
MODERN ODISHA

From Royal Rails to Modern Tracks: 125 Years of Paralakhemundi Light Railway (PLR)

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From Royal Rails to Modern Tracks: 125 Years of Paralakhemundi Light Railway (PLR)

Celebrating the Legacy of Odisha's First Privately-Owned Railway

The Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway (ECoR) recently commemorated a remarkable milestone — **the 125th anniversary of the Paralakhemundi Light Railway (PLR)**, a testament to Odisha's enduring railway heritage. Held in the Gajapati district, this celebration honored one of the state's oldest and most iconic rail networks, highlighting both its royal origins and its continued relevance.

A Royal Vision: The Genesis of PLR

The story of the **Paralakhemundi Light Railway** dates back to 1898, when **Maharaja Goura Chandra Gajapati Narayan Dev II**, the visionary ruler of Paralakhemundi, envisioned connecting his princely state with the mainline railway network. This dream materialized on **April 1, 1900**, with the inauguration of a **40-km narrow gauge railway line from Naupada to Paralakhemundi** — making it **Odisha's first privately owned railway**.

By 1931, under the leadership of his son, **Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayan Dev**, the line was further extended to **Gunupur**, increasing its total stretch to **51 km**. Over the years, the PLR became a lifeline for the people of Gajapati district, enhancing connectivity, trade, and cultural integration.

Transition and Transformation

The management of the PLR was transferred to **Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR)** in 1934. Despite its narrow gauge limitations, the PLR continued to serve the region diligently. Public demands for modernization led to multiple surveys in the 1950s and 1960s, ultimately resulting in the **conversion to broad gauge**. This transformation culminated in **2010**, when services resumed, and by **2011**, the entire **Naupada-Gunupur corridor** was fully

operational.

Honouring Heritage: Celebrations at 125

To celebrate 125 years of the PLR's legacy, ECoR organized a series of events that combined festivity with reverence. **Paralakhemundi Station was beautifully illuminated**, and competitions like **essay writing, painting, and elocution** were held for schoolchildren under the theme '**Virasat Se Vikas Tak**' (**From Heritage to Development**). These initiatives aimed to instill pride and awareness about the PLR's contribution to regional progress.

A special event was hosted at **Paralakhemundi Railway Station**, where senior officials, railway personnel, and local residents paid homage to the royal legacy. The **Rail Users Group** added a historical dimension by **donating rare photographs of the royal family** and proposing to **restore the old station building** and create an **art gallery** within the premises.

The Road Ahead: Modernization and Revival

As part of the **₹16.4 crore Amrit Bharat Station Scheme**, Paralakhemundi Station is undergoing a massive facelift. The redevelopment project includes:

- **A 12-meter-wide foot overbridge**
- **Passenger lifts** for easier accessibility
- **Premium waiting halls**
- **Divyangjan-friendly toilets**
- **Eco-friendly lighting**
- **Wider parking zones**
- **Landscaped gardens and commercial areas**

Notably, the architectural redesign draws inspiration from the **Maharaja's palace**, blending tradition with modernity and sustainability. With nearly **70% of the work completed**, officials are confident of finishing the entire redevelopment by **the end of 2025**.

A Heritage That Lives On

The legacy of the Paralakhemundi Light Railway is more than a historical footnote; it's a living symbol of how **visionary leadership, community spirit, and modern planning** can work hand in hand. What began as a royal initiative in the colonial era now stands as a **beacon of connectivity and development**, seamlessly blending Odisha's past with its promising future.

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