

IN BRIEF

Pakistan's FIA summons activist

Pakistan: Activist Gul Bukhari has been summoned by the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA)'s anti-terror wing which is also going to contact Interpol, ARY News reported on the authority of its sources. The channel reported that Gul Bukhari was issued the notice on Tuesday. Bukhari is known for her criticism of the establishment's policies, and is currently based abroad. London-based Pakistan activist Gul Bukhari has been threatened with terror charges. Bukhari has been accused of harbouring anti-Pakistan agenda, being a part of a cyber-terrorism ring and being associated with the Haqqani network and the Balochistan Liberation army.

112 Israeli firms on UN blacklist

Geneva: The UN has released a list of 112 companies with activities in Israeli settlements, which are considered illegal under international law, including Airbnb, Expedia and TripAdvisor. The report comes in response to a 2016 UN Human Rights Council resolution calling for a "database for all businesses engaged in specific activities related to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory". The UN rights office said the claim about the companies was "not, and does not purport to be, a judicial or quasi-judicial process". Israeli officials fear the list could be used to boycott firms with ties to the Israeli settlements. Among the businesses on the list are a range of large international companies, including Airbnb, Alstom, Booking.com and Motorola Solutions. "I am conscious this issue has been, and will continue to be, highly contentious," UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said.

Duterte ends US defence pact

Manila/Washington: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday announced the termination of a two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States (VFA), delivering on threats to downgrade an alliance important to US interests. US Defense Secretary Mark Esper called the decision "unfortunate" and said it would be a move in the wrong direction at a time when Washington and its allies were trying to press China to abide by "international rules of order" in Asia. The mercurial Duterte, who has clashed with the United States over several issues, decided to pull the plug on the troop rotation pact with the former colonial ruler to enable the Philippines to be more independent in its relations with other countries, his spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

WIFE THRASHES HUBBY AT HIS 3RD WEDDING

Karachi, Feb. 12: A Pakistani man was rescued by the police after his first wife gate-crashed his third wedding and brutally thrashed him and tore up his clothes in front of guests here, a media report said on Wednesday. Madiha and her relatives barged into the wedding reception venue of Asif Rafiq in Karachi's Sakhi Hassan Chorangi area on Monday night and claimed that was married to him in 2014. The Express Tribune reported. She claimed that Rafiq had married another woman, a Jinnah University employee, without her consent and apologised to her after she objected to his second marriage, promising to stay only with her, the report said. Madiha and her family brutally thrashed Rafiq during the reception and tore his clothes, the report said, adding that the police also beat him up after detaining him. Rafiq tried to escape from the police station but was chased by Madiha's family, forcing him to hide under a parked bus. He was caught and beaten up again before being rescued by some people, it said. According to Rafiq, he had divorced Madiha and therefore does not require anyone's permission to remarry, saying: "It is my right to marry four women at the same time". Meanwhile, the police asked Madiha and Rafiq to approach the court as it was a civil dispute.

Sanders edges Buttigieg in New Hampshire

Klobuchar gets her moment but bad nights for Warren and Biden; Yang, Bennet suspend their 2020 bids

Washington, Feb. 12: US Senator Bernie Sanders has won the Democratic presidential primary in the key state of New Hampshire, giving a big boost to his campaign for the 2020 White House bid as the race to his party's nomination gathers momentum over the next few months. President Donald Trump, 73, who is seeking his reelection, won the New Hampshire Republican primary with a massive vote. Sanders, 78, who lost to former secretary of state Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential primaries in New Hampshire, was ahead of his closest rival Pete Buttigieg. With more than 85 per cent of the votes counted, the Senator from Vermont took 26 per cent support, followed by Buttigieg closely with 24.4 per cent and Amy Klobuchar coming third with 19.8 per cent of the votes.

