: Deadly pens and exploding cigars? Amateur Israeli spies — according to a popular Iraqi newspaper — are putting crocodile eggs in two lakes in northern Iraq, reports AP.

That provokes the release of "large quantities" of cobra snakes near Iraqi forces in the north, said Babil, a daily newspaper owned by Odai Hussein, the Iraqi president's eldest son.

Northern Iraq is under the control of Kurdish factions helped by a no-fly zone enforced by US and allied warplanes.

Madnan Mufti, a representative of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which controls the region around the lakes of Dokan and Darbandi Khan, called the report "silly and stupid propaganda."

"How can one do that in lakes where thousands of our people live and eat from their fish?" he said from Cairo, Egypt.

The newspaper did not elaborate on the goal of the operation, and there was no immediate comment from Israeli officials.

Two headed deer indeed

GREAT FALLS, Montana: In hunter's terms, it was quite a rack. Robert Kercher of Great Falls was stalking deer on opening day Sunday, and wound up with a bizarre kill, reports AP.

Kercher shot a buck only to find out that tangled in its antlers were the head and antlers of a second buck — the loser in a head-butting battle.

"It's one of those strange things that happen," said Bob Woodmansey, who was with Kercher. "We'll be talking about this forever when we go hunting."

The hunters and Jim Williams, a wildlife biologist with the state Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, surmise that the deer left standing after the fight between the bucks dragged the other around. Eventually the body of the loser simply fell off.

It's also possible that coyotes moved in on the entangled deer, killing one. Bite marks were found on Kercher's quarry.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks called Kercher's shot a mercy killing. When the buck was shot, Kercher discovered its front legs were caught in a beaver dam.



Passers-by laugh at a poster of the five Indian film stars, including Salman Khan, centre of poster, involved in the killing of endangered species of antelope, during a demonstration by animal lovers in Bombay Monday. The demonstrators were demanding a ban on all movies which include Salman Khan. — AP/UNB photo.

India accuses Pakistan of trying to capture Siachen Glacier

NEW DELHI, Oct 27: Indian accused Pakistan of trying to capture territory on an icy border battlefield and said its forces killed six enemy soldiers in repulsing the attack, a news agency reported Tuesday, says AP.

United News of India, quoting the Defence Ministry, said the fighting with mortars and shells occurred Monday evening on the Siachen Glacier.

The glacier, some 1,000 kilometres north of New Delhi, is more than 6,000 metres above sea level. Both India and Pakistan claim Siachen, and skirmishes are common across the frontier despite the severe conditions. Temperatures on Siachen usually hover around minus 55 Celsius, with wind speeds of up to 100 kilometres per hour.

The Siachen dispute is among the items to be discussed next month by Indian and Pakistani secretaries of defense, water and power, police, commerce and culture. The talks aimed at normalising relations are part of a round that began earlier this month with talks between the two countries' foreign secretaries.

The foreign secretaries talks, which ended inconclusively with promises of more meetings next year, were also preceded by fighting on Siachen.

Saeufuddin's comment sparks criticism Habibie rejects demand to fire food minister

JAKARTA, Oct 27: Indonesia's president has rejected demands from within the nation's Hindu minority that he fire a Muslim Cabinet minister they accuse of insulting their religion, a newspaper reported Tuesday, says AP.

Indonesian media reports have quoted Food Minister AM Saeufuddin as saying that opposition faction leader Megawati Sukarnoputri should not elected president of predominantly Muslim Indonesia because she is a "Hindu." The comments triggered outrage among Hindus, particularly on the economically important tourist island of Bali.

Some Hindus there have threatened to stage a mass strike unless President BJ Habibie fires Saeufuddin within one month. They also want the minister prosecuted.

Megawati, the popular daughter of Indonesia's founding President Sukarno, is in fact a Muslim although her grandmother was Balinese.

The Jakarta Post newspaper quoted Habibie's main

spokesman State Secretary Akbar Tanjung as saying Monday that the president had no plans to reshuffle his Cabinet.

Earlier this month Saeufuddin downplayed Megawati's chances being elected president when he reportedly asked: "Are the Indonesian people willing to have a Hindu president?"

He later apologised, saying he had no intention of insulting any religion.

On Tuesday about 70 Muslims rallied outside the parliament Tuesday, in support for Saeufuddin. The group, calling itself the Young Generation for Indonesian Development, said the next Indonesian president should be a Muslim and a man in line with teaching in the Quran, Islam's holy book.

