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On convocation eve, gov removes JU interim VC

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KOLKATA: The Jadavpur University campus plunged into chaos on Saturday evening, hours before its annual convocation, following a sudden Raj Bhavan decision to remove officiating vice-chancellor Buddhadeb Sau from the post.

Despite the dramatic turn of events, the university decided to go ahead with the ceremony on Sunday, in which degrees will be conferred on over 5,000 undergraduate, postgraduate, MPhil and PhD students. All officials and heads of departments have been asked to reach the university by 9am, sources said.

Governor CV Ananda Bose's decision - conveyed through a terse communique - caught everyone off guard and came in the wake

of the university's decision to go ahead with the convocation without the governor's nod. The governor is also the chancellor of all state universities.

"The authorization given to Prof Buddhadeb Sau dated August 17, 2023 to exercise the powers and perform the duties of the office of the vice-chancellor, Jadavpur University, till further orders is withdrawn. The order will take immediate effect," the Raj Bhavan communique stated.

Sau, however, appeared resolute on going ahead with Sunday's convocation despite his removal. "I will be there (at the convocation). I have followed the university's act and statute. I cannot be removed like this. Someone who

has recruited me does not have the right to summarily remove me. No one is above law."

Late at night, chief guest for the convocation, UGC chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar, landed in the city and was received at the airport by Sau.

After governor C V Ananda Bose removed Buddhadeb Sau from the post of JU's officiating VC on the eve of the convocation, education minister Bratya Basu posted on X, "It appears that (the governor) is hell bent on destroying the higher education ambience in the state. ...he is not only disregarding the advice of the elected state government, he has stooped to new low by disrespecting the interim judgment of the highest court of the land to maintain status quo in the universities! He has bared his fangs and nails!" Sau has invited Basu to the convocation. The minister said he would "think about it".

Sources said the higher education department has asked Sau not to accept the letter from Raj Bhavan.

The chancellor's office has sought legal opinion whether the money can be recovered from the VC and political forces, which pressured the VC to convene the illegal convocation, said a Raj Bhavan statement. Raj Bhavan sources said the chancellor had received complaints that Sau was defying SC orders. "An inquiry panel will be constituted to probe the serious allegations against the VC. Public money incurred on this unauthorized convocation will be recovered from the salary of the VC and others responsible," said a source.

The drama surrounding JU's convocation has been playing out for over a month. The state higher education department gave its nod to hold the EC and court meetings on the convocation after twice denying permission. But the governor then refused to authorize the officiating VC to convene the court meeting to ratify the degrees to be awarded at the convocation. This prompted an EC meeting on Wednesday that decided the convocation would be held in the interest of students. EC members urged the VC to hold the court meeting and convocation, as per the JU statute.

Jadavpur University Teachers' Association general secretary Partha Pratim Ray said this was "unprecedented". "We want students to get valid degrees. University officials should have kept these complications in mind," he said.

English HoD and state nominee to EC, Manojit Mandal, said, "The chancellor has no power to appoint such VCs, nor does he have the power to remove VCs. Status quo should be maintained. The authorized VC should continue."

General secretary of All Bengal University Teachers' Association termed Bose's move "autocratic" and "against students' interest".

Many professors TOI spoke to said Raj Bhavan should have thought about students before taking such a step. IR research scholar Bidu Chanda said, "My mother has come from north Bengal to attend my convocation. There is an emotion attached to the convocation ceremony. There was no need to create such uncertainties." Sumatra Baral, who will also receive his MPhil degree, said, "I was shocked. How could this be done? It is an important event in our lives. Later, I was a bit relieved when I heard the programme would be held."