



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 – has been slashed 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 Ujjit 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 yesterday on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Daudkandi.

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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