

News in brief

Two million stranded as worst floods in decades hit Bangladesh's northeast

Rivers in Bangladesh have burst their banks



and caused the worst floods in the country's northeast for nearly two decades, with about two million people marooned by rising waters, officials said yesterday. Floodwater rushing from India's northeast breached a major embankment on the Barak River, inundating at least 100 villages at Zakiganj in Bangladesh, said Mosharraf Hossain, the chief government administrator of the Sylhet region. "Some two million people have been stranded by floods so far," he said, adding that at least 10 people have been killed this week.

Armed men kidnapped an Italian couple and their son in southern Mali overnight, their church said, as violence spreads in a country ravaged by an Islamist insurgency.

3 Italians kidnapped in southern Mali

A spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses church in neighbouring Senegal said the couple is in their 70s and their son is about 50. They were living in Mali for personal reasons and are not missionaries, he said. It was not immediately clear who took them, he said. Media outlets reported that a Togolese national was kidnapped along with the Italians, but the spokesman said he could not confirm that.

9 more bodies found in Kashmir tunnel collapse, toll at 10

Rescuers yesterday found the bodies of nine more workers in a



collapsed tunnel in Kashmir, taking the death toll to 10. The tunnel is part of a mountainous highway tunnel system that was under construction in the Himalayan region when it collapsed Thursday night. The body of one worker was recovered Friday. Aamir Ali, an official at the government's disaster

management department, said yesterday that the bodies of all missing workers were recovered. Emergency crews used heavy machinery to clear the wreckage at the site of the collapse in southern Ramban district.

A New York court on Friday sentenced two sons of former Panamanian president Ricardo Martinelli to three years in prison on charges of corruption linked to the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht.

US jails sons of Panama ex-president for three years



The sentence against Luis Enrique and Ricardo Martinelli, which also includes a fine of \$250,000, is well below the nine to 11 years prosecutors had asked for. They were accused of having received \$28 million in bribes from the disgraced construction group, of which \$19 million had passed through US accounts.

Three killed in Israeli 'aggression' targeting southern Damascus

An Israeli 'aggression' launched from the Golan Heights

and targeting southern parts of the Syrian capital Damascus killed three people and caused some material damage, the Syrian ministry of defence said. Earlier on Friday, state TV reported that Syrian air defences shot down a number of missiles in the Damascus countryside.

Turkey's Erdogan puts conditions on support for Nordic nations' NATO bids

AFP | Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said Turkey would not look "positively" on Sweden and Finland's NATO bids unless its terror-related concerns were addressed, despite broad support from other allies including the United States.

Turkey has long accused Nordic countries, in particular Sweden which has a strong Turkish immigrant community, of harbouring extremist Kurdish groups as well as supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher wanted over the failed 2016 coup.

Erdogan's threat throws a major potential obstacle in the way of the likely membership bids from the hitherto militarily non-aligned Nordic nations since a consensus is required in NATO decisions.

"Unless Sweden and Finland clearly show that they will stand in solidarity with Turkey on fundamental issues, especially in the fight against terrorism, we will not approach these countries' NATO membership positively," Erdogan told NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg in a phone call, according to the presidency.

On Twitter, Stoltenberg said he spoke with Erdogan "of our valued ally" on the importance of "NATO's Open Door".

"We agree that the security concerns of all Allies must be taken into account and talks need to continue to find a solution," he said.

On Thursday, Stoltenberg said Turkey's "concerns" were being addressed to find "an agreement on how to move forward".

Erdogan, who refused to



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during a news conference in Istanbul

While other NATO nation appear welcoming to have Finland and Sweden join, Turkey has raised objections to their accession, principally over the presence of alleged terrorists in their countries and the block on arms sales

kara's concerns over the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Iraqi and Syrian offshoots, Erdogan told the Swedish premier, according to the presidency.

The PKK has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 and is blacklisted as a "terrorist organisation" by Turkey and Western allies like the European Union -- which includes Finland and Sweden.

'Incompatible'

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February has shifted political opinion in both Nordic countries in favour of joining the Western military alliance.

Membership requires the consent of all 30 existing members but Turkey is putting a spanner in the works.

Sweden and Finland, while solidly Western, have historically kept a distance from NATO as part of longstanding policies aimed at avoiding angering Russia.

