



A NEW DAWN

Heralding the break of a new dawn, a gigantic rooster figure leads the Baishakhi Shobhajatra as it steadily advances inside the Dhaka University campus yesterday with the slogan “Noboborsher Oikyatān: Gonotontre Punorutthan” -- a call from the procession for the revival of democratic values and practices.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



BNP will implement July charter

Says Tarique, rolls out Farmers' Card

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said the BNP would definitely implement the July charter and warned that any attempt to obstruct the government's public welfare programmes would be resisted with the people's support.

“We must stay alert; we must be cautious [about] the ghosts of autocracy, upon whom a shadow is being slowly cast again... who are once more trying to create anarchy in the country,” the BNP chairman said at a public meeting held at the Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University campus in Tangail yesterday afternoon.

“The people of Bangladesh have given BNP the responsibility to run the country. The day BNP signed the July charter, others also signed it. We have seen that those who are now in the opposition were initially confused about whether they should sign or not. And there is another party with them. They did not sign at that time. We saw them go and suddenly sign it quickly after the election.

“BNP signed first. Those who shouted loudly for the July charter after the election, we can ask them, ‘If you cared so much, why did you not sign first?’” he said.

Tarique said, “I have said before, and I am making it clear again. BNP has signed the July charter, and it will implement it. There will be no change in this. But those who try to obstruct BNP's canal digging,



Family Card, Farmers' Card, programmes to create professional players, and other public programmes, the BNP will resist them with the people.”

He said, “We may disagree on some issues, that is not a problem. But those disagreements must be solved through discussion. You will make your point and I will give my logic. If your logic is correct, I will accept it.”

The BNP chairman said, “We carry this country in our hearts. We have no other address besides this country. Since this Bangladesh is our identity and our last shelter, we must build this country ourselves.”

Before making these remarks at the campus, Tarique inaugurated the Farmers' Card pre-pilot programme at Tangail's Shaheed Maruf Stadium, where several thousand farmers and party leaders and supporters gathered.

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A dangerous turn in banking reform

A new law allows the architects of Bangladesh's banking crisis to buy their way back in

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Reform, in Bangladesh, has a short shelf life. Not long after the interim government began cleaning up the country's rotten banking sector, the BNP administration walked back much of the work. A new law now lets the former owners of five scandal-plagued Shariah banks buy their way back in. The price? A mere 7.5 percent upfront of whatever the state pumped in to keep the institutions alive.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The government and Bangladesh Bank together injected Tk 35,000 crore into what became “Sommilito Islami Bank”, a state-run vehicle created to absorb the wreckage of First Security Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, Union Bank, Global Islami Bank, and Exim Bank. Under the Bank Resolution Act 2026, former owners can reclaim the lot for Tk 2,625 crore -- with the rest repayable over two years at a gentle 10 percent simple interest. It is, as one economist drily noted, a reward rather than a reckoning. The amount is also meagre compared to what these very owners allegedly siphoned out through years of rule-bending.

The five banks were not victims of misfortune. They were victims of their owners. Four were dominated by S Alam Group, whose chairman, Mohammed Saiful Alam, stands accused of using depositors' money as a personal treasury. The fifth, Exim Bank, was long the fiefdom of

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Baishakh celebrations regain fervour

DOWEL BISWAS

As dawn broke over Ramna Batamul yesterday, Chhayanaut's chorus of 200 performers lifted “Jago alok-logone” into the morning air, opening the celebration of Pahela Baishakh 1433.

The morning programme unfolded in deliberate rhythm -- with Tagore's devotional “E ki sugandha-hilloi bohilo” giving way to Nazrul's sharper invocation, “Arunkanti ke go yogi bhikhari”, then

speaking, and assembling should never demand courage.

From Ramna, thousands then streamed toward Shahbagh. Streets closed to traffic became temporary markets of toys, windmills, and folk instruments. Families wandered slowly as children stopped at will.