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and former Vice President Joe Biden were headed for distant fourth and fifth spots respectively. "Now that we've gained another victory in New Hampshire, the establishment and financial elite are going to throw everything at us except the kitchen sink. And I have a feeling that the kitchen sink is coming pretty soon as well," Sanders said after his victory in New Hampshire. The Republican party and the Trump campaign said that Sanders winning the Democratic primary reflects that socialism has gained momentum in the Democratic party. "One thing that is clear: Bernie Sanders winning his second state in a row shows how Socialism is now the mainstream in today's Democrat Party," Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said in a statement. "The Democrat story in New Hampshire is the continued dominance of big government socialist policies and the success of their standard bearer, Bernie Sanders," said Brad Parscale, Trump 2020 campaign manager.

Ahead of the US Presidential election later this year, White House hopefuls are contesting for their party's nomination in primaries. — PTI



Democratic presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders at a primary election rally in Manchester, New Hampshire. — AP

After Iowa, concerns grow over Nevada's plan

Las Vegas, Feb. 12: Concerns have been growing that next week's Nevada caucuses could offer a repeat of the chaos that ensnared the Iowa vote, with Nevada facing many of the same organisational and technical challenges that crippled Iowa's process. Volunteers who will be leading the Feb. 22 caucuses said key information had yet to be shared. There has been no hands-on training with iPads being deployed to caucus sites on Election Day nor opportunities to try out a new "tool" that will be loaded onto the iPads and used during the caucus process. Adding to the mix is that Nevada also plans to offer early voting, a complicated

NEVADA, THE third state to cast votes on the Democratic presidential field, is seen as the first test of a candidate's strength before a diverse population and strong labour unions. Nevada, the third state to cast votes on the Democratic presidential field, is seen as the first test of a candidate's strength before a diverse population and strong labour unions. Nevada Republicans are not holding caucuses this year. Molly Forgey, a spokeswoman for the Nevada State Democratic Party, declined to respond to questions about how the reporting process will work and the security measures in place. "We'll train our volunteers as soon as the process is rolled out," Forgey said. — AP

Feds upset over Trump intervention, resign

Washington, Feb. 12: Under pressure from President Donald Trump, the US Justice Department on Tuesday abruptly moved to seek a shorter prison sentence for veteran Republican operative and long-time Trump adviser and friend Roger Stone, and all four prosecutors quit the case after the highly unusual reversal. Senior department officials - hours after Trump complained on Twitter that Stone was being treated unfairly - overrode the sentencing recommendation of seven to nine years made on Monday by the federal prosecutors who secured Stone's conviction. Stone was found guilty in November on seven counts of lying to

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump praised his attorney general Wednesday for intervening to seek a lighter prison sentence for Roger Stone, convicted as part of the Russia probe. Congress, obstruction and witness tampering. In a new court filing, a Justice Department official who had not previously worked on the case called that recommendation "excessive and unwarranted" and said the department would not make a formal sentencing recommendation. Democrats blasted the department's shift in the

high-profile case involving Stone, whose friendship with Trump dates back decades. Stone's trial arose from former Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation that detailed extensive Russian interference in the 2016 election to benefit Trump's candidacy. Trump told reporters he thought the initial recommendation was "ridiculous" but said he did not speak to the Justice Department about it. The four prosecutors who won Stone's conviction - Aaron Zelinsky, Adam Jed, Michael Marando and Jonathan Kravis - withdrew from the case. Kravis told the court in a filing that he was also quitting his job as a federal prosecutor. — Reuters

Pak court sentences Hafiz Saeed to 11 years in jail

Lahore, Feb. 12: Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed was on Wednesday sentenced to 11 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in two terror financing cases. Saeed, a UN designated terrorist whom the US has placed a USD 10 million bounty on, was arrested on July 17 in the terror financing cases. He is lodged at the Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail in high security. A court official confirmed that Saeed was sentenced in two terror financing cases registered against him in Lahore and Gujranwala cities on the application of the

Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police. The court sentenced Saeed to five and a half years and imposed a fine of ₹15,000 in each case. The sentences of both cases will run concurrently. The anti-terrorism court or ATC had indicted Saeed and his close aides on December 11 in the terror financing cases. On last Saturday, Lahore ATC judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta deferred the verdict against Saeed in two terror financing cases till February 11. In the two cases, the prosecution produced some 20 or so witnesses in the ATC who testified against Saeed and his

close aides for their involvement in terror financing. Saeed pleaded "not guilty" in both the cases. The Counter Terrorism Department had registered 23 FIRs against Saeed and his accomplices on the charges of terror financing in different cities of Punjab province. The cases were registered against Saeed and others in Lahore, Gujranwala and Multan for collection of funds for terrorism financing through assets/properties made and held in the names of Trusts/Non Profit Organisations including Al-Anfaal Trust, Dawatul Irshad Trust, Muaz Bin Jabal Trust, etc.



Turkish military convoy is seen near Idlib in Syria on Wednesday. — AP

US, TALIBAN CLOSE TO AGREEMENT

Islamabad, Feb. 12: The Taliban have issued an ultimatum to Washington after weeks of talks with a US peace envoy, demanding a reply on their offer of a seven-day reduction of violence in Afghanistan, or they would walk away from the negotiating table, two Taliban officials said Wednesday. The development comes as Washington said late Tuesday that an agreement on the insurgents' "reduction of violence" offer was days away. Also, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani tweeted that he had received a phone call from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo telling him of "notable progress" in the talks with the Taliban. The ultimatum came from the chief Taliban negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who met earlier this week with White House envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and the Qatari foreign minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, according to two Taliban officials familiar with the negotiations. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorised to speak to the media. There was no immediate response from Washington on the ultimatum, which appeared designed to focus the negotiations on Taliban demands. — AP

SECURITY ALERT ■ Swiss-based firm was top supplier of devices for encoding messages

CIA spied on countries, including India

Washington, Feb. 12: The CIA read the encrypted messages of several countries, including India, for decades through its secretly-owned Switzerland-based company trusted by governments all over the world to keep the communications of their spies, soldiers and diplomats secret, according to a leading American daily. According to a report by The Washington Post and German public broadcaster ZDF published on Tuesday, the company, Crypto AG, entered into a deal with America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1951 and

came under its ownership in the 1970s. The joint reporting project, which uncovered the secret operation from CIA classified documents, described how the US and its allies exploited other nations' gullibility for years, taking their money and stealing their secrets. The company specialised in communications and information security and was founded in the 1940s as an independent firm. The CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA) spied on allies and adversaries alike through Crypto AG specialising in making cryptography



The Central Intelligence Agency seal displayed in the lobby of CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

equipment, the report said. For more than half a century, governments all over the world trusted the Swiss firm to keep the communications of their spies, soldiers and diplo-

Swiss neutrality tainted by scandal

Geneva, Feb. 12: Outraged commentators warned Wednesday that revelations the CIA and Germany's intelligence service had for decades used a Swiss encryption company for spying had seriously damaged Switzerland's cherished reputation for neutrality. Critics voiced particular concern that Bern may have been at least tacitly

complicit in the secret operation. Switzerland, which takes pride in its neutral and non-aligned status, "was hosting a quasi ally intelligence agency," the Tribune de Geneve daily said in an editorial. Swiss officials "very likely" knew what was going on but "closed their eyes" in the name of neutrality, it added. — AFP

TALIBAN ISSUES an ultimatum to US after weeks of talks with a peace envoy

IN BRIEF
Nepal shuts resort as 8 Indians die

Kathmandu: Nepal has suspended the licence of a mountain resort for three months after a probe found security lapses at the hotel for the incident that led to the death of eight Indians, including four minors, due to possible asphyxiation, a senior official said on Wednesday. Tragedy struck a group of 15 tourists from Kerala when eight of them died on January 21 due to possible asphyxiation after they fell unconscious probably due to a gas leak from a heater in their room at a resort in Makwanpur district. After a five member probe committee formed by Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation to investigate the tragedy, submitted its report, the ministry decided to suspend the transaction of the resort for three months, said Surendra Thapa, director at the Department of Tourism, who headed the five member probe committee.

