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**C V ANANDA BOSE**

# Varsities' legal expenses for Bengal Governor Ananda Bose to be probed

The committee formed by the higher education department has to submit its report within a month

SUBHANKAR CHOWDHURY | PUBLISHED 05.01.24, 05:56 AM



Ananda Bose

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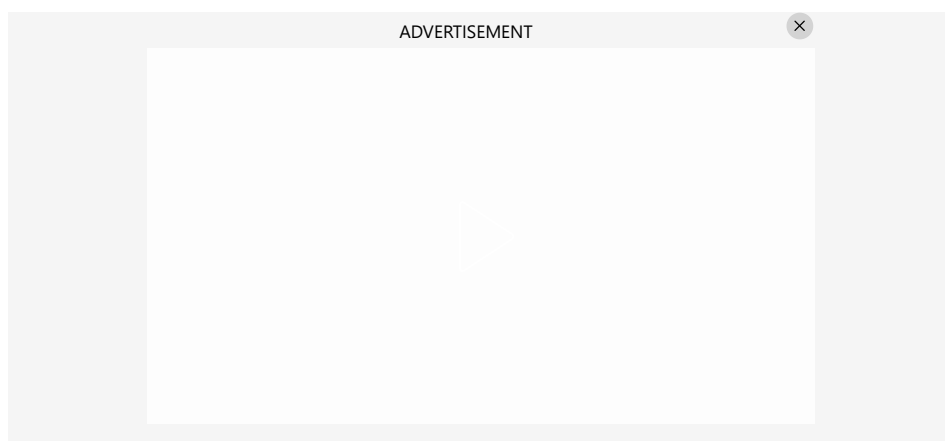
The higher education department has constituted a committee to probe the “justification of legal expenditure” of the universities after it emerged that several state-aided universities paid from their coffers to defend Bengal's governor in a case being fought against the state government over who has the authority to appoint officiating vice-chancellors.

Governor C.V. Ananda Bose is the ex-officio chancellor of all state-aided universities in Bengal.



The committee will look into the sources of legal expenditure of the universities, says a notification signed by the special commissioner to the state government (an official in the education department).

“An enquiry in the nature of audit may also be conducted,” says the notification.



The notification was issued after the education department had on December 18 sought a “clarification” from the universities regarding the “legal expenses incurred on account of the engagement of all advocates to defend the chancellor” in connection with a special leave petition that the state government has filed challenging the chancellor's authority to appoint officiating VCs without consulting the department.

Calcutta University has spent over Rs 10 lakh as part of the legal expenses and Jadavpur University around Rs 60,000, officials in the two universities said.

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The January 3 notification says the four-member committee has been formed “in the exercise of the powers conferred under Section 5 of the West Bengal Universities (Control of Expenditure) Act 1976” to examine the legal expenses incurred by the universities.

The committee will “enquire into the justification of legal expenditure of the universities in connection with the cases and for miscellaneous purposes under legal expenses”.

The committee has to submit its report within a month.

A joint secretary or deputy secretary in the education department will be the member-convener of the committee. The other members are a senior officer of the West Bengal Audit and Accounts Service, a senior law officer of the education department and a representative of the finance (audit) department.

Wednesday’s notification is a follow-up to a letter signed by the special commissioner, which was addressed to the registrars of all state-aided universities on December 18, said an official of the department.

That letter said: “The Department of Higher Education got hold of a letter bearing No.... dated 17/10/2023 issued by the Senior Special Secretary to the Hon’ble Chancellor wherein it is directed to the Vice-Chancellor (Authorised) of Calcutta University to the effect that the legal expenses incurred on account of engagement of all advocates to defend the Hon’ble Chancellor of the University before the Hon’ble Supreme Court in connection with the SLP (State of West Bengal....) and such other cases may be shared by all the Universities concerned and the Calcutta University being the Coordinating University may make transactions towards payment of such fees from time to time.”

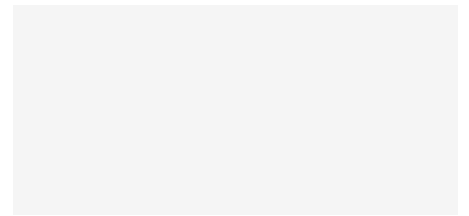
The official said they were amazed to learn that the state-aided universities were participating in a legal battle against the government in deference to the chancellor’s wish with money granted from the state coffers.

Manojit Mandal, a Jadavpur University professor and the state government's nominee to JU and another state-aided university, said: “The committee has been constituted with experts to stem such misuse and unauthorised use of public money by ad-hoc VCs.”

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