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Falgun festivities obstructed

STAR REPORT

Programmes to celebrate Basanta were forcibly halted in at least three locations across the country over the weekend.

On Chattogram's CRB Road, a Basanta Baron (spring welcoming) programme was cancelled midway yesterday.

The day-long cultural festival, organised by Proma Abritti Sangathan, began on the CRB Shirishatala ground in the morning. The first session, which ran until noon, went smoothly.

However, things took a turn later. One of the organisers, speaking anonymously, said, "We received a call from the Bangladesh Railway [BR] around noon, informing us that the permission for the afternoon session had been cancelled, although we had been granted permission for the entire day."

Some railway officials claimed the instruction to shut the programme down came from higher authorities.

Officials from BR, whose Kalyan Trust handles permits for using the

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5



SPRING IN THE AIR ... Dancers spreading some colours and joy as they perform at the Charukala's Bakultala in Dhaka University on the occasion of Basanta Utsab – a festival celebrating the first day of spring -- yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Natya Utsab postponed amid 'security concerns'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Organisers have postponed Dhaka Mohanagar Natya Utsab, citing security concerns.

This happened amid objections to the event from the BNP's cultural wing Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangshtha (Jasas).

Thandu Raihan, convener of the utsab, said they were forced to postpone the festival after receiving threats from an unidentified group.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police said it did not issue any directives for the postponement.

The festival was scheduled to open at 5:00pm yesterday at the Mohila Samity Auditorium. In the evening, the Liberation War themed play "Payer Awaj Pawa Jay" was set to be staged.

A total of 85 theatre groups were supposed to perform at the festival.

But police officers came to the venue on Friday and requested the organisers to stop the programme, saying they had received complaints about it and that the organisers did not have proper "permissions", according to Thandu.

"We are not hosting any foreign groups, so an event at the Mohila Samity does not require permission, as far as I know," he said.

"We then contacted the OC of Ramma Police Station. In the evening,

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5

Form separate body to redraw constituencies

Reform commission stresses maintaining global standards

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Electoral Reform Commission has proposed a new law in line with internationally accepted guidelines, such as maintaining impartiality and ensuring true representation, while demarcating parliamentary constituencies.

The draft law suggests that parliamentary seats in small districts be demarcated based on a standard that maintains an average population difference of 10 percent. For larger districts, like Dhaka and Chattogram, a 15 percent difference is acceptable.

The full report of the reform commission, submitted to the government on February 8, also proposed the establishment of a separate independent authority for the future delimitation of electoral constituencies. Currently, the Election Commission demarcates constituencies as part of its constitutional duty ahead of general elections.

The EC opposed the proposal for a separate body to handle delimitation, as it is one of the most fundamental pre election tasks outlined in the constitution.

Delimitation refers to the process of

defining the boundaries of an electoral district or constituency. It involves determining the geographic area that will be represented by each member of parliament or legislative assembly in a democratic system.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said, "The EC is already an independent body. Creating another one would complicate matters, as the demarcation of constituencies is a constitutional power of the EC. Establishing another authority would contradict the spirit of the constitution.

"I don't know the details, but I've heard they proposed a new law. Delimitation is my [the EC's] constitutional mandate, and I must retain control over it. If an independent institution handles delimitation, it can set its own timeline. The election might take place, but the delimitation process may not be completed in time."

CEC AMM Nasir Uddin

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Abdul Alim, a member of the reform commission, argued, "This isn't a question of independence; rather, the constitution has entrusted the Election Commission with a specific responsibility.

"Since this issue is often surrounded by

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Time for new European army
Says Zelensky

AFP, Munich

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday called for the creation of a European army, as he insisted Kyiv and its backers on the continent must be listened to in peace talks with Russia.

Speaking at a gathering of top policymakers in Munich, the Ukrainian leader said that with the return of President Donald Trump to the White House Europe could no longer count on Washington to always have its back.

Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Zelensky's rallying cry came a day after he met US Vice President JD Vance as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three year war.

"Let's be honest -- now we can't rule out the possibility that America might say no to Europe

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Scientists turn pollution into fuel in climate breakthrough

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have developed a solar-powered device that can pull pollution from the air and convert it directly into fuel for cars and planes.

The new reactor, built by a team from the University of Cambridge, takes its inspiration from photosynthesis, requiring no cables or batteries in order to turn atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) into syngas.

The researchers say the reactor offers a new solution to the climate crisis, providing an alternative to current Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies.

CCS has been touted as a way of slowing down or even reversing the worst effects of climate change, with the UK government recently committing £22 billion to the technology.

Current CCS methods have been criticised for being too energy-intensive, and for not recycling the captured CO₂. Safety concerns have also been raised about storing pressurised CO₂ underground.

"What if instead of pumping the carbon dioxide underground, we made something useful from it?" said Dr Sayan Kar from Cambridge's Yusuf Hamied Department of Chemistry.

Hamas, Israel complete another prisoner swap

Talks on 'permanent ceasefire' expected to begin next week

AFP, Khan Yunis

Palestinian militants released three Israeli hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian inmates freed by Israel, completing the latest swap despite fears the Gaza truce deal was near collapse.

An AFP journalist saw masked Hamas gunmen parade the hostages onto a stage before a crowd in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis.

Israeli-American Sagiv Dekel-Chen, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov and Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn were made to make statements into a microphone before being handed over to the Red Cross and taken back home to Israeli territory, after being held for more than 16 months.

Clutching gift bags given by their captors, the three men, flanked by fighters, called for the completion of further hostage exchanges under the ceasefire deal.

Not long after, a busload of Palestinian prisoners departed Israel's Ofer Prison and were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, an AFP journalist said.

More buses took inmates from an Israeli prison in the Negev desert to the Gaza Strip, according to another AFP journalist.

Yesterday's swap, the sixth since the truce took effect

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Relatives mourn Palestinian Adel Bushkar, who was killed during an overnight Israeli military raid on the refugee camp of Askar east of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, during his funeral yesterday.

Musk keen on launching Starlink in Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

Elon Musk, head of the US Department of Government Efficiency and owner of satellite internet service provider Starlink, yesterday said he is looking forward to launching Starlink in Bangladesh.

Earlier yesterday, the X account of Bangladesh's chief adviser posted: "Had great meeting with Mr @elonmusk. We agreed to work together and hope to launch Starlink in Bangladesh soon."

Musk replied: "Looking forward to it!"

On Thursday, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing issued a statement saying that Prof Muhammad Yunus had an extensive discussion with Musk to explore future collaboration and advance efforts to introduce Starlink in Bangladesh.

According to the statement, the two discussed the transformational potential of Starlink's satellite communications, particularly for Bangladesh's enterprising youth, rural and vulnerable women, and remote communities.