N. Ireland hosts same sex marriage

Carrickfergus, UK: A Belfast couple on Tuesday made history by becoming the first same-sex couple to get married in Northern Ireland, following a landmark change in the law last year. Robyn Peoples, 26, and Sharni Edwards, 27, tied the knot in an afternoon ceremony in a hotel in Carrickfergus, near Belfast, after the new legislation came into effect on Monday. The legal change followed campaigning by Amnesty International and partner organisations in the "Love Equality" coalition, which hailed it as "a landmark moment for equality in Northern Ireland". "We are literally living the dream, it's incredible," Edwards, a waitress from Brighton on the British mainland, told the domestic Press Association news agency shortly after the service. "We didn't expect to be the first couple, it's coincidental."

Man sustains burns trying to save wife

Dubai: A 32-year-old Indian man is fighting for his life after sustaining 90 per cent burn injuries while trying to save his wife from a fire at their home in the UAE, according to a media report. Anil Ninan, who hails from Kerala, is in a very critical condition and has sustained 90 per cent burn injuries, his close relative was quoted as saying by the *Khaleej Times*. "Doctors said his condition is very critical. We are all praying for him," said July, Anil's relative who is in the hospital. However, the condition of his wife is stable. "She is doing okay. She has only 10 per cent burns and is recovering," the relative said. The incident happened on Monday when Anil was trying to save his wife Neenu from the fire that was caused by a short circuit from the electric box placed in the corridor of their apartment in Umm Al Quwain city in the UAE, the report said.

OLDER WOMEN TEND TO DRINK MORE: STUDY

Melbourne, Feb. 12: Women aged between 50 and 70 are more likely than younger women to consume alcohol at levels that exceed low risk drinking guidelines, according to a study conducted in Denmark and Australia. Researchers from Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia found that many middle-aged and young-old women who consume alcohol at high risk levels tend to perceive their drinking as normal and acceptable, so long as they appear respectable and in control. This is despite the potential health risks of exceeding national drinking guidelines, they said. The study, published in the journal *Sociology of Health and Illness*, analysed the social construction of alcohol use among 49 women aged 50 to 69 in Denmark and Australia. According to Australian health authorities, drinking more than two standard drinks on any day significantly increases the risk of premature death over a woman's lifetime, the researchers noted. The research highlighted the widespread use of alcohol in both samples of women in Australia and Denmark. "Respondents from both countries indicated that alcohol use among women their age was normal and acceptable," Dare said.

Coronavirus death toll climbs to 1,114

More than 45,100 infected globally; virus officially named 'COVID-19' by World Health Organisation

Beijing, Feb. 12: The death toll in China's novel coronavirus outbreak has gone up to 1,113 with 97 new fatalities reported mostly in the worst-affected Hubei province while the confirmed cases of infection jumped to 44,653, health officials said on Wednesday. The country's National Health Commission said it received reports of 2,015 new confirmed cases and 97 deaths from 31 provincial-level regions on Tuesday.

The virus was officially named 'COVID-19' by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at a conference in Geneva. Among the deaths, 94 were from the virus-hit Hubei Province and one in Henan, Hunan and Chongqing respectively, the Commission said.

Another 3,342 new suspected cases were reported Tuesday, said the commission. Also on Tuesday, 871 patients were seriously taken ill, while 744 people discharged from hospital after recovery.

The overall confirmed cases on the Chinese mainland has reached 44,653 by the end of Tuesday and 1,113 people has died of the disease. The commission added that 8,204 patients remained in severe condition and 16,067 people were suspected of being infected with the virus.

A total of 4,740 people had been discharged from hospital after recovery.

The commission said over 4.51 lakh close contacts had been traced with over 1.85 lakh others are still under medical observation. By the end of Tuesday, 49 confirmed cases including one death has been reported in Hong Kong, 10 confirmed cases in Macao and 18 in Taiwan. As many as 397 cases have reported from a number of countries.

After naming the virus as 'COVID-19', WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "We had to find a name that did not refer to a geographical location, an animal, an individual or group of people, and which is also pronounceable and related to the disease".



