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Burnt smell, tattered gates: Vandalism, arson at TMC-backed union office in Jadavpur University

Members of the ultra-left Revolutionary Students' Front (RSF) are accused of attacking the office twice after one of their supporters allegedly came under the wheels of education minister Bratya Basu's car

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The Trinamool Shiksha Bandhu Samity office at JU that was set on fire on Saturday.

Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

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- Charred objects lay strewn on Sunday inside and outside the office of the Trinamool-backed non-teaching employees' union at Jadavpur University, following alleged vandalism and arson by students the evening before.
- Members of the ultra-left Revolutionary Students' Front (RSF) are accused of attacking the office twice after one of their supporters allegedly came under the wheels of education minister Bratya Basu's car.

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Around 10am on Sunday, the charred remains gave out an acrid smell. The benches outside the office had been yanked off. The AC, lights and fans had been broken and burnt. The walls were covered in soot.

A signboard that read “Trinamool Shiksha Bandhu Samity” lay on the ground, partially burnt.



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“The office was attacked twice. Around 7pm, it was vandalised. At 10pm, it was set on fire,” said Binay Singh, president of the JU unit of the non-teaching employees’ union.

A forensic team collected samples from the ground-floor office, adjacent to the Jupiter Building on the campus, on Sunday.

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Before the arson, RSF supporters had allegedly smashed the makeshift gates that the Trinamool-backed West Bengal College and University Professors Association (WBCUPA) had erected to welcome Basu elsewhere on the campus.

On Sunday afternoon, fragments of the gates were scattered all around. Banners carrying the minister’s image lay torn.

The association had invited the education minister, in his capacity as president of the organisation, to its annual general meeting on the campus on Saturday.

As some students demanding campus elections allegedly heckled Basu and attacked his car on Saturday evening, breaking the windscreens, one of them is said to have come under the wheels of the minister’s car. He has been admitted to KPC Hospital with eye and head injuries.

CPM student arm SFI has called for a strike across Bengal's university campuses on Monday in protest against the alleged attack on the students.

Subhodeep Bandyopadhyay, a member of the SFI state committee, said: "The education minister, without answering questions about the possibility of campus polls, ran his car over the protesting students."

The SFI led a protest march from Jadavpur police station to the 8B bus stand on Sunday.

The prospect of a strike left several JU students concerned about a disruption of the academic environment.

"Whatever happened was unfortunate. There is a clear ploy to disrupt the academic environment of the campus," Tirtharaj Bardhan, a third-year student, said.

"Everyone wants the student union elections to be held. But the way the demands were taken up was condemnable. This will disturb the academic atmosphere."

Basu told the news channel ABP Ananda on Sunday that the state government was keen to hold campus elections.

"I will talk to the chief minister about this. We may hold the elections soon. I wanted to talk to the students about this at JU on Saturday," he said.

Student elections at JU and most other universities and colleges in Bengal have not been held since January 2020. The state higher education department had told JU in January that the exercise would have to wait until an ongoing process to amend the rules governing campus polls was completed.

An education department official said there was a proposal to reserve 55 per cent of the seats for women students. "The amendment proposals are lying with the law department," he said.

Ujan Bhuiya, an RSF supporter on the JU campus, said that if the minister had so wished, he could have held talks with the students. "Instead he mowed down our comrade Indranuj Roy," she said.

Asked about the alleged vandalism, she said: “RSF supporters were not involved in this vandalism. Our names are being unnecessarily dragged into it.”

Manojit Mandal, JU professor and member of the WBCUPA, said Saturday’s event was not the right place for such a violent protest by the students against the minister.

He said Basu had told the students he was ready to talk with them at the open-air theatre, the venue of the programme, after his speech.

“But those from the RSF and a few other ultras did not want to come and attacked the minister and his car. They then accused the minister of not holding talks and sought to detain him on the campus,” Mandal said.

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