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PRE-POLLS ARSON ATTACKS

Burnt schools await repair

Thousands of students take classes in the open or in damaged classrooms as first month of academic year passes

WASIM BIN HABIB

The air is still filled with the acrid smell of charred doors, windows and furniture. Plasters on the warped walls are falling off at places. It is in this ghostly atmosphere that some 55 children sitting on mats take classes at Mamunshia Government Primary School in Kotchandpur upazila of Jhenidah.

The school was torched on the eve of the January 5 polls. No repair work has begun yet.

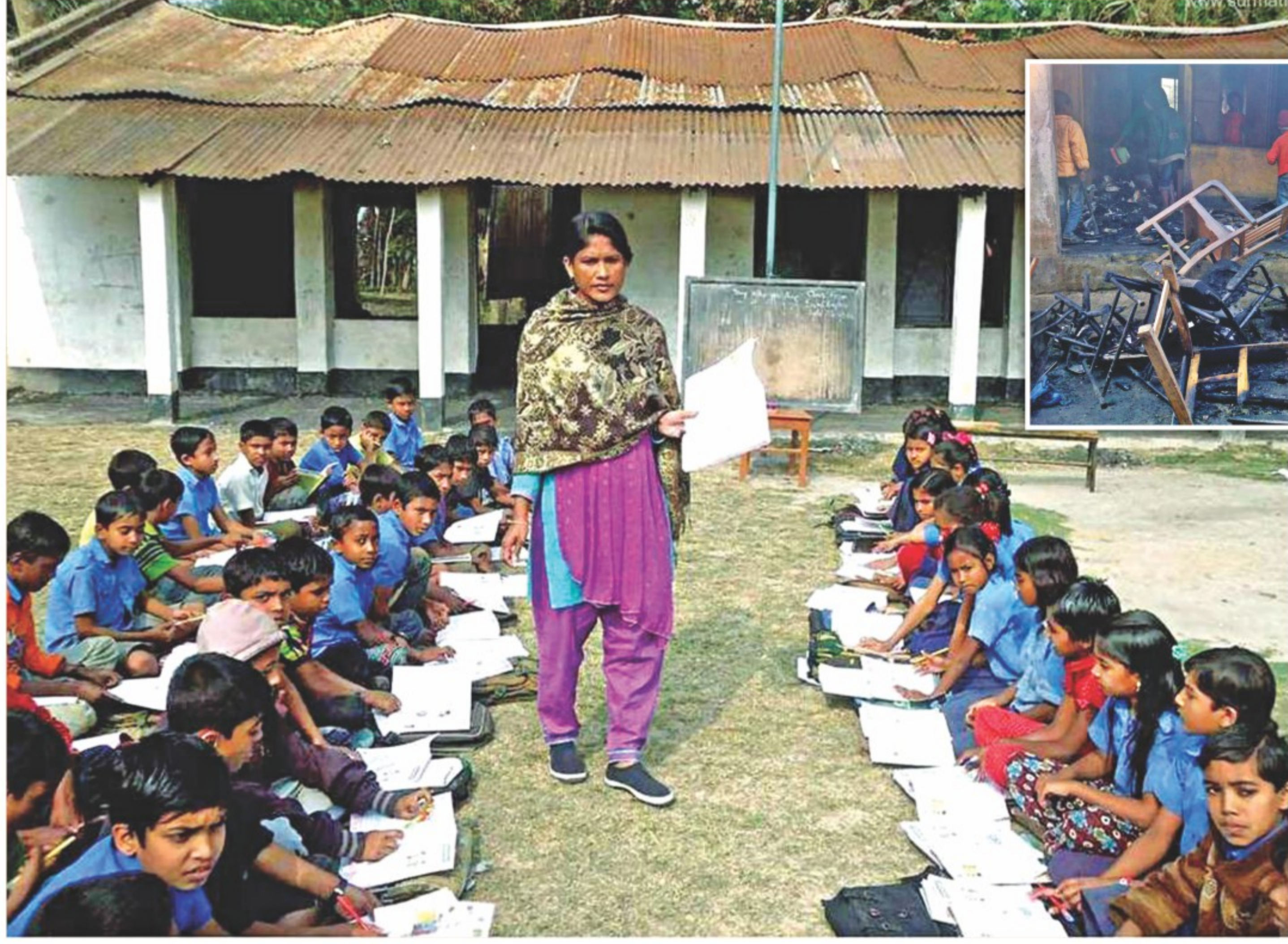
"After coming to school in the morning chill we don't feel good to take our lessons sitting on the cold floor. We feel awful in this burnt room," Shakil Ahmed, a class-V student of the school, told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Abdur Rahim, the headmaster, said, "The situation is difficult even for teachers."