About 90 per cent of Indonesia's 202 million people are Muslim, making it the world most populous Islamic nation. Religious tolerance is enshrined in the national philosophy and constitution.

Indonesia plans to stage parliamentary elections next May.

US warns Libya of tougher int'l sanctions

WASHINGTON, Oct 27: The State Department cautioned Libya on Monday that it may face stiffer international sanctions if it does not allow two Libyans wanted in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 to stand trial in the Netherlands, reports AP.

Spokesman James P. Rubin made the statement after Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security adviser Sandy Berger met with several dozen family members of the victims of the bombing.

The bombing occurred on December 21, 1988, over Lockerbie, Scotland. All 259 persons on board were killed along with 11 more on the ground. The family members were given unspecified assurances during the meeting that the US government would not allow the 10th anniversary of the bombing to pass unnoticed.

Following up on a proposal offered by Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi the United States and Britain proposed in July a compromise that would allow the two Libyans to be tried by a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands.

Libyan authorities have not yet accepted the offer and have issued a series of conditions, including a demand that the two defendants be allowed to serve their sentence, if convicted, in Libya or the Netherlands and that they not be extradited to the United States or Britain.

Libya was placed under UN sanctions in 1992 to force it to hand over the defendants. The

sanctions include an air embargo, an arms ban and a partial ban on the sale of oil equipment.

Rubin said the administration believes that it will be easier to obtain tougher UN sanctions against Gaddafi if he refuses to turn the two over for trial.

Rubin added: "The goal here is not the stiffer measures. The goal here is a trial, is compliance."

Two family members who spoke to reporters after the State Department meeting expressed frustration with the process.

Daniel Cohen, of Cape May, New Jersey, said he and other family members would be disappointed if a trial led to the conviction of only "the triggermen" while their superiors escaped without punishment.

Saying he was "one of the real hard-liners" among family members, Cohen said he didn't support the idea of a trial in the Netherlands in the first place.

Cohen lost a daughter, aged 20, in the Pan Am bombing.

Rosemary Wolfe, of Alexandria, Virginia, said she was concerned that Gaddafi was not given a deadline to respond to the US-British proposal.

Wolfe, whose stepdaughter was killed aboard Pan Am flight 103, contrasted what she regarded as the tame US response to the Pan Am 103 bombing to the military strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan after the bombing of US em-

bassies in East Africa.

I know they (the administration) are trying, but trying is not enough. It's been almost seven years since the indictment," she said.

Another AP report says: The General Assembly voted 80-2, with 67 abstentions Monday on a non-binding resolution sponsored by Libya calling for an end to sanctions used for individual political agendas.

The United States Israel — which traditionally sides with America on General Assembly resolutions — cast the lone dissenting vote. Countries currently under US sanctions voted in favor of the measure, including Iraq, Cuba, India and Pakistan.

On the whole, Arab, African and Latin American states voted overwhelmingly to adopt the resolution, which called for the immediate repeal of sanctions and urged UN members not recognize sanctions imposed by others.

The United States urged countries to vote against the resolution, which it said was an attempt by Libya to divert attention from its obligations under UN sanctions.

An AFP report from Alexandria adds: Libya is right to demand guarantees before extraditing the two Libyans suspected of the deadly 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing for trial, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Monday.

Govt to take back land owned by son of Suharto

JAKARTA, Oct 27: A 3,100 hectare (7,660 acres) tract of land owned by a son of former President Suharto will be returned to the government, a newspaper reported Tuesday, says AP.

President BJ Habibie is expected to issue a decree by the end of the month that will allow authorities to take over a forestry area in Bogor, near the capital of Jakarta.

Critics say Suharto, who resigned in May amid riots and protests, illegally funneled state contracts and assets to his family and friends during 32 years of authoritarian rule. The former president has denied accusations of corruption.

Last year, Suharto used a presidential decree to grant the land in Jonggol township in the Bogor area to one of his three sons, Bambang Trihatmodjo, The Jakarta Post reported.

Habibie's new decree, in turn, revokes the order of his predecessor and one-time mentor.

In justifying the revocation, the government alleged special privileges were granted to Bambang and his partners and city planning regulations were violated.

Habibie has pledged to root out corruption in government and implement democratic reforms.