The Baishakhi Shobhajatra steadily advanced under the slogan “Noboborsher Oikyatān: Gonotontre Punorutthan” -- a call from the procession for the revival of

In closing remarks, Chhayanaut President Sarwar Ali pointed to a climate where cultural expression remains vulnerable, recalling recent pressures on cultural spaces and the lingering memory of the 2001 Ramna Batamul bombing. His message was clear: in a society, singing, speaking, and assembling should never demand courage.

Lalon's strain of endurance, “Boro shonkote poriya doyal”, and finally Dwijendralal's luminous “Aji gao mahageet.”

Chhayanaut's repertoire moved between resistance, remembrance, and renewal, rehearsing cultural memory as much as celebration.

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democratic values and practices.

A rooster figure led the procession, heralding the break of a new dawn, while a tiger, a lion, and a fox followed alongside a black elephant with red wings and a white dove of peace, visualising tension and balance.

Farmers carried tools of labour and indigenous groups joined in traditional dress. Children marked their faces with the numerals of the new year and spun paper pinwheels that caught brief winds. Under rain trees, groups of women in red and white saris formed rotating patterns, their movement tightening into a rhythm.

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US-Iran talks may resume in 2 days

Says Trump as progress reported on nuke issue in backchannel talks; IMF cuts global growth outlook

Ships exit Gulf from Iran despite blockade

Lebanon, Israel start direct talks in US

Oil retreats below \$100 per barrel

AGENCIES

Talks to end the Iran war could resume in Pakistan over the next two days, US President Donald Trump said yesterday, after the collapse of weekend negotiations prompted Washington to impose a blockade on Iranian ports.

Gulf, Pakistani and Iranian officials also said negotiating teams from the US and Iran could return to Pakistan later this week, though one senior Iranian source said no date had been set.

“You should stay there, really, because something could be happening over the next two days, and we're more inclined to go there,” Trump was quoted as saying in an interview with the New York Post.

While the US blockade drew angry rhetoric from Tehran, signs that diplomatic engagement might continue helped calm oil markets, pushing benchmark prices below \$100 yesterday.

The highest-level talks between the two adversaries

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PHOTO: AFP

Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the Al-Hosh area near the coastal Lebanese city of Tyre yesterday.

Eastern Refinery running on fumes

No crude oil arrived since Feb; shutdown likely in a week

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Ctg

With usable crude stocks nearly exhausted amid import disruptions due to US-Israel war on Iran, the Eastern Refinery Ltd (ERL) has been kept running by drawing from “deadstock”, residual crude settled at the bottom of storage tanks that can only be used in limited quantities in emergencies.

Production at the refinery, the lone state-owned oil refinery, has dropped sharply, raising concerns of a possible shutdown within a week unless fresh supplies arrive.

Bangladesh needs to import around 1,20,000 tonnes of crude oil monthly. Due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, no crude oil shipments arrived in February and March.

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ESO HEY BAISHAKH

With the rising of the sun, Chhayanaout welcomed the Bangla New Year with songs at Ramna Batamul yesterday, setting the tone for the nationwide celebration of Pahela Baishakh. Cultural programmes and colourful processions across Dhaka and other districts upheld Bangalee culture and heritage. Large crowds gathered under trees to enjoy music and recitations by artistes in traditional attire while elsewhere dancers in red and white performed on open-air stages before audiences. The festive spirit spread to the streets as vibrant processions featuring giant handcrafted motifs of birds, animals, and masks marched roads, symbolising peace and cultural pride. People of all ages joined in colourful outfits, turning the celebrations into a vivid display of tradition and unity.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, MEHEDI HASAN, RAJIB RAIHAN, HABIBUR RAHMAN, TITU DAS, AZAHAR UDDIN



The fading pages of Halkhata

FROM PAGE 4
a new red-cloth-bound ledger book – was once a defining feature of Bangla New Year to traders. However, it has largely lost its grandeur in Chattogram city steadily over the years, except for a few areas – such as Terribazar, Anderkill, Boxirhat, and the old wholesale markets of Chaktai-Khatunganj – where the tradition still flickers on.

