

## Snow, heavy rain kill 61 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Snow and heavy rain have killed 61 people in Afghanistan in the last three days, the disaster management authority said yesterday.

The deaths occurred between Wednesday and Friday, mainly in central and northern provinces of the country, according to a map released by ANDMA.

The “initial figures of casualties and destruction” also include 110 injured people and 458 houses either partially or fully destroyed, it added.

The Salang highway, one of Afghanistan's main roads, has been closed, the provincial authority for Parwan said. Food supplies were distributed to travellers stuck on a mountain pass in the central Bamyan province.



Aurora borealis lights up the sky above a The Nuuk cathedral in Nuuk, Greenland, on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Israeli strike kills 2 teenagers in Gaza

### US envoys in Israel for talks

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed two teenagers in a drone strike yesterday, while the military said it eliminated two “terrorists” who planted an explosive device near troops.

The civil defence agency said the drone killed the two near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza. The territory's Al-Shifa Hospital said it received the two bodies, adding they were two boys aged 13 and 15.

The Israeli military said the pair had posed an “immediate threat” to its soldiers as they crossed the Yellow Line and planted an explosive device in the area. Under a US-brokered ceasefire that came into effect on October 10, Israeli forces have withdrawn to positions behind a so-called “Yellow Line” in Gaza, though they remain in control of more than half of the territory.

Israeli forces have killed at least 477 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect.

Meanwhile, US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were in Israel yesterday to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mainly to discuss Gaza.

The US on Thursday announced plans for a “New Gaza” rebuilt from scratch, to include residential towers, data centres and seaside resorts.

## Trump seeking to forge ‘new UN’: Lula

AFP, Brasilia

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Donald Trump on Friday of trying to create “a new UN” with his proposed “Board of Peace.”



The veteran leftist joins other world leaders who have avoided signing up for Trump's new global conflict resolution organisation, where a permanent seat costs \$1 billion and the chairman is Trump himself.

“Instead of fixing” the United Nations, “what’s happening? President Trump is proposing to create a new UN where only he is the owner,” Lula said.

Trump unveiled his “Board of Peace” at the World Economic Forum in Davos Thursday, joined on stage by leaders and officials from 19 countries to sign its founding charter.

Lula defended multilateralism against what he called “the law of the jungle” in global affairs.

His remarks come a day after he spoke by phone with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who urged his counterpart to safeguard the “central role” of the United Nations in international affairs.

## NEW NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY US to limit support for allies

Priority shifts to homeland security; curbing China remains main global focus

AGENCIES

The US military will prioritize protecting the homeland and deterring China while providing “more limited” support to allies in Europe and elsewhere, a Pentagon strategy document released on Friday said.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) marks a significant departure from past Pentagon policy, both in its emphasis on allies taking on increased burdens with less backing from Washington, and its softer tone on traditional foes China and Russia.

“As US forces focus on homeland defense and the Indo-Pacific, our allies and partners elsewhere will take primary responsibility for their own defense with critical but more limited support from American forces,” the strategy said.

The previous NDS – released under President Donald Trump's predecessor Joe Biden – described China as Washington's most consequential challenge and said that Russia posed an “acute threat.”

**Latin America tops the US ‘global’ focus**

**‘Respectful relations’ with Beijing sought**

**Russia threat seen as ‘persistent but manageable’**

**Pentagon foresees ‘more limited’ role in deterring North Korea**

The new document however urges “respectful relations” with Beijing – while making no mention of US ally Taiwan, which China claims as its territory – and describing the threat from Russia as a “persistent but manageable” one affecting Nato's eastern members.

Both the Biden and Trump strategies say homeland defense is important, but their descriptions of the threats facing the US differ significantly.

The Trump administration's NDS takes aim at the past administration for neglecting border security, saying this led to a “flood of illegal aliens” and widespread narcotics trafficking.

“Border security is national security,” and the Pentagon “will therefore prioritize efforts to seal our borders, repel forms of invasion, and deport illegal aliens,” it said.

The 2026 NDS also includes no mention of the dangers of climate change.

Like Trump's national security strategy, which was released last month, the NDS elevates Latin America to the top of the US agenda. The document called that the “Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine,” a reference to the declaration two centuries ago by the then-young United States that Latin America was off limits to rival powers.

The Pentagon also foresees a “more limited” role in deterring North Korea, with South Korea taking primary responsibility, a move that could lead to a reduction of US forces on the Korean Peninsula.

## Suicide blast at wedding kills 7 in Pakistan

REUTERS, Dera Ismail Khan

The death toll from a suicide bombing at a wedding near the Afghan border rose to seven yesterday, police said.

The bombing tore through a building housing members of a peace committee during a wedding ceremony on Friday in northwestern Pakistan's Dera Ismail Khan district, said a police official.

