

NEWS IN

brief

Bomb kills 15 at Pak poll rally

DAWN ONLINE

A blast at public meeting of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) in central Kurram tribal region's Para Chamkani area in Sewak village killed 15 persons and injured 42 others on Monday. Assistant Political Agent of central Kurram region, Mohammad Fazal told Dawn.com that at least 15 people had died in the incident whereas 42 others were injured. Moreover Political agent Riaz Masood conformed that the explosion occurred when a planted device detonated inside the madressa where the rally was taking place.

Iranians jailed for life in Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

A Kenyan court yesterday sentenced two Iranians to life in prison on terror-related charges, including the possession of explosives allegedly to be used in bomb attacks.

Ahmed Mohammed, 50, and Sayed Mansour, 51, who were arrested last June, were found guilty of possessing 15 kilos (33 pounds) of the powerful explosive RDX, found by police hidden in a hole in a golf course.

Saudis execute Syrian drug trafficker

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi authorities beheaded a Syrian man yesterday after he was convicted of drug trafficking, the interior ministry said.

Mohammed Khalaf was arrested "as he was smuggling a large amount of narcotic pills into the kingdom," the ministry said in a statement published by the official SPA news agency.

He was beheaded by the sword in the northern Jawf province.

Musicians find fame, fortune at YouTube

AFP, San Francisco

YouTube is proving to be a powerful launch pad for a new generation of Internet-savvy music stars from Psy to Macklemore and beyond.

The Google-owned video-sharing website has catapulted Psy, Macklemore, Justin Bieber and others onto global stages where they can cash in on digital downloads of songs; packed concerts; online ads, or even sponsored music videos.

Former Italian PM Andreotti dies

AFP, Rome

Italy's Giulio Andreotti, a shadowy seven-time former prime minister who presided over the post-war political scene for decades, died Monday aged 94, Italian media reported.

Andreotti, a key figure in the once-dominant Christian Democratic party, suffered from ill health in recent years and was hospitalised in August 2012 with heart trouble.

He died at his home in central Rome, his relatives were quoted as saying.



SINO-INDO BORDER DISPUTES

Both countries withdraw troops

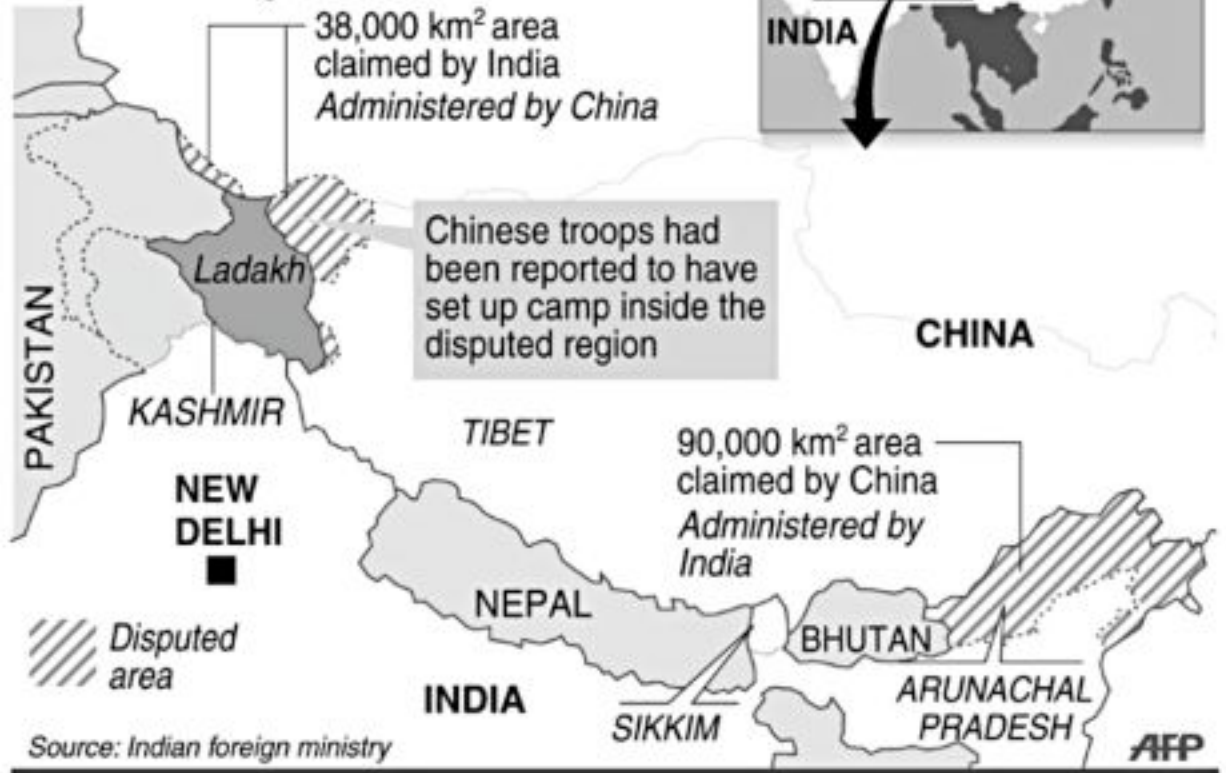
AFP, New Delhi

India and China yesterday began withdrawing troops from a disputed area of the Himalayas after settling a border dispute that had threatened to reverse a recent warming in ties, Indian officials said.