With the rapid rise of digital technology, the nature of business has transformed. Paper ledgers have largely given way to computers, software and spreadsheets. Yet, Halkhata has not entirely disappeared; it survives in the practices of a handful of old businesses and craftsmen and in the collective nostalgia of the trading community.

On Monday, a day before the festival, workers were seen in some shops binding ledgers and carefully pasting red fabric onto the covers with glue to complete the traditional look.

“Halkhata was once the backbone of our trade. There used to be over a hundred ledger makers in this area. Now, only around 10 remain,” Akash said.

“Large businesses once maintained year-long accounts in this red cloth-bound ledgers,” Akash says. “Now most have shifted to digital systems. Still, some jewellers, grocers and wholesalers continue to use Halkhata for its enduring reliability, as the entries in a paper ledger cannot be altered easily; it remains a trusted record,” he added.

At SB Binding House, manager Alauddin said Halkhata ledger books now sell for Tk 80-700, depending on size and quality. “Red remains the preferred colour, as many consider it a symbol of good fortune,” he added.

His family has been in the ledger-book making business for four generations. “We produce books

ranging from 100 to 1,200 pages. Our products are in demand not just in Chattogram but also in Cox’s Bazar, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Feni, Cumilla and Sylhet,” he also said.

The origin of Halkhata can be traced back to the Mughal era, when Emperor Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar introduced the modern Bangla New Year in 1584 AD, merging the Islamic lunar calendar with the traditional solar-based Bengali calendar, to streamline tax collection with the agricultural cycle.

The term “Hal” is derived from Persian, meaning “new”, reflecting the practice of closing old accounts and opening a fresh ledger at the start of the new year.

Abdur Razzak, owner of Razzak Traders in Khatunganj, recalled another fading aspect of the tradition. “There used to be specialised accountants known as ‘Sarkar’, who maintained large account books throughout the year. The designation ‘Sarkar’, like many such terms we used to hear earlier, have now almost disappeared,” he said.

“Halkhata was once a grand affair. Preparations would begin days in advance. Invitation letters were sent to debtors, traders travelled from distant places, and around 80 percent of transactions were on credit. That made the occasion truly significant,” he added.

While Halkhata festivities were observed across the country yesterday, some business owners will celebrate the occasion today, following the traditional calendar (panjika).

Since the 1980s and 1990s onwards, the tradition began to wane, following the expansion of banking services, decline in credit-based trade, and a growing trust deficit among traders, all of which have contributed to the shift. The recent rise of mobile financial transactions

further contributed to the decline.

Moreover, the Bangla calendar is hardly being used to maintain business records anymore, as many businesses follow the Gregorian calendar and maintain records digitally, said traders.

“Halkhata is not merely a ledger. It is a symbol of relationships. It once fostered trust, goodwill and a sense of community between buyers and sellers. We used to celebrate it at our shop,” said Jayatu Chowdhury, owner of Promoda Tea House.

“But times have changed. Credit sales have declined, and trust has eroded. Many traders suffered losses after debtors disappeared without paying. We do not arrange Halkhata events anymore,” he added.

Although the tradition of Halkhata may have faded, yet, it still endures, even if symbolically, and certainly in the memories of those who once celebrated it wholeheartedly.

IMF, WB may give \$2b

FROM PAGE 4
support for developing and low-income countries, while the World Bank has pledged up to \$25 billion.

Bangladesh is currently under a \$5.5 billion IMF loan programme, with \$1.3 billion due in two instalments by June.

The World Bank is also expected to provide \$400 million in budget support.

The minister said the World Bank was ready to provide “all-out support”, including policy backing and financing.

“We assumed office with existing economic deficits, and the war has created a major shortfall. Various measures have been discussed to address these issues. The World Bank will remain active in providing solutions in both policy and financing,” he said.

Harvey Weinstein rape retrial begins in New York

AFP, New York

The retrial of disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein on a rape charge on which a jury was previously deadlocked started yesterday, although he will remain imprisoned for other offenses regardless of the verdict.

Weinstein is accused of the third-degree rape of Jessica Mann, who starred in the 2015 romantic comedy

“This Isn’t Funny.”