A doctor takes a swab from a woman to test for the COVID-19 virus at a fever clinic, in Yinan county in China's Shandong province. — AP

EU crisis centre offers aid to China to fight virus

Brussels, Feb. 12: Janez Lenarcic, the EU's crisis management commissioner, recently stared at a wall of computer screens in Brussels. This is where his crisis task forces usually monitors forest fires, floods, and other natural disasters. Now, he is looking at maps with confirmed coronavirus infections.

The bloc's 27 health ministers plan to gather for a crisis meeting on Thursday. Lenarcic did not specify which measures would be discussed. China has requested additional humanitarian goods and medical supplies from the European Union. Face masks, protective

gloves and clothing will soon be delivered to China, according to the European Commission. So far, Germany and France have already delivered protective gear to China. "Ever since the virus outbreak became known to the international community," Lenarcic said, "cooperation between the European Commission and China has been good." — Agencies

■ Another 39 people aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan have tested positive for the new coronavirus, as thousands more steel themselves for a second week in quarantine. There are now 174 confirmed cases on the ship.

■ Chinese foreign minister to make first visit abroad since coronavirus outbreak.

Singapore's DBS bank evacuated

Singapore, Feb. 12: Leading Singaporean multinational bank DBS bank on Wednesday cleared its downtown office and told some 300 employees to work from home after one of its staff was infected with the Coronavirus. Singapore had previously reported 47 cases of the new virus, the Health Ministry of the island city-state confirmed. The firm, in a statement, said that

on Wednesday morning, one of its employees was confirmed to be infected of the new virus, and as a precautionary measure, the authorities told all its staff on the same floor to work from home. "We are also currently conducting detailed contact tracing with all employees and other parties that the infected person may have come into contact with," the statement read.

Doctors at China's virus epicentre overworked

Beijing, Feb. 12: Doctors on the frontline of China's new coronavirus epidemic are facing a daunting task: treat an ever-growing number of infected patients and risk getting infected themselves due to a drastic shortage of masks and other protective equipment.

Tired and understaffed, medical workers have had to deal with thousands of new cases per week in Wuhan, the city at the epicentre of the outbreak that first emerged late last year. Many doctors have had to see patients without proper masks or protective body suits, resorting to reusing the same equipment when they should be changed regularly. Some have even worn diapers to avoid hav-

ing to take off the equipment and make it last longer, according to a health official.

One doctor at a community clinic in Wuhan said he and at least 16 other colleagues were showing symptoms similar to the new virus, including lung infections and coughing. "As doctors, we do not want to work while being a source of infection," he said, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisals. But "right now, there is no one to replace you," the doctor explained, adding that all medical staff without a fever are expected to work.

"What would happen if there was no one working on the frontline?" Some 44 percent of the 42,600 cases nationwide — and the

majority of more than 1,100 deaths — have been in Wuhan, home to a wild animal market where the virus is suspected of having originated before spreading between humans.

The risks medical staff are facing was highlighted on Friday after Li Wenliang, a whistleblowing doctor in Wuhan, succumbed to the disease more than a month after he first raised alarm about a new SARS-like virus in the city. His death unleashed an outpouring of grief and anger on Chinese social media, with 10 academics in Wuhan circulating an open letter calling for political reform and freedom of speech. —AFP

NEW UNIVERSAL TARGET FOR ANTIVIRAL VACCINE

Boston, Feb. 12: A potential new drug target that could lead to a vaccine against a host of viral infectious diseases has been identified, scientists said on Wednesday. The novel coronavirus outbreak in China shows viruses are a constant threat to humanity, the researchers from the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in the US noted. The research, published in the journal *Cell Reports*, suggests that the protein Argonaute 4 (AGO4) is an "Achilles heel" for viruses. AGO4 is one of a family of AGO proteins. Until now, there has been little evidence of why they are important, the researchers said. —PTI

Russian jumps out of window as 2 flee hospital

Moscow, Feb. 12: One patient jumped out of a hospital window to escape her quarantine and another managed to break out by disabling an electronic lock.