Ivana Petkovic sits in a chair after being crowned Miss Croatia after a rerun of the contest in Zagreb, Sunday. Lejla Sehovic, a 22-year-old Muslim, who won the Miss Croatia beauty contest on October 11, and then was stripped of it amid allegations of religious prejudice, lost her crown for good last night when the same jury awarded the crown to former runner-up Ivana Petkovic. — AP/UNB photo.

Kohl: Germany's icon of power ends 16-year reign

BONN, Oct 27: The day started like so many others for Chancellor Helmut Kohl. A helicopter ride back to Bonn after a weekend in his home state, and a meeting with trusted aides, reports AP.

But when Monday was over, the man who guided Germany and Europe through historic changes over the last 16 years was no longer Germany's iron-willed leader, but just one of 669 lawmakers serving in the newly confirmed parliament.

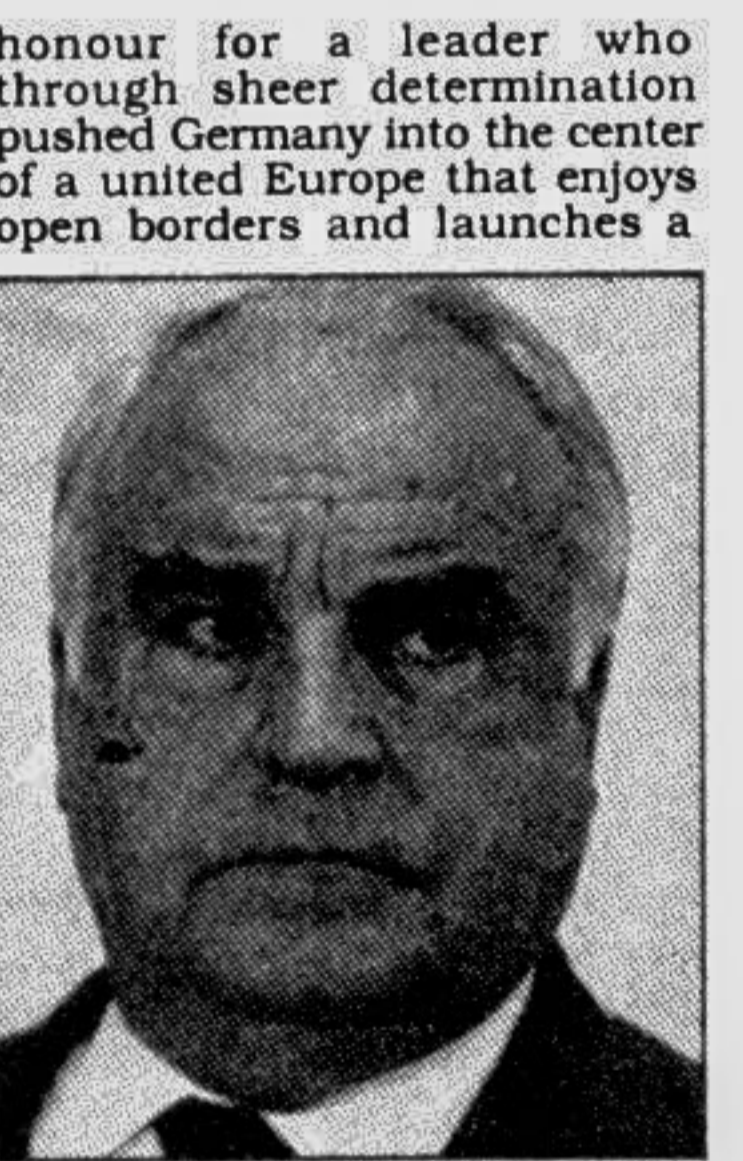
German President Roman Herzog presented Kohl with the highest honour bestowed on a German citizen, the Federal Cross of Merit with laurels, honouring his "service to Germany and Europe." The only other person ever to receive the award was postwar leader Konrad Adenauer.

The new political order at the end of this century bears your handwriting," Herzog told Kohl during a ceremony at the president's residence, the Palais Schaumburg. "That Germany, for the first time in its history, lives with all of its neighbours in peace, freedom and friendship is your biggest and most lasting legacy."

Kohl accepted the award with emotion. And if there was any bitterness at being voted out of power, Kohl hid it.

"There's no looking back in anger," Kohl said. "They were 16 powerful years, good years, with lots and lots of work."

The special award of merit was another extraordinary



Kohl's determination to station missiles in Germany has faded. But besides demonstrating the depth of Germany's relationship with the United States and the Western allies, it did have one lasting legacy: opposition to the warheads gave political impetus to the fledgling environmental Greens party, a partner in the government that succeeds Kohl's.

