

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

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Iran confirms increase in IAEA nuclear inspections at Fordo

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran confirmed on Saturday that it has allowed watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to increase the number of inspections it carries out into Tehran's nuclear programme, state media reported.

"We have increased capacity – it is natural that the number of inspections should also increase," the official *IRNA* news agency quoted the country's nuclear chief Mohammad Es-

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes

lami as saying.

"When we carry out nuclear activities, and where we deal with nuclear materials, changing the scale will naturally change the monitoring level," he added.

Mr. Eslami's comments came after an IAEA report said that Iran had agreed to increased monitoring.

Last week, the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran had revamped Fordo enrichment plant so it could "significantly increase the rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60%", close to the 90% needed to make a nuclear weapon.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and denies it is seeking an atomic weapons capability.

Britain, France and Germany had on Tuesday "condemned" Tehran's latest steps to expand its nuclear programme.



Georgia chooses far-right loyalist as its new President

Mikheil Kavelashvili, known for his vehement anti-West diatribes, is the leader for a five-year term; Opposition denounces the poll as 'illegitimate'; sitting President Zurabishvili refuses to step down

Agence France-Presse
TBILISI

Georgia's ruling party on Saturday installed a far-right loyalist as President in a controversial election process, amid a deepening constitutional crisis and weeks of mass pro-EU protests.

The Black Sea nation has been in turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party claimed victory in contested October parliamentary elections. Its decision last month to delay European Union membership talks ignited a fresh wave of mass rallies.

An electoral college, controlled by the ruling Georgian Dream party and boycotted by the Opposition, elected Mikheil Kavelashvili with 224 votes as the country's next figure-head leader for a five-year term, central election commission chair Giorgi Kalandrishvili said.

The Opposition has denounced Saturday's election as "illegitimate" and said the sitting President,



Crisis deepens: An electoral college controlled by the Georgian Dream party elected Mikheil Kavelashvili with 224 votes. REUTERS

Salome Zurabishvili remains the country's sole legitimate leader.

Pro-Western Zurabishvili – who is at loggerheads with Georgian Dream – has refused to step down and is demanding new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown.

On Saturday morning, protesters began gathering outside the Parliament building – which was cordoned off by police – ahead of a rally scheduled for the evening.

A former diplomat, Ms. Zurabishvili is a hugely

popular figure among protesters, who view her as a beacon of Georgia's European aspirations.

Ahead of Saturday's vote, Ms. Zurabishvili called it "a parody. It will be an event entirely devoid of legitimacy, unconstitutional and illegitimate," she told a press conference.

Opposition groups accuse Georgian Dream of rigging the October 26 parliamentary vote, backsliding on democracy and moving Tbilisi closer to Russia – all at the expense of the Caucasus nation's constitutionally mandated

bid to join the EU.

Mr. Kavelashvili, 53 – the sole candidate for the largely ceremonial Presidential post – is known for his vehement anti-West diatribes and opposition to LGBTQ rights.

Georgian Dream scrapped direct Presidential elections in 2017.

With Ms. Zurabishvili refusing to leave office, Opposition lawmakers boycotting Parliament, and protests showing no signs of abating, the legitimacy of Mr. Kavelashvili's election has been undermined from the outset.

On Friday, Amnesty International said protesters had faced "brutal dispersal tactics, arbitrary detention and torture". There have also been raids on the offices of Opposition parties and arrests of their leaders.

Washington has imposed fresh sanctions on Georgian officials, barring entry for around 20 people accused of "undermining democracy in Georgia", including ministers and parliamentarians.

'AI is rapidly transforming the Indian security industry'

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

The Indian security sector is rapidly transforming, driven by technological advancements and evolving threats, industry executives and experts said.

Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered solutions are revolutionising security systems, while strategic partnerships are fostering innovation in critical areas like quantum technology and cybersecurity, they said. With growing demand for advanced security solutions, the domestic market is expanding, positioning Indian companies as global leaders through their technological expertise and manufacturing prowess, they pointed out.

"The global security industry is valued at \$120 bil-

AI enhances the functionality of cameras by offering real-time monitoring, and proactive alerts

lion, growing at 8% CAGR annually until 2030. As security becomes an essential focus for governments, institutions and private sectors alike, the demand is set to increase exponentially in the coming years," pointed out Shashank Sambyal, zonal head for the north and east region at Godrej Enterprises.

