


HINDENBURG REPORT RAISES POLITICAL STORM

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Congress demands a JPC probe into allegations against SEBI chief, while BJP sees a global conspiracy. Rahul Gandhi questions the PM's opposition to a JPC investigation.



 **The savings of millions of Indians are at risk. It is, therefore, imperative that this matter is investigated**

RAHUL GANDEHI
Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha

Rahul Gandhi demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) inquiry into allegations against SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, linked to the Adani Group scandal in a Hindenburg report. Gandhi called the revelations "explosive," urging her resignation. The BJP dismissed the claims, while Buch and her husband denied the allegations.

Rahul Gandhi questioned who would be responsible if investors lose money amid allegations against SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and the Adani Group, criticizing PM Modi's resistance to a JPC probe. Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Praveen Chakravarty emphasized the need for transparency and protection of small investors, warning against compromising India's institutions.

Opposition leaders, including Sitaram Yechury, Mahua Moitra, and Akhilesh Yadav, demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the latest Hindenburg report alleging misconduct involving SEBI and the Adani Group. BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar dismissed the report as a foreign attack, accusing Congress of trying to destabilize India's financial system.

Adani case: SC had said it can transfer probe if bias found



The Supreme Court, on January 3, upheld SEBI's investigation into the Adani Group, praising it for a thorough probe and dismissing calls for SEBI's removal. However, new Hindenburg allegations against SEBI chief Madhabi Puri Buch have reignited controversy, accusing her of links to offshore entities in the Adani money scandal.

Rahul Gandhi criticized SEBI's integrity after allegations against its Chairperson. The Supreme Court, in a January 3 ruling, affirmed its rare power to transfer investigations if evidence shows bias or failure of justice but upheld SEBI's probe. The court also called for investigating Hindenburg's role in market volatility affecting Indian investors.

TUNGABHADRA DAM GATE SWEEPED AWAY IN KARNATAKA, FLOOD WARNING ISSUED

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

CONTEXT: A crest gate of the Tungabhadra reservoir in Karnataka was washed away, prompting flood fears and an alert to avoid the downstream river due to potential increased outflow.



Due to reduced inflow, dam authorities lowered the discharge to 28,000 cusecs to maintain the full reservoir level of 1,633 feet. However, after a crest gate broke, the discharge was increased to one lakh cusecs. Karnataka officials, including Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar, are planning repairs and aim to reduce the water level to 60 tmcft.

Due to a broken crest gate, 98,000 cusecs of water are being released from the reservoir, with plans to increase discharge to 2 lakh cusecs to reduce the water level to 60 tmcft for repairs. Authorities warn that if the discharge exceeds 2 lakh cusecs, several World Heritage Site monuments at Hampi may be flooded.

FEARING WAYANAD-LIKE INCIDENT, KERALA FORUM WANTS NEW DAM AT MULLAPERIYAR

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

CONTEXT: Wayanad landslides reignite concerns over the safety of the 129-year-old Mullaperiyar dam, prompting MPs to demand its decommissioning in Parliament.



In the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, MPs demanded the decommissioning of the ageing Mullaperiyar Dam, citing safety concerns. Despite Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan's assurances, the Mullaperiyar Samara Samiti plans to restart its 2006 agitation. The Kerala Assembly supports a new dam, while Union Minister C.R. Patil has proposed a high-level meeting to address safety issues.



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PARTIES, SERIOUS CRIMES AND THE NEED FOR JUDICIAL CLARITY

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court's queries on AAP's involvement in a PMLA case led to the Enforcement Directorate making the party an accused, raising concerns about the implications for political parties in criminal cases.

The investigative agency's attempt to classify political parties under Section 70 of the PMLA, using definitions from The Representation of The People Act (RPA) 1951, is legally flawed. Section 29A of the RPA defines a political party as one that self-identifies as such, which differs from the PMLA's definition focusing on bodies similar to corporations or firms. Political parties, primarily engaged in mobilizing and governance rather than transactional activities, are thus not covered by the PMLA's scope.