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Kohl's commitment to tighter integration of Europe can be traced to his awareness of the history of his home state, Rhineland-Palatinate, through which he noted, "hordes of people and armies passed for 2,000 years." Growing up near the French border contributed to Kohl's desire for a close relationship with the neighbour, which he nurtured through his friendship with former French President Francois Mitterrand.

When Kohl first uttered the pledge of German unification, it seemed the folly of an idealist. In West Germany, the divided nation was accepted as the price Germans must pay for Hitler's war. Divided, Germany did not look threatening.

But eight years later it was achieved, with the world's blessing and largely due to the personal relationships Kohl had fostered with world leaders, Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush, and Francois Mitterrand.

German unification remains Kohl's greatest accomplishment.

BRIEFLY

Earthquake jolts Indonesia: A strong earthquake rocked parts of Indonesia's West Nusa Tenggara province Monday, causing panic among residents, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties, AP says from Jakarta.

The magnitude 5.1 quake jolted the provincial capital of Mataram and surrounding areas at 3:22 am (1922 GMT Sunday), the official Antara news agency said.

Couple killed in Taiwan storm: A couple were killed when their home was crushed by a mudslide caused by downpours as tropical storm Babs approached Taiwan, police said yesterday, AFP says from Taipei.

The bodies of Cheng Fung-Chi, 54, and his wife Cheng Lai-Yu, 48, were retrieved shortly after midnight from under an avalanche of mud and rock which smashed into their home in a Taipei suburb, police said.

Confere on AIDS opens in Hanoi: A three-day conference aimed at combating the spread of AIDS in ASEAN countries opened at Hanoi yesterday organisers said, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Health officials from the nine-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are focusing efforts on exchanging information between member countries in a bid to control the alarming spread of the disease in the region.

4 die near Cambodian border: Four Cambodian soldiers were killed and one Thai ranger was injured in a fierce firefight after the Cambodians sneaked across the rugged northern border, Thai military officers said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

FM clarifies remarks quoted in media Pakistan to sign NPT, CTBT only if sanctions lifted

ISLAMABAD, Oct 27: Pakistan will sign the global nuclear test ban if sanctions are lifted and financial institutions "fully" restore lending to the country, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said today, reports AFP.

In a statement, clarifying his remarks published Monday in the local the Nation newspaper, Aziz denied having said Pakistan had to object to signing the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

He said Pakistan had opposed the NPT and "continues to do so on account of its discriminatory nature."

The US proposals discussed in the ongoing dialogue with Washington have not raised the issue of NPT, he said, adding that the US "is aware of our position on this issue."

He said Pakistan had no problem in principle concerning the CTBT.

But Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif "categorically" stated in his recent UN address that Pakistan would sign the CTBT if sanctions were removed and lending by international financial institutions was "fully restored," Aziz said.

Aziz also said Pakistan had agreed to the start of negotiations on Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT) in Geneva, which were expected to take several years to conclude.

The foreign minister said Pakistan was committed not to transfer sensitive nuclear technology to third countries, and it had an "impeccable" record in this respect. "We are ready to further tighten existing controls," he added.

The Nation had quoted him as saying in an interview that Pakistan had "no objection" to signing the CTBT, the NPT and FMCT.

Adventurous son to outdo father?

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand, Oct 27: Peter Hillary, son of the first man to scale Mount Everest, was today still waiting for good weather to set out on a 2,800 kilometre walk to the South Pole, reports AFP.

He is the son of New Zealand explorer Sir Edmund Hillary who, with Sherpa Tensing Norgay of Nepal, conquered Everest in 1953.

Edmund Hillary also played a key role in the 1955-58 British trans-Antarctic expedition, controversially beating leader Sir Vivian Fuchs to the pole.

Six years ago Peter Hillary made it to the summit of Everest as well to complete the first father-son combination. Using a satellite phone he called his father from the top.

Peter Hillary's latest expedition with Eric Phillips and Jon Muir is being sponsored by satellite phone company Iridium and can be followed on the internet at www.iridium-iceberg.org.

"We are three people who have done a lot of these sorts of things, basically we've climbed big mountains and have gone for long desert walks," Hillary said Tuesday.



Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, centre, in a white dress, walks along with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, right of Abdul in a black jacket, past flag-waving Pakistani children at Shalimar garden in Lahore Monday, Oct 26, in Lahore. — AP/UNB photo.