The judge declared a mistrial last June after the jury foreperson refused to return to deliberate the case amid a jury-room feud.

Weinstein is being retried on that count in the Manhattan court, and the process of jury selection began Tuesday after a number of rulings by judge Curtis Farber, who said the defense had sought to delay the trial.

caused no injuries.

On Monday, Israel summoned Italy’s ambassador following comments by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani that condemned “unacceptable attacks” on Lebanese civilians by Israeli forces.

Tajani, who is deputy prime minister, was in Beirut Monday for talks with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi.

He later wrote on X that he was there to “convey Italy’s solidarity following Israel’s unacceptable attacks against the civilian population”.

Italy pauses defence deal

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education and training of military personnel, research and development and information technology, among others.

Tensions between the two countries have risen over the past week after the Italian government accused Israeli forces of firing warning shots at a convoy of Italian UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

Italy summoned Israel’s ambassador in protest over the incident that damaged at least one vehicle but

UNHCR, IOM warn

FROM PAGE 4
prospects for safe return.

At the same time, shrinking humanitarian assistance, harsh camp conditions and limited access to education and livelihoods are pushing refugees to take dangerous routes by sea.

False promises of better wages abroad and misinformation spread by smuggling networks are also luring both Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals into taking major risks, they said.

Such conditions, the agencies warned, are enabling smugglers and traffickers to exploit vulnerable people and put their lives in grave danger.

Calling for urgent international support, UNHCR and IOM urged the global community to strengthen solidarity and sustain funding for lifesaving assistance for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, alongside support for host communities.

As Bangladesh marks the new year, they said the latest tragedy highlights the need to address the root causes of displacement in Myanmar and create conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees.

Without collective action, more lives will be lost at sea and along other deadly migration routes, the statement added.

boats, aircraft, and computers must remain completely suspended.

Also, all government-funded foreign trainings will remain suspended, while internal training costs must be reduced by 50 percent. For meetings and seminars, entertainment expenses must be cut by 50 percent, and overall costs by 20 percent.

Other steps include: 30 percent reduction to travel expenses, and to use of fuel, electricity, and gas in government offices; 20 percent reduction to beautification costs for residential buildings and 50 percent for non-residential buildings; and complete suspension of expenses for land acquisition.

Fuel perk for officials’ pvt cars spared cuts

FROM PAGE 4
When asked why fuel allowance for cars purchased with interest-free loans was excluded from the austerity measures, a senior official from the Finance Division said, “The government has not decided to cut costs in this sector, so it was not included.”

In response to further questioning, he added, “Instructions have been issued exactly as the government decided. It is the government that determines what is appropriate or inappropriate; I cannot comment on that.”

On April 9, in a letter sent to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Cabinet Division announced a 30 percent reduction in fuel allocations for the PM,

ministers, and state ministers. The letter stated that until further notice, cabinet members will receive 12.6 litres of fuel daily, down from the previous 18 litres.

Meanwhile, in a separate office memo, the Cabinet Division notified the secretaries to all ministries and divisions regarding the government’s austerity measures, including cost-cutting in sectors such as training, foreign travel, and meetings or seminars.

According to the directives, fuel consumption for all government vehicles will be reduced by 30 percent on a monthly basis, while interest-free loans for government officials to buy cars will remain suspended.

The purchase of government cars,



The fading pages of Halkhata

Once the heartbeat of trade in Ctg, the tradition now survives in fragments

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, *Chattogram*

The bustling trading hub of Chaktai-Khatunganj in Chattogram -- one of the country's oldest and largest wholesale markets -- once used to come alive a week before Pahela Baishakh to observe Halkhata, a thousand-year-old tradition.

Invitation cards used to be sent to traders, shops were cleaned and decorated, and accounts from the previous year would be settled. On the morning of the Bangla New Year, businesses welcomed customers with sweets, small gifts and warm greetings before opening fresh accounts in the traditional red cloth-bound ledgers.

The rhythmic beat of drums echoed through the marketplace, turning commerce into celebration.

Now, such scenes exist mostly in memory.

