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Bengal governor skips convocation after officiating VC he axed leads event

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KOLKATA: Jadavpur University (JU) went ahead with its convocation on Sunday, with officiating vice-chancellor Buddhadeb Sau leading the ceremony despite Bengal governor CV Ananda Bose's late-Saturday decision to remove him. Sau was armed with the Trinamool government's backing. Sau declared JU's 66th convocation open but didn't give a speech and handed over the proceedings to pro VC Amitabha Dutta, who took over the rest of the programme, including handing over certificates.

The governor (also chancellor) stayed away, as did chief guest and University Grants Commission (UGC) chief M Jagadesh Kumar. Kumar did not respond to TOI's queries on his absence.

VC's termination against SC order: WB education minister

Saturday's removal was widely seen as an attempt to scuttle the convocation, over which Sau and Bose had been at loggerheads. The tussle has raged against the backdrop of a long-running feud between Bose and the Mamata Banerjee-led government over top university appointments. The governor is chancellor of all state universities.

State education minister Bratya Basu cited a top court order in the feud and stressed that "according to the

Supreme Court, a status quo has to be maintained". "It means no one can be appointed in that post now and cannot be terminated. So, has anyone been terminated? A letter of termination has only been sent, which is against the Supreme Court directive," Basu said.

On Sau's fate, the minister said: "I am not retaining anyone. I am only saying what the apex court said. I will not step beyond the law."

Basu accused the governor of having "even betrayed and misled" CM Mamata on the issue. "He had assured her that he would sign (give his consent to) the ordinance on VC appointments. He didn't and instead is appointing VCs, terminating them, he is investigating and he is chasing them. This is a pre-planned controversy," Basu said. The ordinance empowers the state in top varsity appointments.

Sau was moved to tears at the end of the ceremony. "I am glad that I have been able to conduct the convocation and hand over degrees to 5,000 students. Had the convocation not taken place, the students would have faced a lot of uncertainty and anxiety regarding their degrees," Sau said.

The uncertainty, however, refuses to go away. The governor's office issued a statement saying the interim VC was removed because he had violated the law. "The chancellor (Bose) did not cancel the convocation, respecting requests from the students. The chancellor has sought expert legal opinion whether he can grant post facto approval to the convocation, otherwise the degrees will become invalid. The chancellor wants to avoid that," the statement read.

Sau said he had received two letters. "One was from Raj Bhavan and the other was from the state government. Since the state government had sent me the letter, I placed both communiques before the university's highest

body, the court, and they requested me to sign the certificates and open the convocation. I kept their request," he added.

Partha Pratim Roy, general secretary of Jadavpur University Teachers' Association, said it would be the university's responsibility to replace the degrees and re-send those to the students, should anyone raise any questions about Sau's signature.

(Inputs from Poulami Roy Banerjee)