More than three weeks after Chinese troops were reported to have set up a camp far inside a region claimed by India, senior officers from both sides reached an agreement for a joint pullback.

Disputed border

India and China began pulling troops back Monday from a disputed area after resolving a spat that threatened to reverse recent warming ties



"Both sides reached an agreement on Sunday night after a meeting was held between border commanders. We will withdraw our troops and China will do the same," a senior Indian army official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Another army source said around 50 Chinese soldiers had withdrawn from the Siachen glacier in the remote Ladakh region and pulled down their tents close to an Indian military airstrip.

A source in the foreign ministry confirmed that the pullback had begun and said a statement would be made before parliament later in the day.

News of the withdrawal came after Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid had hinted that he could cancel a planned trip to Beijing this week if there was no settlement of the dispute.

Syria rebels 'used sarin': UN

Israel raids kill 15 soldiers; No warning for US before strikes

AGENCIES

Syrian rebels have used the deadly nerve agent sarin in their fight against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, according to evidence from victims and doctors, UN human rights investigator Carla del Ponte said, reports AFP.

"According to the testimonies we have gathered, the rebels have used chemical weapons, making use of sarin gas," del Ponte, a former war crimes prosecutor and a member of a UN commission of inquiry on Syria, said in an interview with Swiss Italian broadcaster RSI on Sunday.

She said there was "still not irrefutable proof, (but) very strong suspicions, concrete suspicions that sarin gas has been used. Assistance to victims shows this."

Her comments come amid growing Western suspicions that Assad's regime has used chemical weapons in the 26-month conflict and follow Israeli raids on military sites near Damascus over the weekend.

She said that as far as the UN commission had been able to determine,



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers are seen with their tank near Golan Heights yesterday.

"sarin gas has been used ... by opponents, by rebels, not by government authorities."

Israeli strikes on Syrian military targets at the weekend killed at least 15 soldiers and dozens more were unaccounted for, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights watchdog said on Monday.

Syria said Israel targeted three military sites near Damascus early Sunday, with a diplomatic source in Beirut saying the raids were against a military facility, weapons depot and anti-aircraft unit.

US President Barack Obama has said that the use of chemical weapons in the Syria conflict was a "red line"

Najib Razak sworn in for second term

Opposition protests; says poll 'stolen'

