

News in brief

Child labour swells for first time in two decades: UN



The world has marked the first rise in child labour in two decades and the coronavirus crisis threatens to push millions more youngsters toward the same fate, the United Nations said. In a joint report, the International Labour Organization and the UN children's agency UNICEF said the number in child labour stood at 160 million at the start of 2020 -- an increase of 8.4 million in four years.

Argentina's president apologized after going viral for stating that modern-day Mexicans originate from indigenous peoples, Brazilians "from the jungle" and his own country's inhabitants come from Europe.

"I am a Europeanist. I am someone who believes in Europe," Alberto Fernandez said as he and visiting Spanish leader Pedro Sanchez met with business leaders in Buenos Aires. Fernandez said he "did not mean to offend anyone" but to anyone who was, "my apologies."

Argentine president forced to apologize for 'jungle' comment



Guatemalan court charges retired soldiers for Civil War killings, disappearances



A judge in Guatemala on Wednesday charged six ex-military members for their alleged participation in the death and forced disappearance of at least 183 civilians during Guatemala's civil war in the 1980s. Judge Miguel Galvez said there was sufficient evidence to bring the retired soldiers to trial for the 1983-1985 crimes, part of a conflict between leftists and the government from 1960-1996 that killed 200,000 people. About 45,000 people are thought to have been forcibly disappeared after they were kidnapped.

Colombia in 2020 managed to reduce by seven percent its land surface under coca cultivation, but remained the world's largest producer of cocaine, a UN report said.

The country last year had 143,000 hectares of illegal coca plantations, down from 154,000 hectares in 2019, said the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Production of cocaine hydrochloride was estimated at 1,228 metric tons in 2020, an eight percent rise from 2019, said the UNODC.



US blacklists four Nicaraguans, including Ortega's daughter

The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on four Nicaraguans, including a daughter of President Daniel Ortega, and Washington warned it would continue to use diplomatic and economic tools against members of the leftist government that it accused of undermining democracy. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Ortega to release detained presidential candidates as well as other civil society and opposition leaders arrested over the past week in what he called a "wave of repression."

11 dead in Mumbai building collapse



Rescuers clear the debris after a three-story building collapsed in Mumbai
AFP | Mumbai

A dilapidated building collapsed following heavy rains in the western Indian city of Mumbai, killing at least 11 people and injuring seven others, police said yesterday.

Heavy monsoon rains during the day Wednesday had flooded several parts of the city that is India's financial and entertainment capital.

The three-story building collapsed late Wednesday night, and police officer Ravindra Kadam said dozens of rescuers were clearing the debris to find any residents possibly still trapped.

The New Delhi Television channel said the building collapsed onto another structure in a slum in the Malad West area of Mumbai.

Residents joined the fire and police officers in rescuing people and they took the seven injured to a hospital in the suburban Kandivali area.

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YOU KNOW WHAT

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Building collapses are common in India during the June-September monsoon season when heavy rains weaken the foundations of structures that are poorly built.

In 2019, a three-story building collapsed in a hilly area in the northern Indian town of Solan following heavy rains, killing 14 people. A four-story building collapsed in Mumbai the same year and killed 10 people.

Navalny team on after 'extreme'

Russian court brands jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's team as an "extremist" organisation and ordered its closure.

The United States and Britain denounced the ruling, which comes a week before US President Joe Biden meets Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva



Alexei Navalny stands inside a glass cell during his trial
AP Photo/Maxime Buet

AFP | Moscow

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption group vowed yesterday to fight on after a court branded it an "extremist" organisation and ordered its closure.

Western countries and the European Union were quick to condemn Wednesday's late-night ruling, but senior Russian officials doubled down, describing Navalny as an agent collaborating with Washington.

The court decision was the latest move against critics of President Vladimir Putin. Some of his loudest opponents have fled the country and several prominent activist groups and independent media have closed.

The ruling bans Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and a network of regional offices from operating and, under a recently passed law, prevents those previously associated with the groups from running in parliamentary elections.

