

PREZ URGES STUDENTS TO HELP THOSE LEFT BEHIND

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BALASORE

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday urged students of Fakir Mohan University to help those left behind in the developmental journey. Addressing the convocation ceremony of the institute in Balasore, she said that a society's growth lies in the progress of everyone. She said that the key to success in every endeavour is dedication.

The President paid tributes to 'Vyasakabi' Fakir Mohan Senapati and said that during her student days, she was deeply influenced by his timeless story, 'Rebatu' and that influence remains indelible. She underlined that the National Education Policy-2020 emphasises the importance of mother tongue and guides students to stay connected to their culture.

"India has a rich knowledge tradition. Our scriptures and manuscripts are full of knowledge and wisdom," Murmu said. Apart from poetry and literature, they are also a source of knowledge in areas including science, medicine, astronomy and architecture, she said.

By understanding the past and comprehending the present, the students can shape their own future as well as that of the country, the President said. She congratulated the graduating students and said that through knowledge, passion and commitment, they can achieve respect and recognition in society. Noting that successful and meaningful lives are not the same, Murmu said that while the former is good, the latter is even better.

She said it is important to achieve fame, gain prestige and become financially secure, but one should also do something for others. The President was happy to note that Fakir Mohan University gives importance to research and outreach programmes in addition to academic stud-



MURMU PERFORMS 'PINDA DAAN'

HANS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu visited Biraja temple in Jajpur district on Tuesday morning to perform the 'pinda daan' ritual. Elaborate security arrangements were made at the temple, with about 600 security personnel deployed for the presidential visit.

Murmu performed the 'pinda daan' ritual at 'Navi Gaya', a sacred pool on the temple premises, for the

salvation of the souls of her ancestors. According to mythology, after demon Gayasura was killed by Lord Vishnu, his body was divided into three parts. His head fell at Gaya in Bihar, his feet at Pithapuram

growth, innovation and social transformation, she said. "By nurturing critical thinking, ethical leadership and research that responds to local and global challenges, institutions of higher learning can shape a future that is sustainable, equitable and rooted in human values," Murmu added.

She expressed confidence that Fakir Mohan University,



in Andhra Pradesh and the naval portion at Jajpur in Odisha.

Before beginning the 'pinda daan' ritual, Murmu performed puja at the 13th-century shrine where Goddess Biraja is worshipped in the form of Durga with two hands or 'dwibhuja', spearing the chest of Mahisasura with one and pulling his tail with the other.

All schools in Jajpur town and its nearby areas were shut in view of the President's visit.

tor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, officials said.

On the occasion, honorary doctorate degrees were conferred upon three eminent personalities for their outstanding contributions in their respective fields -- Anuradha Biswas (sports), Santanu Kumar Acharya (literature) and Guru Gopal Chandra Panda (Odissi music).

Performing the sacred 'kanyadan', the Chief Minister Majhi spoke with emotion, declaring that he stood there not as the head of the government but as a father and brother to

CM blesses 201 couples as govt launches mass wedding scheme



SUNIL MOHAN PATNAIK
BERHAMPUR

UNDER the benevolent gaze of Maa Taratarini, where faith meets destiny atop the sacred Shakti Pitha in Purushottampur block of Ganjam district, 201 young couples from economically weaker families stepped into a new chapter of life on Tuesday as Odisha formally launched the Mukhyamantri Kanya Bibha Yojana (MKBY).

The air resonated with Vedic chants, halahuli, haribol and the soulful notes of sankha and mahuri, turning the inaugural mass marriage ceremony into a moving confluence of tradition, compassion and State support.

The historic occasion was graced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida, ministers Bibhuti Bhusan Jena and Gokulananda Mallick, nearly all MLAs of Ganjam, senior district officials and the families of the newlyweds,

every bride. "A daughter is never a burden," he said, "she is God's blessing." His words drew heartfelt applause, echoing the spirit of the scheme that seeks to transform social attitudes while easing financial distress.

Announced in the State Budget and formally notified in late 2025, the MKBY is designed to help economically weaker families solemnise their daughters' marriages with dignity and cultural respect. Each eligible bride will receive assistance of Rs 51,000, including Rs 35,000 through Direct Benefit Transfer to her bank account, Rs 10,000 towards a wedding gift kit comprising saree, jewellery and essential household items, and Rs 6,000 to support community or mass marriage arrangements.

The initiative aims to reduce the crushing burden of wedding expenses while discouraging dowry practices and preventing child or forced marriages.

The scheme will be implemented across all districts of Odisha from 2025-26 to 2029-30. Applications will be processed at the district level with strict verification.

Eligibility conditions include the bride's age between 18 and 35 years and the groom's between 21 and 35 years, with both being permanent residents of Odisha. Priority will be given to widows opting for remarriage, persons with disabilities, PVTGs, Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, with only one eligible woman per family allowed to avail the benefit.

Highlighting the government's commitment to women's empowerment and social security, the Chief Minister linked MKBY with the Subhadra Yojana, citing inspiring examples such as President Droupadi Murmu, Odisha Assembly Speaker Surama Padhi and Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida as symbols of what women can achieve when given opportunity and support.

The rituals were conducted by 201 Brahmin pandits under the guidance of chief pandit Ashok Kumar Padhi, with marriages solemnised in 201 separate mandaps. As the sacred knots were tied and blessings showered, tears of joy glistened in many eyes, marking not just the union of couples, but the union of tradition with a compassionate state.