The committees are made up of local residents and elders and supported by Islamabad as part of its efforts to counter militants in the regions along the Afghan border.

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombing.

## A death out of nowhere

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As of last night, the police were still going through CCTV footage from the area and could not confirm from which building the rod fell.

“No one has been arrested yet. The investigation is ongoing,” the IO said.

According to the case statement, the incident occurred between 2:00pm and 2:45pm in front of Ashfaq's office on Road-140 in Gulshan-1.

At the time, construction work was underway on the 25th floor of the Concord MBR Skyline building located across the road.

Ashfaq's colleague Sazzad Hossain told The Daily Star that they had been standing and talking for five to six minutes when the rod fell from above.

“I am still traumatised. I still can't believe that a lively man, who I was just talking to, could die in such an unfortunate way. This is just unacceptable,” Sazzad said.

Ashfaq's brother-in-law, Ashraful Hasan, said Ashfaq's wife and their

11-year-old daughter have been left numb with grief.

“This cannot be described as mere negligence; it was gross negligence that led to a death. Construction work on a 25-storey building along a busy road cannot be carried out without adequate safety measures,” he added.

**CONCORD STATEMENT**

In a statement issued yesterday, Concord Group expressed deep sorrow over the death and conveyed condolences to the victim's family.

The group claimed that at the time of the incident, glass-cleaning work was being carried out at a nearby building, using a scaffold along the footpath. During the work, a small piece of iron rod fell from above and struck the pedestrian on the head, it said.

The statement said workers were seen hurriedly removing the scaffold after the incident. It also claimed that several steel rods were visible on the roof of that building, from where a loose rod may have fallen. Concord

said related video footage and visual evidence have been preserved.

According to the statement, Concord's MBR Skyline project is located on the opposite side of the road, about 40 to 50 feet from the accident site.

“We want to state firmly and clearly that the rod involved in the accident did not come from the MBR Skyline project.”

Concord further claimed the recovered rod was old, rusted and partially painted and did not match rods used at its construction site.

It added that the northern side of the MBR Skyline building is fully covered with glass cladding and that no rod-related work was underway on that side.

The statement also said the footpath along Road-140 is protected by a tin shed and nylon safety nets, making it “practically impossible” for any object to fall from the building.

Concord said it is fully cooperating with the ongoing police investigation.

## Probe points to feud over extortion: DMP

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He added that police were working to dismantle the syndicates and would conduct further drives.

Musabbir, a former general secretary of Swachhasebak Dal's Dhaka North City unit, was shot dead on January 7 in an alley off Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

His wife filed a murder case with Tejgaon Police Station the following day, accusing four to five unidentified assailants.

On January 11, the DB arrested four suspects – Zinnat, Abdul Kadir, Md Reaz, and Md Bilal. Another alleged shooter, Rahim, was arrested from Narsingdi on Tuesday, bringing

the total number of arrestees to five.

Asked about their identities, Shafiqul said they should be described as extortionists rather than political activists.

“Extortionists have no political ideology. They use political banners only as a cover,” he said.

According to DB sources, Dilip is a close aide of a top criminal from the Tejgaon area.

After the 2024 political changeover, Dilip allegedly began extorting money from businessmen who had shifted their operations from the Bashundhara area to locations near Karwan Bazar.

When some shop owners refused to

pay, he allegedly threatened them over the phone. A video of such threats later circulated on social media.

Musabbir's family has remained largely silent since the incident and declined to speak on record.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a family member said they had never heard the name Dilip or Binash before police mentioned it.

“We even spoke to businessmen in the Karwan Bazar area, and they also said they had not heard of anyone extorting money under that name,” the family member said.

“We want the truth to come out quickly and the perpetrators to be brought to justice.”

nominated candidates from them. “This is a clear violation of the law, and the Election Commission has taken no action,” he said.

Presenting the keynote paper, Sarkar said, “People want democracy to be institutionalised, the rule of law to be established, and good governance to prevail in all spheres of the state. There is no alternative to a free and fair election to fulfil these aspirations. Only through such an election can democratic transition truly begin.”

## A final farewell

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bucket of water and later took her own life,” he claimed.

Swarnali's father, local Jatiya Party leader Ruhul Amin Howlader, said, “My daughter died by suicide. We do not want to blame anyone. We applied to receive the bodies of my daughter and grandson without delay. Now we will follow whatever decision the administration takes.”

Officer-in-Charge of Bagerhat Sadar Police Station Mohammad Masum Khan said a murder case had been filed over the death of the child.

“At this stage, whether the death of Swarnali was a murder or a suicide will be determined after the official autopsy report is received,” he said, adding that further legal steps would depend on the findings.

He also said issues related to the husband's parole and other arrangements fall under the jurisdiction of the district magistrate, not the police.

Police said the autopsy report had not been received as of 9:00pm yesterday.