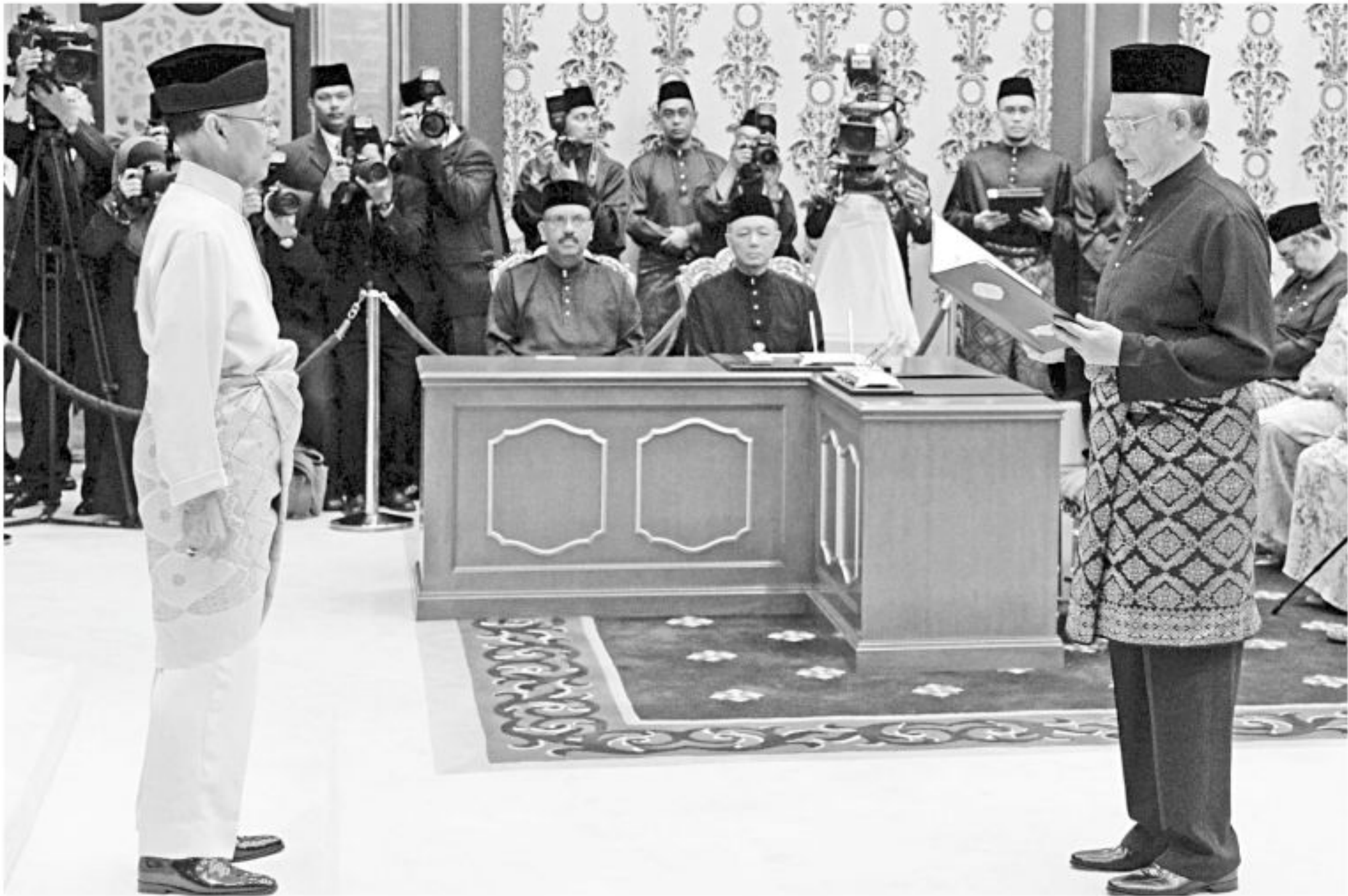
AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Najib Razak was sworn in for a second term by Malaysia's king yesterday, after his 56-year-old ruling coalition retained power in elections branded as fraudulent by the opposition.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim called for a rally in two days' time to protest at a victory which he said was achieved via the "worst electoral fraud in our history".

The coalition that has ruled since independence in 1957 held off a spirited opposition challenge to retain a firm parliamentary majority in elections widely forecast to be the biggest-ever threat to the ruling bloc.

But the opposition bitterly alleges major fraud by Najib's Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition and bias by the Election Commission.



Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak, right, reads his oath declaration in front of Malaysia's King Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah for his second term as prime minister at the National Palace in Kuala Lumpur.

PHOTO: AFP

Getting tough

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ther chaos.

"Hefajat will not be allowed to hold programmes any more," Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir said after the meeting.

Besides, the government would take tough legal action against those responsible for Sunday's mayhem in downtown Dhaka. It will rehabilitate the street vendors whose goods have been torched completely by the Hefajat men. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked officials at the Prime Minister's Office to make a list of the affected vendors, added the sources.

Informing her cabinet colleagues that the Hefajat would not be given "an inch of space" in future to repeat its Sunday chaos, Sheikh Hasina asked them to remain alert as vested quarters would try to repeat similar incidents.

She said patrolling by Border Guard Bangladesh would be increased wherever there is dominance of the Hefajat and Jamaat-Shibir in the country.

Several cabinet members expressed resentment over the torching of the Holy Quran, business establishments, vehicles and public properties by the "so called" Hefajat men. In this context, Hasina directed the ministers to make people aware of these chaotic incidents in every ward and thana across the country.

The government high command thinks that there were several groups behind the chaos. Among them are Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir. The BNP men resorted to looting and vandalism from Moghbazar to Nightingale intersection at Kakrail, said meeting sources.

The prime minister told the cabinet that the mayhem was "well planned" and the BNP-Jamaat was "in-

volved" in it. She directed the home minister to identify the culprits through video footage and the main planners of the havoc and take stern action accordingly.

Asked about the government's stance on Hefajat-e-Islam, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star that any bid to create chaos by the Hefajat would be contained lawfully in the future.

Sources said the government was preparing cases against many BNP, Jamaat and Hefajat men on charges of killing people and law enforcers, vandalising vehicles and carrying out arson attacks during Sunday's Dhaka blockade programme by Hefajat.

The cabinet members thanked the prime minister for dislodging the Hefajat men "peacefully" from the Shapla Chattar.

The premier said Hefajat chief Shah Ahmed Shafi had not been arrested owing to his old age.

Hostile politics

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continue with the exams on hartal days. If a hartal ends at 12:00noon, that day's AM session will start at 2:00pm and the PM session at 7:00pm.

