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Acting VC leads JU convocation; gov, UGC chairperson stay away

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KOLKATA: Jadavpur University (JU) went ahead with its 66th convocation on Sunday, officiating vice-chancellor Buddhadeb Sau leading the ceremony despite the governor's late-Saturday decision to remove him from his post.

Governor C V Ananda Bose's move was widely seen as an attempt to scuttle the university's convocation, which went ahead without glitches, albeit with two empty chairs: neither the governor (the chancellor), nor UGC chairperson and chief guest M Jagadesh attended.

The convocation was possible because of the state government's unstinting support to Sau. "According to the Supreme Court, a status quo has to be maintained," said education minister Bratya

Basu. "It means no one can be appointed to that post, nor can be terminated. Has anyone been terminated? A letter of termination has been sent, against the SC directive. According to the court, no one has been terminated." Education minister Bratya Basu said interim JU VC Buddhadeb Sau had sent the department a letter on Saturday night, asking whether the convocation should be held.

"Based on the SC order and thinking about the future of the students, we gave our go-ahead. The governor himself had earlier consented," Basu said, adding the governor had "even betrayed and misled the chief minister.

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."

Sau, who was moved to tears at the end of the convocation ceremony, said: "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. I understand the importance of a convocation."

The uncertainty, however, refuses to go away. UGC chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar, who had reached the city on Saturday night, left on Sunday without attending the convocation. Neither did he respond to TOI's queries on his absence. At the same time, the governor's office issued a press statement that said the chancellor had removed the interim VC because he violated the law. "The chancellor 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.

The ceremony started at 10.41am with Sau hoisting the flag while skirting questions from reporters before participating in a ceremonial procession with pro-VC Amitabha Dutta, registrar Snehamanju Basu and dean of faculty councils to the dais. Sau declared annual convocation open but didn't give a speech and handed over the proceedings to Dutta, who took over the rest of the programme, including handing over the certificates, medals and awards as Sau sat on his chair next to the empty seats meant for Bose and Kumar. He sat there for around two hours, sipping tea, as the registrar and pro-VC went ahead with the formalities.