The FBK was defiant, saying in a Twitter post: "We woke up, smiled with destructive intent and knowing that we are a 'danger to society' will continue to fight corruption!"

It is another Kafka-esque attack on those standing up against corruption and for open societies, and is a deliberate attempt to effectively outlaw genuine political opposition in Russia

UK FOREIGN SECRETARY DOMINIC RAAB

What exactly it will be able to do is unclear in the wake of the ruling, which followed a hearing behind closed doors.

Navalny's key allies still in Russia are under close law enforcement supervision, some under house arrest, and other prominent aides have gone into exile.

Navalny was jailed for more than two-and-a-half years in February after he returned from Germany where he had been convalescing following a poisoning attack in Siberia that he blamed on the Kremlin.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	34,271,103	613,736
2 India	29,273,338	363,097
3 Brazil	17,125,357	479,791
4 France	5,729,967	110,270
5 Turkey	5,313,098	48,524
6 Russia	5,167,949	125,278
7 UK	4,542,986	127,867
8 Italy	4,239,868	126,855
9 Argentina	4,038,528	83,272
10 Spain	3,729,458	80,465
11 Germany	3,718,577	90,281
12 Colombia	3,635,835	93,473
13 Iran	2,990,714	81,519
14 Poland	2,876,667	74,447

Global tally

175,401,190

Deaths

3,783,300

Recovered:

158,955,851

New cases

+227,712

New deaths

+6,501

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	270,292		15,471		198,632	56,189
Saudi Arabia	462,528	+1,286	7,503		444,792	10,233
UAE	589,423		1,710		568,828	18,885
Kuwait	323,357	+1,709	1,810	+4	306,232	15,315
Oman	230,219	+1,640	2,467	+19	207,795	19,957
Qatar	219,281	+143	574	+1	216,301	2,406

South Korea building collapse kills nine

AFP | Seoul

Nine people were killed when a five-storey building being demolished in South Korea suddenly collapsed, crushing a bus, officials said.

Dramatic television footage showed the bus being buried in debris and smothered by a huge cloud of dust as the structure gave way.

The bus, which had stopped in front of the site, was carrying 17 people when the accident occurred Wednesday in the city of Gwangju, southwest of Seoul.

Nine of the passengers were killed and the remaining eight were all seriously injured, according to the National Fire Agency.

All the workers on the demolition site had been evacuated before the collapse, they added.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear. Police have launched a probe into the case, authorities said.

Chung Mong-gyu, the chairman of HDC Hyundai Development Company, the contractor involved, visited Gwangju yesterday to apologise.

"I sincerely apologise to the



South Korean rescue workers search for survivors in the debris of a collapsed building in Gwangju
AP Photo/Chang Gwon

I sincerely apologise to the victims, their families, the injured, and citizens in Gwangju -- I feel a heavy sense of responsibility

CHUNG MONG-GYU, THE CHAIRMAN OF HDC HYUNDAI DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

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-- I feel a heavy sense of responsibility," he said, bowing before reporters.

"Our company will do its best so that the victims and their families can recover from the damages as soon as possible," added Chung, who is also president of the Korea Football Association.

President Moon Jae-in offered consolation to those affected by the disaster, calling for a "thorough investigation" into the case.

Man who slapped Macron the president embroiled in scandal

Reuters | Paris

The medieval martial arts enthusiast who slapped President Emmanuel Macron across the face told a court he was a right-wing sympathiser who had acted because the president represented all that was rotten with France, BFM TV reported.

Damien Tarel, 28, told the court in Valence that several days ahead of Macron's visit to the southeastern Drome region, he had thought about throwing an egg or a cream tart at the president, the news channel reported.

"I think that Macron represents very neatly the decay of our country," he told the court according to BFM TV. "If I had challenged Macron to a duel at sunrise, I doubt he would have responded."

Macron later described the attack as an isolated incident and said violence and hate were a threat to democracy.

Tarel faced a charge of assault against a public official, an offence which carries a maximum sentence of three years in jail and a 45,000 euro fine.

He struck Macron on Tuesday after the president came over to