In a bail petition for Mr. Sisodia, Justices B.R. Gavai and K.V. Viswanathan questioned how to differentiate between policy and criminality. They highlighted that under the British parliamentary system, the cabinet has exclusive authority to frame policies, which cannot be judged by the judiciary. The Supreme Court has maintained that criminal charges against an individual Minister for collective cabinet decisions are legally unsustainable, emphasizing that only individual violations of law can be prosecuted. Including political parties under the Prevention of Corruption Act and Prevention of Money Laundering Act could have significant repercussions, exposing them to potential political vendettas. This would increase vulnerability among political parties. There is a pressing need for the Supreme Court to clarify the legal implications of such inclusion and address the liability of individual Ministers for collective cabinet decisions.

PERFUNCTORY PANACEA - SCIENTISTS NEED GREATER FUNDING FOR RESEARCH, NOT NATIONAL AWARDS

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CONTEXT: Later this month, 33 scientists will receive the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar, replacing the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar awards, as part of the government's updated approach to honouring scientific achievement.

The RVP awards, previously comprising a certificate, cash prize, and additional benefits, are now renamed the Vigyan Yuva-SSB and awarded as a medal and certificate. The new categories include Vigyan Shri, Vigyan Ratna, and Vigyan Team awards, with a cap of 56 awards annually. This year's awards, including the Vigyan Team award for the Chandrayaan-3 team, cover diverse scientific fields but are predominantly given to recipients from elite Indian research institutions.

The RVP awards were introduced in 2022 to consolidate and elevate scientific recognition, reducing numerous departmental awards to a national level. While national awards aim to honour scientists and raise their profile, they are not a substitute for prestigious recognitions like the Nobel Prize. The real challenge lies in addressing inadequate funding and resources for research in India, which would more effectively support scientific progress than symbolic awards.

ON AMENDMENTS TO THE WAQF ACT

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Union government introduced a Bill to amend the 1995 Waqf Act, aiming to reform waqf property management and include non-Muslims in Waqf Boards, sparking opposition concerns over stakeholder consultation and religious rights.



Understanding Waqf Properties in India

In Islamic law, waqf is property dedicated to religious and charitable causes, and once established, it cannot be sold or inherited. In India, waqfs are regulated by the 1995 Act, with properties identified through state surveys and managed by the State Waqf Board. Unlike trusts under the Indian Trusts Act, waqfs cannot be dissolved. These properties support various public goods like mosques, schools, and aid for the poor.

Regulation and Management of Waqf Properties in India

The 1995 Act creates State Waqf Boards to manage waqf properties, with each Board including government nominees, Muslim legislators, Islamic scholars, and mutawallis. Boards can sanction the transfer of immovable waqf properties but need two-thirds approval. Amendments in 2013 restricted the sale of waqf properties. Additionally, the Central Waqf Council, led by the Union Minister of Minority Affairs, oversees uniform administration and advises on waqf policies and disputes.

Key Changes in Waqf Property Management Bill

- **Waqf Creation:** Only lawful property owners who have practiced Islam for five years can create waqf properties.
- **Abolition of 'Waqf by Use':** The new Bill eliminates the concept of waqf based on property usage without formal deeds.
- **Government Property Exclusion:** Government properties identified as waqf are not recognized as waqf under the new law.
- **Revised Authority:** District collectors will survey waqf properties and adjudicate disputes, replacing the 1995 Act's survey commissioners.
- **Inclusive Representation:** Non-Muslims and women must be included in key waqf institutions and tribunals for better representation.

Concerns over Waqf Property Management and Religious Freedom

Professor Faizan Mustafa, Vice Chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, expressed concerns about the implementation of amendments to the Waqf Act. While acknowledging their benefits, he emphasized the need to protect waqf properties without infringing on religious freedoms. He also warned that increased centralization might undermine the autonomy of Muslim institutions and questioned the fairness of including non-Muslims in governance of religious boards. The Bill, opposed by the Congress-led INDIA bloc, is under parliamentary review, with numerous petitions challenging the Act pending in courts.

