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Gaza City, January 11: A Palestinian student forcibly relocated from the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank to Gaza two months before she was to complete her university studies was awarded her degree in the besieged territory on Sunday.

Berlanty Azzam, 22, who on October 28 was detained and sent to Gaza by Israel because she had a Gaza ID, said she had "challenged the occupation" by completing her studies at the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University.

"I am sad because I was not able to graduate with my colleagues in Bethlehem, but I was able to challenge the occupation and today I am graduating from the university despite all the difficulties," she said at a ceremony attended by family and friends, her eyes filled with tears of joy.

Peter Bray, the vice chancellor of Bethlehem University, praised Azzam's determination as he awarded the bachelor's degree in Gaza City, saying the school "was not going to let the Israeli military prevent her from graduating."

He added that her professors had worked with her via the telephone and Internet to allow her to complete her studies from Gaza.

Azzam was handcuffed and blindfolded when she was sent to Gaza in October, according to the Israeli human rights group Gisha, which unsuccessfully petitioned Israel's supreme court to allow her to return.

The court upheld the state's decision that Azzam may not return to the West Bank because she had lived there since 2005 without the necessary Israeli permit.

The state admitted that Azzam had received a permit to travel to the West Bank via Israel in 2005 but argued that she should have obtained a further authorization to remain there, even though it admitted none existed at the time, according to Gisha.

Israel controls the Palestinian population registry and since 2000 has not permitted address changes from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank.

Like Azzam, an estimated 25,000 Palestinians could be forcibly sent to Gaza because their addresses are registered there, according to Gisha.

Israel has severely restricted the travel of Palestinians into and out of Gaza since June 2007.

Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) are Palestinian territories that have been under illegal Israeli occupation since 1967.