"Government regulations like Standardisation Testing & Quality Certification (STQC), are strengthening industry standards, ensuring secure data management," Mr. Sambyal said.

M.A. Johar, president of strategic business at CP Plus, said, "The CCTV surveillance sector in India is currently valued at approximately ₹9,000 crore, growing at rate of 30% annually. The potential for further expansion is immense, and Indian brands are gaining global attention as the world increasingly looks towards India for surveillance solutions."

'Demand for cameras'

"The integration of AI technologies is revolutionising the industry. AI enhances the functionality of cameras by offering real-time monitoring, proactive alerts, and data analytics. We are also witnessing how the demand for cameras has expanded beyond traditional security applications," he added.

MFN clause freeze won't hit investments in India: Switzerland

Country's suspension of the 'Most Favoured Nation' tag for India won't impact the India-EFTA trade deal: India says tax treaty to be reworked

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Switzerland's decision to suspend the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment for India under the two countries' 30-years old double-taxation avoidance agreement (DTAA) from January 1 will neither affect the free trade deal recently reached between the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nations nor affect Swiss investments into India, the country's officials told *The Hindu*.

While Indian officials said they will go into the details of the Swiss move, they indicated that double taxation treaty with the EFTA-bloc nation is going to be renegotiated in light of the EFTA-India Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) agreed upon this year.

In a statement dated December 11, Swiss authorities had announced that the MFN clause under the DTAA was being suspended, as India's apex court had held that it does not get automatically triggered until it is notified by the government under the Income Tax Act of 1961. Indian companies operating in Switzerland currently benefit from a reduced tax rate of 5% on dividends and other incomes, but will be liable to pay 10% tax



Randhir Jaiswal

from the coming year.

The TEPA signed with the four-nation EFTA bloc is a unique free trade agreement, as it includes a binding commitment of \$100 billion investment and the creation of one million direct jobs in India by companies from those four countries over the next 15 years.

Asked if the MFN clause suspension could dent the TEPA pact hopes, a Swiss embassy official in New Delhi said there is no direct impact on the EFTA-India TEPA. "In particular, this week's decision does not negatively affect investment from Switzerland to India," the official said.

"The question of the interpretation by Switzerland and India of the most-favoured-nation clause concerns the residual tax rate applicable to dividends based on the double taxation agreement paid by a company of one contracting state to a resident of the other contracting state. However, the change

in this residual rate has no impact on the validity of the double taxation agreement as such, or on any other treaties under international law concluded between Switzerland (independently or under the EFTA framework) and India," the official emphasised to *The Hindu*.

India's External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the double taxation treaty with Switzerland is to be renegotiated because of the TEPA deal with EFTA nations.

The suspension of the MFN clause by Switzerland was triggered by an October 2023 ruling against its validity by the Supreme Court on 11 petitions that were combined with a plea by Swiss major Nestle SA.

"This suspension basically adapts the Swiss interpretation of the most favoured nation clause to the one taken by India and confirmed by its Supreme Court," explained a Swiss trade expert.

While Switzerland had, in 2021, granted the 5% residual tax rate for Indian firms retroactively with effect from July 2018, the Indian competent authority, on the other hand, did not grant reciprocity in applying the MFN clause towards Switzerland, and this decision was upheld by the apex court last year, he pointed out.

Bovine H5N1 displays pronounced neurotropism in many mammals

Pronounced neurotropism of the 2024 H5N1 virus belonging to the 2.3.4b clade is highlighted by high viral loads in the brain and minimal or no viral presence in the lungs of several species, suggesting a significant shift in virus behaviour

R. Prasad

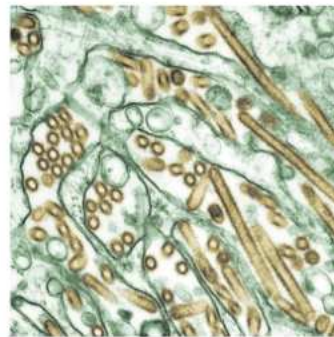
A study investigated and compared the tissue tropism of a 2004 H5N1 strain isolated from a fatal human case and the 2024 bovine strain of H5N1 that is currently circulating in mice and found that the two strains displayed significantly different abilities to infect different tissues. While replication of the 2004 virus was largely in the respiratory tract with “limited” replication in the central nervous system, the 2024 bovine strain successfully replicated in the respiratory tract as well as various regions of the brain. Also, mice challenged with the 2024 bovine H5N1 isolates exhibited clinical signs consistent with central nervous system infection, and infectious viruses were detected in the brain tissue. The 2004 H5N1 virus was used for comparison as the virus strain has been extensively studied in animal models.