Two Russian women who were kept in isolation for possible infection by a new virus say they fled from their Russian hospitals this month because of uncooperative doctors, poor conditions and fear they would become infected. Russian health authorities haven't commented on their complaints.

The incidents occurred amid the outbreak of the virus in China that has already infected some 45,000 people worldwide. In Russia, only two cases of the disease COVID-19 have been reported. Nevertheless, the authori-

ties took vast measures to prevent the new disease from spreading and hospitalized hundreds of people who returned from China as a precaution.

Many of those quarantined in different Russian hospitals complained about dire conditions of isolation rooms and lack of cooperation from doctors, uncertain about quarantine protocols.

Both women said their hospital ordeals began after returning from Hainan, a tropical region of China popular with Russian tourists.

In a lengthy account on Instagram published Friday, a woman with the screen name of Guzel-Neder said her son came down with a cough and a fever of 37.3 C (99.2 F) four days after the family's

return to their home in the city of Samara. She called emergency services, who diagnosed the boy as having a viral respiratory infection and who said the mother and the son must go to a hospital for coronavirus tests.

The hospital promised test results within 3 days, then extended it to five, she said, and meanwhile the boy responded to treatment with medication and an inhalator, she wrote.

When she tried to press for results, hospital staff obstructed her, she said. Meanwhile, she had become concerned about lax procedures in the hospital, saying that some medical staff came to the isolation area without masks or threw their protective clothing on the floor. —AP

FOOD | CRISIS

■ Every farmer, big or small, has been affected

Cyclone: Hunger stalks southern Africa

Buhera, Zimbabwe, Feb. 12: Just under a year ago, Alice Posha fled her home in the middle of the night and then watched as it was swept away by floods.

The torrential rain came from Cyclone Idai, one of the worst storms ever to hit Africa and the fiercest on record to strike Buhera, a district in the usually arid province of Manicaland in eastern Zimbabwe.

Today, the scene in Buhera is entirely different. But the misery remains. The 60-year-old, who was rehoused in October, is going through the motions of weeding a field of maize that has been withered by the worst drought in 35 years.

A little rain for her corn would be more than welcome. "Seeing how the maize is wilting, we may



A view of Ngungu township in eastern Zimbabwe after the area is hit by Cyclone Idai. —AFP

have a very bad harvest," she said it is a scene that is being played out across southern Africa, where chronic lack of rain is threatening mass hunger and ruin. Climate is being fingered as the big culprit. In the space of 10

months, Buhera and many districts like it have been hammered by extremes that scientists say are consistent with forecasts about climate change.

In March 2019, the arrival of Idai unleashed devastation on eastern

Zimbabwe and its neighbours Mozambique and Malawi.

Over a thousand people died and the lives of millions of others were badly affected. "Our chickens and turkeys were swept away" said Posha's sister-in-law, Josephine Ganje, who now depends on food aid. She is among the 45 million people in southern Africa that the UN has said are threatened by famine.

Its World Food Programme (WFP) sent out a stark warning last month. "This hunger crisis is on a scale we've not seen before and the evidence shows it's going to get worse," said Lola Castro, WFP's regional director in southern Africa. For the past five years, the entire southern tip of the African conti-

nent, where average temperatures are rising twice as fast as the global mean, has suffered from a significant lack of rain.

Every farmer, big or small, has been affected as well as breeders, hoteliers and teachers. In Zimbabwe, the drought has added to a long list of crises, from stratospheric inflation to shortages of cash, petrol, medicines, water and electricity. For many, daily life has become a nightmare. "Almost everybody in my area is food insecure," said 68-year-old Janson Neshava, who is a headman, or senior leader, in Buhera.