CONSTITUTION DOES NOT HAVE PROVISION FOR CREAMY LAYER AMONG SC/STS: LAW MINISTER

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal accused the Opposition of misleading people about the Supreme Court's remarks on a creamy layer within SC and ST communities, stating that the Constitution lacks such provisions.



“This government is committed to the Constitutional provisions given by Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar. There is no provision of creamy layer in Babasaheb’s Constitution. The Cabinet’s well thought through decision is that it is only as per Babasaheb’s Constitution that reservations for SC/ST should be provided,”

- Mr. Vaishnaw (Railways Minister)

Government Defends Reservation System amid SC Observations

Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal accused the Opposition of misleading the public about the Supreme Court’s recent observation on the creamy layer within SC and ST communities. He emphasized that the Constitution does not provide for creamy layer restrictions and affirmed the BJP-led NDA government’s commitment to the existing reservation system. The Supreme Court’s observation allows states to consider sub-classification but did not mandate it.

BIOTECHNOLOGISTS DETECT DIFFERENCE IN USE OF NITROGEN BY RICE VARIETIES

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CONTEXT: Biotechnologists at GGU, New Delhi, found significant variation in nitrogen use among Indian rice varieties, potentially leading to high-yield, low-nitrogen varieties, reducing fertilizer costs and pollution.



Biotechnologists at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi, have identified significant variations in nitrogen-use efficiency (NUE) among popular Indian rice varieties. This discovery could lead to developing high-yielding rice varieties that require less nitrogen, potentially reducing fertilizer costs and nitrogen-linked pollution. The study highlights the global impact of inefficient nitrogen use in agriculture.

Rice Varieties Show Wide Nitrogen Efficiency Differences, Study Finds

A study by Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University reveals that some

Indian rice varieties have five times higher nitrogen-use efficiency (NUE) than others. Despite high NUE, the highest yields remain a priority for Indian farmers. The researchers advocate for broader agricultural research and biotechnology to enhance NUE and crop yields.

BANGLADESH GOVT. VOWS TO END ATTACKS ON MINORITY GROUPS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Bangladesh's new interim government is addressing attacks on Hindus and religious minorities following the ouster of Premier Sheikh Hasina, with Hindus being a key support base for her party.



Violence Against Hindus Surges in Bangladesh Amid Political Crisis

Following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's sudden resignation and flight, attacks on Hindu households, temples, and businesses in Bangladesh have escalated. The interim Cabinet, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, condemned the violence and pledged support for affected families. A new chief justice was also sworn in amidst ongoing protests.

COLD WAR NUKE TESTS LIGHT UP A BUG IN PRESENT-DAY CLIMATE MODELS

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CONTEXT: A study in Science finds that plants absorb more carbon dioxide than previously thought but store it for a shorter time before releasing it back into the atmosphere.

Cold War Nuclear Tests Offer Unexpected Climate Insights

Scientists have utilized data from Cold War nuclear tests, which increased atmospheric radiocarbon levels, to advance climate research. Heather Graven's study shows that post-1963, radiocarbon levels in the atmosphere declined, indicating its transfer into vegetation. This research aids in understanding how radiocarbon cycles through the environment.



Study Reveals Higher Carbon Storage in Vegetation, Prompting Further Analysis

A new study suggests global vegetation stores up to 80 billion tonnes of carbon annually, exceeding previous estimates. This increased figure indicates faster carbon cycling between plants and the atmosphere. While the findings offer new insights, experts caution about potential

model uncertainties affecting the carbon cycle's understanding.

Despite its potential, radiocarbon data is rarely used in climate models, with only one model incorporating it fully. This gap highlights the need for improved representation of radiocarbon in future projections. Scientists emphasize that enhancing models with such data is crucial for accurate climate predictions.



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