The study demonstrated that both the 2004 and the 2024 H5N1 isolates were uniformly fatal in mice when infected through aerosol exposure. But the tissue tropism was vastly different – the 2004 strain was largely restricted to the respiratory tract and predominantly caused respiratory disease, while the 2024 bovine strain showed preference to both the respiratory tract and the brain and caused inflammation in the brain and nasal cavity.

“Our findings reveal that the bovine isolate exhibits enhanced neurotropism, unlike the respiratory-restricted replication ob-

Shift in tissue tropism

Replication of the 2004 H5N1 isolate was largely in the respiratory tract with “limited” replication in the central nervous system



The clade 2.3.4.4b of 2024 H5N1 virus has spread to 832 cattle herds across 16 States in the U.S. CYNTHIA GOLDSMITH

served with the H5N1 isolate from 2004. This difference in tissue tropism, accompanied by distinct cytokine responses in the brain, underscores the potential for altered disease outcomes in other mammalian hosts,” the authors of a study posted in a preprint server BioRxiv write. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed.

The H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has caused widespread infection in over 90 species of wild and domestic birds and more than 21 mammalian species, including several human infections. The virus has caused fatal infections in many different mammals. In March 2024, the 2.3.4.4b clade was first detected in dairy cattle in Texas. The virus has since spread rapidly; as of December 12, the virus has spread to 832 cattle herds across 16 States in the U.S., with 617 herds in California alone.

Mice were exposed to

one of the two H5N1 isolates via aerosols to mimic a more natural route of infection. Upon exposure, mice in both groups displayed reduced activity, rapidly lost weight, and died. While the mice exposed to the 2024 bovine strain showed neurological signs of disease, neurological disease was absent in mice exposed to the 2004 isolate. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the virus titers were high in the brain tissue of mice exposed to the bovine strain compared with mice exposed to the 2004 strain.

‘Heavily linked’

In April this year, 10 cats died in a rural South Dakota residence, showing respiratory and neurological symptoms. Lab testing of two cats confirmed H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b infection. As per a paper accepted for publication in the journal *Emerging Microbes & Infections*, dead cats

showed systemic infection with lesions and viral antigens in multiple organs. “Higher viral RNA and antigen in the brain indicated pronounced neurotropism,” they write.

The authors note that while earlier H5N1 clades in cats caused subclinical infections or clinical disease characterised by pneumonia and encephalitis, the 2.3.4.4b H5N1 virus strain has also been “heavily linked to respiratory and neurological signs in cats in France, Poland, South Korea, and the U.S.”.

The authors note that animals infected with clade 2.3.4.4b H5N1 viruses commonly exhibited pneumonia and meningoencephalitis, with neurological signs predominating in several animal species. Mammals such as dolphins, skunks, minks, red foxes, and sea lions have displayed significant neurological signs such as tremors, convulsions, and

ataxia, with viral presence mainly in the brain. “Though neurotropism and neurological signs were observed during the outbreaks of previous clades of H5N1 viruses, the pronounced neurotropism of the current H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b is highlighted by high viral loads in the brain and minimal or no viral presence in the lungs of several species, suggesting a significant shift in virus behaviour,” they write.

It must be noted that unlike in mice, central nervous system involvement has not yet been reported for dairy cows, either via natural or experimental infection by the bovine H5N1 strain (2.3.4.4b clade). The H5N1 transmission within and between cattle herds is hypothesised to be associated with milking practices. In cows, the H5N1 virus replication has been limited to the mammary glands when lactating cows were inoculated via the mammary gland.

Notable shift

“The growing list of susceptible mammalian hosts highlights the virus’s ability to cross species barriers, raising concerns about its potential impact on wildlife and domestic animal populations,” the authors of the accepted paper write. “There is a notable shift in the neurotropism of H5N1 viruses, particularly with the emergence of clade 2.3.4.4b in cats and wild carnivores like foxes... These cases have documented viral adaptations that facilitate central nervous system involvement, with some infections exhibiting viral mutations indicative of enhanced neurotropism.”