"We still do the traditional rain ceremonies, but to no avail. Even the wetlands are now dry and streams that used to flow throughout the year are all dry." —AFP

Four survive 32 days in Pacific

Wellington, Feb. 12: Four people survived a month adrift in the Pacific by eating coconuts and drinking rainwater in an ordeal that claimed the lives of eight of their companions, including a baby, reports said Wednesday. The group, from Papua New Guinea's Bougainville province, are believed to have spent 32 days at sea.

The group set off from Bougainville on Dec. 22, intending to celebrate Christmas in the Carteret Islands, about 100 km away. But survivor Dominic Stally said their small boat capsized and a number of the group drowned. The rest managed to right the vessel but there were further fatalities as they floated in the remote waters at the mercy of powerful ocean currents. "We could do nothing

with their dead bodies, we just have to let go of them at sea," he told the newspaper.

"A couple have died and left behind their baby and I am the one who held onto the baby and later the baby died as well." Stally said a number of fishing vessels passed nearby without noticing them until they were finally picked up on Jan. 23 off New Caledonia after drifting some 2,000 km. The survivors comprised two men, a woman and a girl aged about 12.

They were dropped off in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, last Saturday and were discharged into the care of Papua New Guinea's High Commissioner John Balavu after receiving treatment for dehydration. —Agencies

SHORT TAKES

Maxwell may miss beginning of IPL

Melbourne: Australia's dashing all-rounder Glenn Maxwell is set to miss the beginning of the IPL after an elbow injury on Tuesday ruled him out of the upcoming ODIs and T20 Internationals in South Africa. The tour of South Africa starts on February 21. Maxwell will undergo surgery on his left elbow and will be replaced by D'Arcy Short in both squads. Cricket Australia said he might require at least six to eight weeks to attain full match fitness, which means he is likely to miss the beginning of the IPL too, which is starting on March 29. The 31-year-old is representing Kings XI Punjab in the franchise-based league. — PTI

Lakshmi to officiate at ICC women's T20

Dubai: Nitin Memon is the lone Indian in the ICC's list of umpires for the upcoming Women's T20 World Cup in Australia, where an unprecedented six women will be in the match officials team for the tournament. India's G. S. Lakshmi will become the first woman match referee at a global ICC event. Lauren Agenbag, Kim Cotton, Claire Polosak, Sue Redfern and Jacqueline Williams are the women umpires named for the competition. — PTI

Match Officials at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020
Match Referees: Steve Bernard, Chris Broad, G. S. Lakshmi.
Umpires: Lauren Agenbag, Gregory Brathwaite, Chris Brown, Kim Cotton, Shaun George, Nitin Menon, Claire Polosak, Ahsan Raza, Sue Redfern, Langton Rusere, Alex Wharf, Jacqueline Williams.

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Opening dilemma

After stellar show with the 'A' side, Shubman has emerged as one of the top opening bets



Shubman Gill >>>

Hamilton, Feb. 12: Shubman Gill's stellar show in the recently-concluded India 'A' series is an indicator that he is ready for Test debut, feels senior off-spinner Harbhajan Singh. Shubman had scores of 83 and 204 not out batting in middle-order in the first 'A' Test and then scored a hundred opening in the second game, showing his versatility at different slots.

Prithvi Shaw, back in the Test squad after 16 months, is also a contender in the playing XI with his equally dazzling repertoire of strokes. "Shubman should get his chance since he has been part of the team (as reserve opener) for quite a while without playing any Test match,"

Harbhajan, who has been Gill's state team skipper in white ball cricket, said.

Their journeys have been intertwined since the U-19 days but in next 10 days, Prithvi and Shubman will provide skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri with a lot to ponder while fighting to be Mayank Agarwal's opening partner in first Test against New Zealand, starting February 21.

With Rohit Sharma being ruled out due to a hamstring injury and the in-form KL Rahul surprisingly ignored by the outgoing selection committee, India could go into the series with Agarwal, who has so far played nine Tests, as the senior opener.

India's woes could be compounded as Agarwal, despite his superb initiation in Test cricket, has been in wretched form, bagging a pair (0 in both innings) of the 'A' Test in Christchurch and failing in all three ODIs. He also had a quiet couple of Ranji Trophy games.