If a hartal ends at 2:00pm, that day's AM session will start at 3:30pm and the PM session at 8:00pm, and if the hartal ends at 6:00pm, that day's AM session will start at 7:30pm and the PM session at 11:45pm, according to the council's website.

In case of continuous shutdowns, the British Council says it reserves the right to cancel examinations for the safety of its staff and examinees. And if the exams are cancelled, candidates will not get their UK or locals fees refunded.

In the face of the prevailing political chaos, many examinees are gripped by anxiety, severe psychological stress and nervousness and that is hampering their

studies.

Several candidates said they feared that they would find it difficult to reach the exam venues in time because of the fallout of clashes, chases and counter chases between pickets and law enforcers and damaging of vehicles during hartal hours.

"We'll lose six months and have to wait for the next available slot to take the tests if they are cancelled," an O-level student said.

It involves a lot of money as well, he added.

"Our children will miss the session for admission to universities abroad" if they miss any exam, said Rubayet Hasan, a guardian.

Guardians have appealed to the political parties not to enforce repeated hartals, which have had candidates of Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary Certificate examinations suffer a lot.

Netanyahu, Abbas on separate China visits

China criticises Syria raid

AFP, Beijing



Xi Jinping shakes hands with Abbas

China yesterday implicitly criticised Israel's air strikes in Syria as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas both visited the country to meet top leaders.

The raids on military sites outside Damascus a day earlier raised fears of Syria's 26-month-long conflict spilling over into the region.

"We are opposed to the use of force and believe that the sovereignty of any country should be respected," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a regular press briefing when asked about the strikes.

She added that China urged all sides to "refrain from actions that may escalate tensions".

Her comments came as Netanyahu arrived on a five-day trip to China, which will end in Beijing with meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.

It overlaps with a three-day trip by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas to Beijing, where he met the two Chinese leaders on Monday.

Abbas is set to depart on Tuesday and the two Middle Eastern leaders are not expected to meet while in China.

Brought to knees

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destroyed," said Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq, head of communication and service quality of BRAC Bank. The bank is yet to assess the losses of this spell of hooliganism.

But Md Zakir, a snack vendor on a four-wheeler rickshaw van, has. "They [the Hefajat men] were just so cold-blooded. They burned down my van despite desperate pleas -- all my investment is gone now."

The sole bread-earner of a family of four, he has no idea now where his next meal ticket would come from. "I don't know how I'll survive," said a disconsolate Zakir.

Hasnat, who has a roadside tea stall, is in the same boat. "They burnt down all the makeshift shops in the area, the only source of income for poor people

like us. How do they expect us to get by, now?"

Some 350 makeshift shops adjacent to the Baitul Mukarram Mosque were set on fire, said Atiur Rahman, vice-president of Baitul Mukarram Traders Group. "It was a scene straight off their worst nightmare."

Twelve jewellery shops in the complex, too, were vandalised, said Dilip Roy, president of Bangladesh Jewellers Samity.

Altogether, Rahman estimates, the losses would be no less than Tk 15 crore. Branches of Azad Products and Janata Bank opposite Baitul Mukarram were not left alone, either.

"They wanted to enter the shop to set it on fire. Failing to get in, they hurled bricks and torches inside," Mostafa Kamal, assistant general manger

of the Azad Products store, said. The damages stand at Tk 15 lakh, he added.

Abul Barkat, chairman of Janata Bank, said the state-owned bank registered a general diary demanding compensation worth Tk 5.4 crore.

"I will ask my board of directors to help small book shop owners at Paltan as part of our corporate social responsibility," he added.

Many of the street vendors had already started their preparations for the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr, said Sirajul Islam, convener of Purana Paltan Hawkers' Association.

"I borrowed money to buy 700 pieces of childrens wear, which I expected to sell during Ramadan. Now, there is nothing left," said Abul

Kasem, a makeshift stall owner in front of the Bank Asia headquarter in Paltan. "How can I do business ahead of Eid," he said, weeping.

Bilal Hossain, who has three shops in the area, had all of them gutted. "I have lost Tk 8 lakh. I am completely ruined."

Around 175 makeshift shops in this part of Paltan were destroyed, Islam said.

"There was almost no transaction in the principal branch on Sunday, as clients could not come here due to the rally," said Md Fazlur Rahman, managing director of AB Bank.

Fearing for their lives, the throngs of office goers to Motijheel stayed holed up in their place of work -- all evening.

"A few of us stayed at a nearby residential hotel, but the rest were stranded

inside the office," said Huq of BRAC Bank.

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, wondered how political gatherings were allowed at the country's business district, the heart of the economy, in the first place.

"What we have seen is anarchy in the name of peaceful political programme," he said, while urging the government to ban such congregation in the area from now on.

Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhaka, echoed Ahmed's views. "There are other places in the city where political programmes can be confined to."