- The H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has caused widespread infection in over 90 species of wild and domestic birds and more than 21 mammalian species, including several human infections
- Unlike the 2004 H5N1 virus, the 2024 bovine strain successfully replicates in the respiratory tract as well as various regions of the brain in mice

■ Mice exposed to the 2024 bovine isolate exhibited clinical signs consistent with central nervous system infection; infectious viruses detected in the brain tissue

- Aerosol exposure to 2004 and 2024 H5N1 strains was uniformly fatal in mice
- The difference in the tissue tropism of the 2024 bovine isolate underscores the potential for altered disease outcomes in other mammalian hosts
- The 2.3.4.4b clade of H5N1 virus is strongly linked to respiratory and neurological signs in cats

■ Dolphins, skunks, minks, red foxes, and sea lions have displayed significant neurological signs and viral presence mainly in the brain

The new boss at Mint Street

Sanjay Malhotra

RBI's 26th Governor took charge this week in the midst of a growing clamour for monetary policy makers to ignore high inflation and cut interest rates

Vikas Dhoot

December 9 began as a routine day for North Block mandarins, with questions pertaining to the Finance Ministry to be answered in the Lok Sabha. But for avid observers of the economy and financial markets, the big question of the day was neither starred nor unstarred. It revolved around the Governorship of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The incumbent Shaktikanta Das, in his sixth year at the RBI, had just delivered a monetary policy that disappointed a government rooting for an interest rate cut, particularly after GDP growth slipped to just 5.4% between July and September.

Mr. Das, whose tenure was to expire on December 10, said the growth-inflation balance was off but asserted persistently high inflation also hurt consumption and growth. By Monday, reporters who had been running stories about another extension for him, had changed course in the absence of any official communiqué, floating names of senior bureaucrats who may replace Mr. Das. None had an inkling that name would turn out to be Union Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra.

They were not the only ones surprised – even Mr.



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

Malhotra is learnt to have been informed just hours before his appointment was made public. The Rajasthan cadre, 1990-batch IAS officer is not the usual Finance Ministry insider picked for the top role at Mint Street. Like his predecessor, most such appointees had handled departments such as Economic Affairs, or held the Finance Secretary's role, like the late R.N. Malhotra, who was the 17th RBI Governor.

Mr. Malhotra, who has spent almost all his life in North India, is a computer engineering graduate from IIT Kanpur, with a Master's degree in Public Policy from Princeton University. His new role brings him to the heart of India's financial markets Mumbai for at least three years.

"Not a whole lot is known about Mr. Malhotra's views on current economic issues, so he is a relatively unknown figure from that perspective," economists at Nomura Securities said. Others

echoed the sentiment, chiming in with stuff like 'we don't know how he feels about growth and inflation but if the government has chosen him at this juncture, he could oblige them with a quicker and bigger rate cut cycle'.

Soft-spoken, inquisitive

A cricket and coffee aficionado, Mr. Malhotra is one of the most affable and soft-spoken, yet no-nonsense officials in service, known not just for his crystal-clear responses to questions, but also for his inquisitiveness. In media interactions, after one's queries are done and dusted and if time permits, he would extend the chat over a cup of Coffee Board brew to glean some ground-level feedback on issues and perceptions doing the rounds.

On his Day One in office, Governor Malhotra revealed no bias towards either growth or inflation, saying he does not like to start playing his shots from

the first ball of a match. But he promised to "put the best foot forward in public interest" once he gets a clear sense of the pitch, with an eye on the four policy pillars that mattered for people – growth, stability, certainty and trust, he noted.

Mr. Malhotra may be a mystery for Mint Street watchers, but having served as the Department of Financial Services Secretary, he has been on the central bank's board, and is an authority of sorts on banking and financial sector reforms. Moreover, his Revenue role probably affords him a unique vantage point of the economy's growth and consumption impulses, having overseen not just direct tax flows from corporates and households, but also the trends in goods and services trade that only granular details of GST, Customs and Excise trends can reveal. It is then not for nothing that the Centre's revenue math (that hinges on growth assumptions) he has worked on in recent Budgets, has generally been spot on.

Mr. Malhotra knows a lot more about the economic terrain than many realise, and in his new innings, where constant communication plays an important role, the world is about to find that out – with or without rate cuts.

How can gene therapy cure haemophilia A?

What is replacement therapy and how effective is it as a form of treatment for haemophiliacs? What is Roctavian? How is using a lentivirus as the vector in gene therapy different from using an adenovirus? Are medicines for treating haemophilia affordable and accessible?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

Medical researchers at the Christian Medical College, Vellore have reported successfully applying gene-therapy to treat severe haemophilia A, a rare, hereditary condition that results from a faulty gene which triggers severe, spontaneous and fatal bleeding episodes.