However, Harbhajan feels that Agarwal should continue as the main opener. "Mayank is a proven player in Test cricket and a top batsman. He understands his game very well. Just



Shubman (Gill) should get his chance since he has been part of the team (as reserve opener) for quite a while without playing any Test match.
 — HARBHAJAN SINGH

because of three ODI innings and a practice game, you don't drop him. It doesn't work like that," Harbhajan explained.

"He has been scoring lots of runs wherever he is playing, so I feel Mayank and Shubman should start in first Test," he added.

But, former India stumper Deep Dasgupta has a contrarian view and wants Prithvi to start in the playing XI. "I fully understand that Shubman is in great form but remember one thing. It was Prithvi who made his Test debut before even Mayank. He did well and was first choice in Australia before getting injured," Dasgupta's take was different from Harbhajan.

— PTI

RANJI TROPHY

Rahul and Prateek steady Hyderabad

Hyderabad, Feb. 12: Vidarbha's Yash Thakur (4/44) and Rajneesh Gurbani (3/48) vindicated their captain's decision to bowl first as they shared seven wickets that fell on Day One of their Elite Group 'A' Ranji Trophy match against Hyderabad being played at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

For the hosts, an unbeaten Prateek Reddy top-scored with 76 while Medhi Hassan was batting on 27 at stumps. Prateek's 76 was studded with eight fours from 159 balls.

Earlier Rahul Buddhi — with the help of nine fours — added 52 to the team's tally.

Meanwhile, in Group 'B', Saurashtra bowlers led by skipper Jaydev Unadkat dished out a clinical show to restrict Tamil Nadu to 250/7 in Chennai.

For Tamil Nadu, the experienced Abhinav Mukund (86) and N. Jagadeesan (61 not out) scored fifties. Jagadeesan's

BRIEF SCORES

In Hyderabad: Hyderabad 239/7 in 86 overs (Rahul Buddhi 52, Prateek Reddy (batting) 76, Mehdi Hassan (batting) 27, Yash Thakur 4/44, Rajneesh Gurbani 3/48) vs Vidarbha.
In Nadia: Andhra 177 in 84.2 overs (Karan Shinde 49, Bodapati Sumanth 40, Arzan Nagwaswalla 4/18, Axar Patel 3/33) vs Gujarat 2 for no loss in 4 overs.
In Rajkot: Tamil Nadu 250/7 in 90 overs (Abhinav Mukund 86, N Jagadeesan 61 (batting), Jaydev Unadkat 3/25) vs Saurashtra.
In Bengaluru: Baroda 85 in 33.5 overs (A. A. Pathan 45, K. Gowtham 3/25, Abhinay Mithun 3/26) vs Karnataka 165/7 in 52 overs (Karun Nair 47, Soyeb Sopariya 3/40).

knock ensured that the visitors reached the 250-run mark. Tamil Nadu openers Mukund (86 off 112 balls) and L. Suryaprakash (10) added 49 runs for the first wicket. — Agencies

Smriti's 66 in vain, Aussies claim title

Melbourne, Feb. 12: India opener Smriti Mandhana's 37-ball 66 went in vain as Australia claimed the tri-nation women's T20 series with a gritty 11-run win following a sensational five-wicket haul by spinner Jess Jonassen here on Wednesday.

Set a target of 156, India were all out for 144 after being 115 for three in the 15th over. Seasoned left-arm spinner Jonassen was the star of the show with brilliant figures of 5 for 12 in four overs, making her only the third Australian

bowler to return a five-for in the women's T20 format. Opting to bat, Australia managed to post 155 for six in their stipulated 20 overs. Chasing a challenging target, Mandhana was up to the task at hand and smashed 12 boundaries in her knock at the Junction Oval.

However, Mandhana's dismissal in the 15th over turned the match in Australia's favour. — PTI
Brief scores: Australia 155/6 in 20 overs (Beth Mooney 71 not out) bt India 144 in 20 overs (Smriti Mandhana 66, Jess Jonassen 5/12).

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