Caster Semenya's IAAF Challenge

Why in news?

South African 800m Olympic champion Caster Semenya lost her appeal against the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

What was the case about?

- Caster Semenya had challenged the Hyperandrogenism guidelines of the IAAF which will come into effect from May 8, 2019.
- It stipulated that athletes with differences in sexual development (DSDs) will need to reduce their testosterone levels.
- This is a must for them to be eligible to run internationally at events between 400m and a mile (Restricted events - 400, 800m).
- The three-person Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) panel rejected Semenya's challenge against the IAAF.
- Semenya can now appeal the CAS award at the Swiss Federal Tribunal within 30 days.

What are the normal levels?

- The normal female range of testosterone, as indicated by the court, is 0.06 to 1.68 nanomolecures per litre (nm/L) of blood.
- The correspondent male range is 7.7 to 29.4.
- The hormone contributes significantly to the strengthening of muscles and the density of bones.
- Its abundance is a crucial factor that makes male athletes perform better than female athletes.
- Going by the guidelines, Semenya has high testosterone level (T-level) and will have to take medication to reduce it to within 5nm/L.
- She has to maintain this for six months ahead of competition, if she wants to run her pet 800m.

What was the contention?

- Semenya recently raced and won the South African 5000m, an event she can run without suppressing her T-levels.
- She has maintained that there was nothing wrong in her running with her natural levels of testosterone.

- She disagreed on medically tampering with her hormones.
- But the IAAF saw the guidelines as a means of preserving fair and meaningful competition within female classification.

What are the concerns raised by CAS?

- CAS did admit that the IAAF policy was discriminatory to athletes with DSD.
- It however added that such discrimination was a necessary, reasonable and proportionate one.
- It was inevitable in achieving the IAAF's aim of preserving the integrity of female athletics in the Restricted Events.
- So it was unable to establish that IAAF's DSD regulations were "invalid".
- Nevertheless, CAS expressed some concerns over the application of the IAAF regulations:

    i. the unintentional non-compliance of the strict testosterone levels
    ii. the difficulty of maintaining the levels over 6 months and on the day of competition

- There is also, at present, a lack of clarity over the exact advantage higher testosterone offers over the 800m distance.
- So CAS suggested deferring the application of the regulations to the 1500m and the mile till more evidence was made available.
- The CAS also raised an alarm over the "practical impossibility" of compliance citing side effects of hormonal treatment.

- The IAAF has the task of protecting the rights of female runners with lower T-levels (under 2 nmol/L) which is 99% women.
- However, asking the outliers (DSD athletes), who have done no wrong or cheated, to bring down T-levels is contentious.

Source: Indian Express, Livemint

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