What is the usual treatment?

The primary approach to treating haemophilia is called replacement therapy. As the disease is a condition resulting from low levels of clotting factor – necessary to prevent bleeding – replacement therapy involves slowly dripping, or injecting into a vein, concentrates of clotting factor VIII (for haemophilia A) or clotting factor IX (for haemophilia B). Clotting-factor concentrates can be derived and manufactured from human blood, which must be properly tested and screened to prevent the spread of diseases, such as hepatitis. It is also possible to

A March 2024 study estimates the per-patient cost of treating a haemophiliac in India to be \$3,00,000 over a 10-year period

use clotting-factor concentrates that aren't made from human blood reducing, the albeit very small risk, of contracting diseases from injecting blood. These are called recombinant clotting factors and can be easily stored, mixed, and used at home. Haemophiliacs can regularly inoculate themselves with replacement therapy to prevent bleeding, and is meant to protect against unexpected bleeding episodes. Among the challenges with clotting factors is that the body's own antibodies can destroy the clotting factor before it has a chance to work and defeats the whole idea of replacement therapy. Other forms of treatment include desmopressin (DDAVP), a man-made hormone used to treat people who have mild haemophilia A. DDAVP isn't used to treat haemophilia B or severe haemophilia A. This hormone increases the level of clotting factor in the blood.

What is gene therapy in haemophilia?

Among the emerging approaches to fix diseases such as haemophilia, which is due to a defective gene on the X chromosome, is gene therapy. Here copies of a 'corrected' gene are introduced into the cells of a patient, the idea being that this would result – in the case of haemophilia – normal expression of the necessary clotting factor. So far there is only one U.S. Food And Drug Administration-approved gene therapy for haemophilia. Called Roctavian, it is an adeno-associated virus vector-based gene therapy and approved only in 2023 for treating adults with severe haemophilia A, and that too only for those without pre-existing antibodies to adeno-associated virus. Roctavian consists of a viral vector carrying the necessary gene for clotting Factor VIII. The gene is expressed in the liver to increase blood levels of FVIII and reduce the risk of uncontrolled bleeding. The effectiveness of the treatment was established based on results from 112 patients followed up for at least three years after Roctavian treatment. Following the infusion, the mean,

annualised bleeding rate decreased from 5.4 bleeds per year at baseline to 2.6 bleeds per year. The majority of patients who received Roctavian also got corticosteroids to suppress the immune system for the gene therapy to be effective and safe. Treatment response to Roctavian may decrease over time.

How was the Vellore trial different?

The main difference in this approach is the use of a lentivirus as the vector, instead of an adenovirus. Because adenovirus infections are fairly common in people, the chances of having antibodies are fairly high and this could actually be counter-productive to those using treatments such as Roctavian. Lentivirus infections being less common, it is expected that fewer people will have antibodies to them, making them more effective in treatment. Further the Indian approach relies on gene transfer into adult stem cells with the lentiviral vector that integrates with the body's cells instead of in vivo transfer to a hepatocyte, or a liver cell, through a non-integrating AAV vector. The advantage of this approach is expected to be a reliable, life-long production of the clotting factor in necessary quantities without side-effects. Though tested in only five patients in Vellore, none of them reported bleeding episodes over an average follow-up period of 14 months.

Is haemophilia treatment affordable?

A March 2024 research study in the journal *Heliyon*, estimates the per-patient cost of treating a haemophiliac in India to be \$3,00,000 over a 10-year period. Based on various estimates, there may be about 1,00,000 haemophiliacs with type A and type B conditions, with the former being more common. This is the reason why treatments can be expensive. Roctavian is also not cheap and costs nearly \$2 million. Whether the gene-therapy product tested in the India will be affordable remains to be seen, though that is the hope. "It is too early to talk about costs but in principle it will need to be something that will make sense in the Indian healthcare system," Dr. Alok Srivastava, Head, Haematology Research Unit, St John's Research Institute, Bangalore, told *The Hindu*. He led the trial at Vellore.



GETTY IMAGES





In session: Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar conducts the House proceedings on November 25, 2019

Can the Vice President be impeached?