But the two nations moved ahead with their membership

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bid in shock over their giant neighbour's invasion of Ukraine, which had unsuccessfully sought to join NATO.

Erdogan also told Andersson to "lift restrictions imposed on Turkey in the defence industry" after the army's Syria operation in 2019.

Andersson hailed the talks with Erdogan on Twitter and said: "We look forward to strengthening our bilateral relations, including on peace, security, and the fight against terrorism".

In another phone call with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, Erdogan said turning a blind eye to "terror" organisations posing a threat to a NATO ally was "incompatible with the spirit of friendship and alliance".

Erdogan also said it was Turkey's natural right to expect respect and support for its "legitimate and determined struggle against a clear threat to its national security and people", according to the the presidency.

In return, Niinisto praised "an open and direct phone call" with Erdogan, on his official Twitter account.

COVID-19: Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths
1 USA	84,935,262	1,028,741
2 India	43,134,332	524,348
3 Brazil	30,762,413	665,595
4 France	29,315,478	147,780
5 Germany	26,081,894	138,709
6 UK	22,238,715	177,977
7 Russia	18,288,740	378,270
8 S. Korea	17,938,399	23,911
9 Italy	17,229,263	165,918
10 Turkey	15,061,376	98,921
11 Spain	12,238,073	105,947
12 Vietnam	10,707,568	43,075
13 Argentina	9,135,308	128,776
14 Japan	8,552,464	30,255

Global tally
526,877,568
Deaths
6,299,324
Recovered:
496,690,455
New cases
+495,635
New deaths
+576

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	515,645		24,613		442,182	48,850
Saudi Arabia	762,575	+411	9,128	+1	746,999	6,448
UAE	904,466	+373	2,302		888,228	13,936
Kuwait	632,474		2,555		629,392	527
Oman	389,473		4,260		384,669	544
Qatar	366,952	+101	677		365,254	1,021

N.Korea reports over 200,000 fever cases for 5th day amid COVID wave

Reuters | Seoul

North Korea yesterday reported more than 200,000 new patients suffering from fever for a fifth consecutive day, as it fought its first confirmed coronavirus outbreak.

The ongoing COVID wave, declared last week, has fuelled concerns over a lack of vaccines, inadequate medical infrastructure and a potential food crisis in the country of 25 mil-



People watch a TV broadcasting a news report on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in North Korea, at a railway station in Seoul

lion, which has refused outside help and kept its borders shut.

At least 219,030 people newly showed fever symptoms as of Friday evening, taking the total number of such cases to 2,460,640, the official KCNA news agency reported, citing data from the state emergency epidemic prevention headquarters. The death toll rose by one to 66.

KCNA did not say how many people had tested positive for the virus.

In a separate report, KCNA said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had held a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's

powerful politburo early yesterday to check the COVID situation and responses made over the nine days since the outbreak emerged.

Kim praised "positive progress" in the anti-virus campaign but called for consistently adjusting and optimising policy to "seize the chance of winning the battle against the epidemic."

KCNA did not elaborate on where Kim saw progress, but state media has lauded "good results" in the country's COVID fight, citing sustained farming and production in key industrial sectors and construction projects.

Trump pays blocking Ne

AFP | Washington

Former US President Donald Trump has paid a \$110,000 fine for obstructing a major tax evasion investigation led since 2019 by New York state authorities, a spokesperson announced Friday.

Trump was ordered April 25 by New York state's Supreme Court to pay \$10,000 a day for as long as he refused to provide accounting and tax documents as part of a civil investigation by the Attorney General of the state, Letitia James, against the Trump Organization family business.

"On May 19, Donald Trump paid the attorney general's office \$110,000," a spokesperson for James's office said. James and the Republican billionaire have been engaged in a fierce procedural battle for months.

On February 17, James was able to get a New York judge to order Trump and his children Donald Trump Jr. and Ivanka Trump to testify under oath in the context of this investigation, in which she suspects fraudulent tax practices.

The Trumps -- who accuse James of a "political witch hunt" -- have appealed the ruling.

But New York state had also

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With no national vaccination campaign and limited testing capability, the daily data released by state media could be under-reported, and it may be difficult to assess the scale of the COVID wave, experts have said