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## JU alumnus arrested, SFI calls strike and seeks Bratya Basu's arrest; minister decries 'hooliganism'

Seven FIRs have been drawn up, including six against current and former students and others who have been accused of assault, outraging the modesty of a woman, damaging public property, snatching, and other offences

Monalisa Chaudhuri, Subhankar Chowdhury

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Fragments of makeshift gates, erected to welcome minister Bratya Basu, that were smashed by RSF supporters.

Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

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- f** A former Jadavpur University student who now works for a leading software company was arrested early on Sunday in connection with Saturday's arson and violence on the JU campus that left education minister Bratya Basu injured.
- x**
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- e** Seven FIRs have been drawn up, including six against current and former students and others who have been accused of assault, outraging the modesty of a woman, damaging public property, snatching, and other offences.

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The seventh FIR is against an unknown driver of an unknown vehicle, charged with reckless actions endangering lives. Basu's car allegedly injured several protesting students.

“Two suo motu cases have been started. Five other cases (have been registered) based on complaints from different persons,” city police commissioner Manoj Verma said.

“One person has been arrested in the arson case. He has been remanded in police custody till March 12.”

The police identified the arrested man as Mohammad Sahil Ali, 25, a native of Mohammad Bazar in Birbhum who now lives in a rented apartment at Bijoygarh in Calcutta.

The former student of JU’s construction engineering department was picked up from his apartment past midnight, joint commissioner (crime) Rupesh Kumar said.

Basu had come to JU to attend an event conducted by a Trinamool-backed teachers’ body when he faced student demands for campus elections, stalled for five years.

As the minister was about to leave, amid contradictory versions of why talks with students could not be held, protesting students attacked his car and tried to prevent it from leaving.

But the car drove off, causing a student, Indranuj Roy, to fall on the metalled driveway, injuring his head and an eye. A part of his body allegedly came under the wheels.

CPM student arm SFI on Sunday demanded Basu’s arrest alleging his car ran over the protesting students, leaving “at least three injured”. The Left Front too sought the minister’s arrest.

The SFI has called a students’ strike on Monday across Bengal’s university campuses, alleging brutality by Basu and a “large-scale conspiracy” to unleash terror on the JU campus by bringing in outsiders.

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Roy has been admitted to the KPC Medical College and Hospital where he has received 14 stitches around the left eye. Hospital officials said his condition was stable. Another injured student, Sumanta Pramanik, was discharged from the hospital on Sunday.

The police said several students' bodies had also called for meetings and road-disruption programmes on Monday.

Basu, in an interview with ABP Ananda on Sunday, accused the student hecklers of "spreading hooliganism".

"I wanted to meet the students to discuss the (campus) elections after my speech ended. Supporters of the SFI and the Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) came for the discussions," he said.

"However, these students (members of an ultra-left group who allegedly heckled him) did not come. They wanted me and the vice-chancellor to meet them," he added.

"Still, I wanted to meet four to six students. But they wanted to come in a group of 40. How could the discussions be held? Actually, they wanted to create disruptions. They wanted to spread hooliganism. They are a gang of 30 to 40 students."

Basu said he was sorry that a student was injured.

"I am sorry about what happened. This was uncalled for and should not have happened. I want to speak to the student and his family," he said.

"I have heard that his father is associated with Calcutta University. You will come to know later what action I take. But at the same time, you have to bear in mind that I was attacked.

"They climbed atop the bonnet of my car. They were clinging to my car. I was not driving.... My driver was new. He (pressed the accelerator) amid the chaos and the accident happened. Our teachers have been attacked as well."

Basu said it was unfortunate that the SFI had called the strike on Monday, the day the higher secondary exams start.

“We (Trinamool) could have given a call for a strike on Monday (against the attack on the minister). But we did not because we did not want to cause any hardship to the examinees,” he said.

JU’s authorised vice-chancellor, Bhaskar Gupta, said: “I have heard that the students have called a strike on Monday. But whatever unfolded on the campus on Saturday was unfortunate.

“I still can’t understand why the students wanted a discussion with the minister on Saturday on the issue of campus elections. That was not the forum. Even then, how could he discuss it with 40 students? I believe good sense will prevail.”

Anushna Das, one of the protesting students who had climbed atop the minister’s car on Saturday, said: “The trouble started as the minister did not want to speak. He has stalled the campus elections over the past five years. When we wanted to speak to him, he ran his car over a student. We will escalate our protests.”

Kishalay Roy, an international relations student who was part of the TMCP delegation on the campus on Saturday, said: “The minister was more than willing to talk to the students. But these ultra-left students wanted to create trouble on the campus.”

Commissioner Verma and additional director-general of police (law and order) Jawed Shamim said there would be adequate police arrangements to ensure that no higher secondary examinee faces any problem in reaching their venue.

“In case of any nuisance and disruptions causing inconvenience to students, legal action will be taken,” Shamim said.

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