Why did the Opposition submit a notice to move a no-confidence motion against Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

In December 10, the Opposition submitted a notice to move a no-confidence or impeachment resolution against Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. The notice accuses him of engaging in "partisan" conduct and being an "impassioned spokesperson" of the government's policies at public fora. A similar motion had been considered by the Opposition during the Budget session in August but was ultimately shelved as the session drew to a close.

What is the procedure for impeaching the Vice President?

As the second-highest constitutional authority (after the President), the Vice-President draws his or her powers from Article 63 of the Constitution. Article 64 further confers upon the post the power to serve as the "ex-officio Chairman of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha)." Thus, the Vice-President discharges the

duties of both the Vice-President and Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha. The resolution can only be considered for discussion once the constitutionally mandated 14-day notice period has elapsed

The process for the removal of both the Vice-President and Rajya Sabha chairperson has been laid down under Article 67. The provision stipulates that the Vice-President will hold

office for a term of five years from "the date on which he enters upon his office". However, he or she may leave mid-term by submitting a resignation letter to the President.

Additionally, Article 67(b) provides for the removal of the Vice-President if a majority of Rajya Sabha members pass a resolution to that effect, which must then be "agreed to" by the House of the People (Lok Sabha).

However, the provision specifies that no such resolution can be moved unless at least a 14-day notice has been given. "The resolution can only be considered for discussion once the constitutionally mandated 14-day notice period has elapsed. It must then be approved by a simple majority in both Houses for passage and implementation," P.D.T. Achary, former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, told *The Hindu*.

Will the no-confidence motion be taken up?

It is unlikely that the no-confidence motion will be taken up for discussion in the House since the Winter Session of Parliament is scheduled to conclude on December 20, which is less than 14 days away.

For instance, in 2020 then Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu dismissed a no-confidence motion against Deputy Chairman Hariwansh on the ground that it required a 14-day notice. Even if the motion is taken up in the House, it is unlikely to yield any result since the Opposition lacks the requisite numbers for its passage. Ultimately, this move appears to be more of a symbolic protest against Mr. Dhankhar's purported partisan conduct.

"Since it is a constitutional resolution, it does not lapse when the session is prorogued. It can be taken up in the next session of Parliament, or even in a special session convened specifically for that purpose," Mr. Achary clarified.

Can the Vice President preside over the motion in the Upper House?

Notably, even if the motion is taken up in the House and the Opposition's grievances are discussed, it would be difficult for Mr. Dhankhar to preside over those proceedings in the Rajya Sabha. Mr. Achary pointed out that Article 92 of the Constitution explicitly bars the Chairman or Deputy Chairman from presiding over proceedings while a resolution for their removal is under consideration. However, the provision permits the Chairperson to speak and participate in the proceedings although he or she is barred from voting "on such resolution or any other matter" during it.

These provisions however come into effect only if the motion is accepted by Deputy Chairperson Hariwansh Narayan Singh.



Patnaik asks BJD to fight for Odisha's tribes, opposes Polavaram project

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Saturday urged party members to intensify their fight for justice on behalf of Odisha's tribal communities, who are likely to be severely impacted because of the Polavaram dam project in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

Mr. Patnaik's call came after a delegation of party leaders met him to brief him on their recent visit to Delhi, where they raised concerns with the Centre regarding the project's potential impacts.

In a post on X, Mr. Patnaik said, "The Polavaram project will submerge many areas of Malkangiri and will greatly affect the tribal brothers and sisters. I met and discussed with the delegation of @bjd_odisha



There could be environmental damage, as a large area of flora and fauna will be submerged by the river's backwaters. FILE PHOTO

who submitted the demand letter to the Central Government. I advised them to continue fighting for the rights of the people. #BJDWithOdisha."

Delegation leader Debi Prasad Mishra said they apprised Mr. Patnaik regarding their interaction with Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil and senior officials from the Ministry of

Tribal Affairs, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, as well as the chairpersons of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the Central Water Commission.

Agitation from January
Former MP and prominent tribal leader Pradeep Majhi said, "The party will

launch an agitation from January."

He claimed that the Polavaram project would submerge around 200 tribal villages in the Motu and Padi blocks of Malkangiri district due to the backwater created by the dam. He also highlighted the potential environmental damage, noting that a large area of flora and fauna in Malkangiri will be submerged by Godavari river's backwaters.

Mr. Majhi said the Centre is being pressured by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu to continue the project, as the TDP has become a key ally of the BJP after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The Centre has allocated ₹12,000 crore in its 2024 Budget for the completion of the Polavaram project, according to BJD leaders.