"It feels almost imaginary now," says Akash Ghosh, a third-generation Halkhata trader at New Khata Ghar in Khatunganj. "But even back in the 1990s, this was exactly how Pahela Baishakh used to be."

Halkhata -- the ceremonial opening of

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A trader arranges stacks of red cloth-bound ledger books, or Halkhata, at a shop in Chattogram's Khatunganj on Pahela Baishakh. The traditional Halkhata now survives in limited pockets as digital record-keeping replaces paper accounts.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD SUMON

ME WAR FALLOUT

IMF, WB may give \$2b by June in extra support

STAR REPORT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are likely to provide additional financial assistance to Bangladesh, beyond regular budget support, to help deal with the fallout of the US-Israel war on Iran.

Bangladesh could receive up to \$2 billion in emergency assistance by June, sources in an 11-member delegation led by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said. The delegation is attending the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington.

On Monday, Khosru held meetings with IMF Executive Director Urit Patel and World Bank Vice President for South Asia John Jutt on the sidelines.

Speaking to journalists, the minister hinted at the possibility of enhanced support under the IMF's existing programme. "The release of instalments is one matter, but under the programme there could be something even better," he said.

He expressed optimism that Bangladesh would secure additional funding by June and in the next budget. "The discussions have been successful overall. I believe we will largely succeed in addressing the deficit," he added.

Amid disruption caused by the US-Israel war on Iran, the IMF has announced up to \$50 billion in emergency

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Fuel perk for officials' pvt cars spared cuts

BAHARAM KHAN

While the fuel allocation for all government vehicles -- including those used by the prime minister and cabinet members -- has been slashed by 30 percent amid the ongoing energy crisis, fuel for the private cars of senior officials remains exempt from these cuts.

As such, the government treasury continues to cover the full cost of fuel and maintenance for these private vehicles.

Following the economic pressures triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran, the cabinet on April 2 decided on a policy of austerity. The Finance Division subsequently urged cost-cutting across various sectors. Following this, the Cabinet Division issued a directive on April 9, instructing all ministries to implement savings in eight specific areas.

However, the decision to exclude the fuel allowance for senior officials' personal cars from this list has raised serious questions regarding the fairness and effectiveness of the government's austerity measures.

Officers holding the rank of deputy secretary and above in the administration, armed forces, and judiciary are eligible for interest-free car loans. Additionally, these officers receive Tk 50,000 monthly for fuel and maintenance costs.

According to sources from the Ministry of Public Administration, approximately 11,000 officers currently enjoy this facility.

When approached for comment, at least three officials from the Cabinet Division failed to provide a clear explanation for the exclusion of this sector from the recent austerity drive.

One official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said, "The fuel allowance for cars purchased under interest-free loans is not included in the current austerity measures. However, the purchase of new cars under this facility will be temporarily suspended."

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7 killed, 6 hurt as truck flips in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cumilla*

Seven passengers were killed and six others injured after a rice-laden truck lost control and overturned on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Daudkandi yesterday.

The accident occurred at 3:10am in Hasanpur under Daudkandi Police Station, said Daudkandi Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Iqbal Bahar Majumdar.

The victims, mostly agricultural labourers, were heading to Cumilla for work.

The deceased are Mohammad Afzal Hossain, 35, Sohrab Hossain, 40, Salek, 45, Suman, 21, Abu Hossain, Abdur Rashid, 55, and Bishu, 35. They are all from Dinajpur.

Quoting witnesses, police said the truck, travelling towards Chattogram, lost control and veered off the road. Thirteen passengers were riding on top of the vehicle and were trapped underneath when it overturned. Seven died on the spot, while six were injured.

The victims, mostly agricultural labourers, were heading to Cumilla for work. The injured alleged that the truck's helper was driving the vehicle at the time of the crash.

Fire Service and police rescued the injured and took them to a local hospital. They also recovered the bodies.

The OC said the damaged vehicle had been removed and traffic on the highway had resumed.