On this auspicious day, Odisha did more than host a mass marriage; it reaffirmed a promise that every daughter, regardless of economic standing, deserves respect, security and a dignified beginning to her married life.

Reframing Public Health Education: From metrics to meaning

RAMYA PINNAMANENI &
NITHYI RAMESH

THE number of public health schools and programmes in India is at an all-time high and continues to grow annually. As of 2016, only 44 institutions in India offered Masters of Public Health (MPH) degrees. Over the last decade, this number of public health programmes has risen significantly to 129 across India's 28 States and eight Union Territories. Increased visibility of public health during the COVID-19 pandemic drove a renewed focus on essential functions, including epidemiology, health communication and emergency response.

The pandemic redefined public perception, elevating public health from a misunderstood field to a critical pillar of national preparedness and systemic resilience. This change increased both student

interest and institutional willingness to offer formal public health training. Significant national R&D funding represents a more recent lever that could further accelerate this expansion.

The Indian government recently launched a ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) Fund to boost private sector-led innovation, with an initial outlay of ₹20,000 crore for FY 2025-26. As public health capacity-building initiatives grow and research avenues expand, it is an opportune time to ask: What is the true purpose of an education in public health?

Beyond degrees: The purpose of Public Health Education

As we reflect on the purpose of public health education as educators and practitioners in the field, we ask ourselves and fellow colleagues and stakeholders, is it appropriate to

judge a scholar's success by the citation counts of their published work or by the impact they've made on the communities they serve? Is our goal to produce more publications in journals or to impact our communities? Or does it even have to be one over the other? As India builds its public health workforce, the answers to these questions will define the leaders we develop and the health systems we strengthen.

Education beyond the classroom

A persistent challenge is that many students enter public health programmes without clearly understanding what the field entails. This is understandable, given the vast applications for an MPH degree. Students come from various academic backgrounds such as dentistry, medicine, life sciences, economics and are often guided by parental advice or

the prospect of employment. Career mentorship is often inconsistent, funneling individuals into community-facing roles despite a lack of genuine passion or interest.

A shift towards competency-based education

When we pursued our MPH degrees a decade ago, public health education was largely project-driven and mostly undertaken by MBBS and BDS graduates. Curriculum design often prioritised faculty interests and current projects over a shared understanding of core competencies for graduates. Today, despite the increasing number of MPH programmes and graduates, India still does not have a national framework that defines what a public health graduate education should entail.

This is where competency-based education becomes important.

3rd Bilasuni Mahotsava celebrated with fanfare



HANS NEWS SERVICE
CUTTACK

THE third Bilasuni Mahotsava at Bilasuni village in Niali block of Cuttack district was celebrated with immense grandeur and fanfare. The three-day Sports-cum-Cultural Carnival from January 30 to February 1 drew a massive crowd of 10,000 people. Hosted by Gopabandhu Evergreen Anchalika Yuba Parishad (GEAYP) and Voluntary As-

sociation for Empowerment, Development and Action (VEDA), the mega event was a huge success. On the festival's opening day, State Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahalingh pledged his support for the comprehensive development of Bilasuni and the empowerment of its residents.

The Mahotsava began with the Shree Gopaljew Football Tournament, featuring competition among eight local football teams. The Ma-

hotsava's highlight was the Mahadev Mahapatra Memorial Inter-District and Inter-State Football Tournament, featuring eight top-tier teams. While the Cuttack team won the Cup, Khurda finished as the runners-up.

The highlight of the Mahotsava was the spectacular three-evening cultural extravaganza.

The line-up of the artistes who mesmerised the audience with their power-packed performances included playback

MARCH 31 DEADLINE FOR WARD DELIMITATION

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

THE Odisha government has set March 31 as the deadline for completion of the delimitation of wards and seat reservation process ahead of holding the elections in the newly constituted urban local bodies (ULBs) and two other municipal corporations, an official said on Tuesday.

The State Election Commission (SEC) has started the process of holding elections in the 28 newly constituted Notified Area Councils (NACs) and seven new municipalities,

which were declared by the State government as new ULBs in December 2025.

In a letter on Monday, Director of Municipal Administration Arindam Dakua has directed magistrates-cum-collectors of 18 districts to complete the exercise by March 31, 2026, in line with the Odisha Municipal Act, 1950. Earlier, the SEC, in a letter to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) department, had emphasised the need to complete delimitation and reservation of seats to enable timely elections, which must be held within six months of the



notifications which is by June 2026.

In the letter to district collectors, the Director of Municipal Administration suggested that the draft notification for ward delimitation and seat reservation, inviting objections and suggestions, should be done on February 12. "The objections can be submitted until February 21, 2026, and provisional notifications will be published on February 26, 2026," the letter said.

Appeals against the provisional notifications can be filed from February 26 to March 13, the letter said, adding that hearings on

appeals will occur between March 16 and 28. It said that the final notifications will be issued by March 31 and copies sent to the SEC, government, and ULBs concerned.

The new ULBs were located in the districts of Angul, Bolangir, Balasore, Bargarh, Bhadrak, Boudh, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Jajpur, Nayagarh, Kalahandi, Khurda, Koraput, Mayurbhanj, Rayagada, Sambalpur, and Subarnapur. The SEC has also informed the H&UD for holding similar processes in Sambalpur and Puri municipal corporations.