All the four rooms and most of the furniture, including 40 pairs of benches, 16 chairs, eight tables and three almirahs, were completely burnt, he added.

This school has around 300 students. In sunny days, classes are held on the school premises under the open sky

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Students of Garabaria Govt Primary School attend class out in the open. All the furniture at the school, which was designated as a polling centre, were torched by criminals ahead of the January 5 elections. *Inset*, another gutted school, Khudra Brahmanbaria Govt Primary School. More on page 11.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH



Dhirendranath speaks up

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

Ekushey is, and has always been, symbolic of the Bangalee national aspiration for self-expression. Just how important Bangla was to be was a theme already being discussed in the run-up to Partition. There were, of course, those in the non-Bangalee Muslim community in pre-August 1947 India who for their part had begun to root for Urdu as the language of a future Pakistan. And when Pakistan came into being, it was Urdu and English that came in as the languages in which parliamentary business was to be conducted.

It was Dhirendranath Dutta, the quintessential

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BNP focuses on revamp of party

Plans to hold national council by April, strengthen grassroots before resuming anti-govt agitation

RASHIDUL HASAN

Putting its anti-government movement on hold, the BNP now plans a major overhaul to strengthen the organisation.

In the wake of its failure to resist the January 5 election, the party aims to hold councils to inject fresh blood into its different tiers and minimise internal feuds before waging a fresh movement against Sheikh Hasina's new government, which it considers illegal.

The councils, from upazila level upwards, are likely to be held in March and April, party sources said.

"The councils have already been delayed by at least two years. We have decided in principle to hold the councils although the dates are yet to be finalised. Our chairperson and the party's highest forum [standing committee] will take the final decision," Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, a BNP standing committee member, told The Daily Star.

Party insiders said through the national

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NIZAMI'S CONVICTION

Jamaat's hartal now Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jamaat-e-Islami has deferred Monday's country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal to Thursday citing Biswa Ijtema and Saraswati Puja.

The second phase of Biswa Ijtema that began on Friday is scheduled to conclude on Sunday afternoon through Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers) while the puja will be celebrated on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Jamaat's key ally BNP in the 19-party alliance has not yet decided whether to extend its support to the hartal, said BNP office secretary Rizvi Ahmed yesterday.

In a statement, Jamaat acting secretary general Shafiqur Rahman said the party would enforce the shutdown on Thursday instead of Monday so that the devotees joining the Ijtema could smoothly

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RALLY AT SUHRAWARDY UDYAN

19-party yet to get DMP nod

Programme now slated for tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Denied permission by Dhaka Metropolitan Police, the BNP-led 19-party alliance yesterday once again deferred its protest rally by a day.

The rally will now be held tomorrow.

This was the third time in a week the opposition combine has been refused permission by the law enforcers to hold a rally or procession in the capital.

However, in a press release late last night, the BNP said the programme has been rescheduled due to the Akheri Munajat of the second phase of Biswa Ijtema today.

Originally, the rally was to be held at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday to protest the denial of permission to bring out a black flag procession on January 29.

But as the DMP denied the alliance permission for arranging the programme, the combine deferred the rally to today.

Earlier in mid-January, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had announced black flag processions across the country to denounce the January 5 "farical election" and the convening of "illegal parliament".

Talking to this correspondent, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP, last night said he was not aware of receiving any application from the BNP-led alliance seeking permission for a rally.

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BISWA IJTEMA

Akheri Munajat today

HELEMUL ALAM and ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND

The second phase of Biswa Ijtema, the second largest Muslim congregation after Hajj, will end with Akheri Munajat or final prayers today.

Noted Islamic scholar Maulana Jubayerul Hassan from Delhi will conduct the prayers which are expected to begin around 11:00am.

Ministers, lawmakers and political leaders may join the concluding prayers.

Meanwhile, 151 couples got married in a dowry-free wedding ceremony on the second day of the gathering. They did not need to spend money.

Jubayerul Hassan conducted the marriage ceremony after Asr prayers.

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tigers united

banglalink and shakib are now together to start something new.

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