ANNAPURNA BASE CAMP

A trek beyond their years

NILIMA JAHAN

One is five years old, the other is seven. At an age where most milestones are measured in classrooms, Abyaz Adrito Bhuyan and Anabia Audree Hossain were measuring theirs in Himalayan altitudes.

On April 4, 2026, the young siblings stood at the Annapurna Base Camp, perched 4,130 metres above sea level.

The moment marked the culmination of a demanding nine-day trek, an achievement made notable by the fact that it was completed entirely on foot.

Accompanied by their parents, Shaila Amin Bhuyan and Fahad Hossain, the

knowing where they come from while feeling confident about where they can go."

From the outset, the family set one simple rule: the children would walk every step themselves.

Over nine days, the young trekkers maintained a steady rhythm, hiking between four and seven hours each day.

By the third day, their determination had already turned heads, earning them something of a "celebrity" status among fellow trekkers and local guides.

This achievement, however, was no accident. While Anabia and Abyaz viewed the journey as 'a big mountain walk with family,' their parents had overseen two

emotional," Shaila recalled. "But after a short break, with encouragement and their own determination, they pushed through that final stretch."

At the summit, the rewards were both simple and profound.

"My favourite part was seeing the big snowy mountains," said Anabia, 7. "I felt super proud of myself when people said 'good job' and gave me high-fives."

Abyaz, 5, had his own takeaway, delivered with a hint of sibling rivalry: "I liked that I was faster than my sister."

To ensure safer acclimatisation, the family chose a longer route via Poon Hill, beginning their journey from Ulleri on 27



siblings had traversed one of the world's most iconic and physically challenging high-altitude treks.

For the family, originally from Bangladesh and now based in Portland, Oregon, the journey was about far more than reaching a destination. It was, as Shaila described, "coming full circle."

"Growing up in Bangladesh, the Himalayas always felt both close and distant," she said.

"They were present in our stories, geography, and imagination, yet never truly within reach."

"We wanted our kids to grow up

years of gradual preparation.

The siblings had previously completed a two-day backpacking trip in Norway and tackled multiple day hikes in the Italian Dolomites.

To prepare for the thin Himalayan air, their parents introduced them to a 13,000-foot altitude simulation environment ahead of the expedition.

The most difficult moment came just one kilometre before reaching base camp. After setting out hours before sunrise in sub-zero temperatures, both children hit a wall.

"They were exhausted, cold, and

March and passing through Ghorepani, Tadapani, and Machapuchare Base Camp before reaching their final destination.

Logistics were handled by the Nepal Hiking Team, while the parents remained closely attentive to hydration, rest, and overall health throughout the climb.

Reflecting on the journey during their return to Kathmandu, Shaila said the experience reinforced a powerful lesson.

"Children are capable of far more than we often assume when given the right support and environment," she said. "As a family, we didn't just complete a trek, we grew stronger together with every step."



UNHCR, IOM warn of risks as Rohingyas take sea routes

STAR REPORT

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) said they were deeply saddened by the boat capsizing in the Andaman Sea, describing it as a stark sign of the dangers facing Rohingya refugees and other vulnerable people who resort to risky sea journeys in search of safety and opportunity.

At least 250 people, including Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals, have gone missing after the trawler capsized while heading to Malaysia from Teknaf, according to a joint statement issued yesterday by the two UN agencies.

The vessel, which left southern Bangladesh, reportedly sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, the statement said.

The agencies said the incident underscores the consequences of prolonged displacement and the lack of durable solutions to the Rohingya crisis.

They noted that ongoing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State has dimmed

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Italy pauses defence deal with Israel

AFP, *Rome*

Italy has suspended its defence agreement with Israel, which involves the exchange of military equipment and technology research, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and diplomatic sources said yesterday.

"In view of the current situation, the government has decided to suspend the automatic renewal of the defence agreement with Israel," Meloni said on the sidelines of an event in Verona, according to Italian news agencies ANSA and AGI.

An Italian diplomatic source confirmed to AFP that the agreement had been suspended, saying: "It would have been politically difficult to keep it going."

Approved by Israel in 2006, the agreement is reviewed every five years.

It calls for cooperation across defence industries,

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