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The charred and broken school benches of Kalabipara Adarsha High School in Rajshahi after alleged opposition activists early yesterday torched the educational institution even though it was not supposed to be a polling centre during today's elections.

Schools burnt, actually

Education in at least 100 institutions becomes uncertain

WASIM BIN HABIB

The cheers of students with new books in their hands have given way to grim scenes at many schools partially or completely burnt in the last two days. Opposition activists torched around 100 educational institutions, mostly schools, in 23 districts since Friday night in attempts to foil the voting in the parliamentary election to be held today. Almost all of these institutions were designated as polling centres in the areas. Against this backdrop, the Election Commission may use adjacent struc-

tures as polling centres. All the repercussions will befall the students who are no way linked with politics. Teachers and the authorities are concerned as to how long it will take to repair the damaged structures. New textbooks awaiting distribution in some schools were also burnt to ashes along with important records. The arson attacks dealt a further blow to the education of thousands of schoolchildren who had already faced disruption to their studies and examinations owing to perpetual shutdowns and blockades enforced by the BNP.

led opposition last year. Against all odds, the government completed examinations and managed to distribute new textbooks on the first day of the academic year so that students do not lag behind amid the ongoing political turmoil. But the efforts went in vain for these institutions. "I don't know how many days it will take to begin the academic activities... I could not sleep all night," said Afsar Uddin, the headmaster of Lalit Mohan Government Primary School in Shikupa upazila of Jhenidah. SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Schools burnt, actually

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The 120-year-old school was torched Friday night, he said, adding that all records and 108 benches had been destroyed. Abu Shaheed, the headmaster of Namapara Government Primary School at Karimganj upazila in Kishoreganj, said, "Such an incident is unacceptable. How can men do this to an academic institution! It will have a bad impact on the students." Three schools set to be used as polling centres in the upazila were torched around 1:30am yesterday. Kalabipara Adarsha High School in Rajshahi, which is not a polling centre, was burnt down completely. It is located near Nandangachhi Multipurpose High School, a polling centre that was partially burnt. "We built the school brick by brick for 18 years since 1996 and it was damaged overnight," said Rofikul Islam, the headmaster of Kalabipara Adarsha High School. Education of some 225 students of the

school has become uncertain as the authorities will not be able to recover the losses immediately, he added. Expressing resentment and concern, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said the attacks were on civilisation itself. "The anti-liberation forces want to keep the new generations in the dark as they are aiming to cripple the education system," he told The Daily Star. The minister said nearly 100 educational institutions had come under attack since Friday night according to the information he had. "We were under tremendous pressure as schools could not function in the last four months and now these heinous attacks are a fresh blow." Repairing the schools requires money and time, Nahid said, adding, "We'll try to repair those as quickly as possible." He called upon the people to prevent further destruction of educational institutions. Our correspondents from Rajshahi, Jhenidah and Kishoreganj also contributed to this report.