Illegal Usage of Meldonium

Why in news?

The Anti-Doping Appeal Panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) has recently blacklisted two persons related to illegal supply of meldonium.

What is meldonium?

- Meldonium is manufactured by the Latvian company Grindeks, and is prescribed for ischemia, a condition in which there is an insufficient flow of blood to tissues, which are then starved of oxygen and glucose.
- Meldonium gives those suffering from heart and circulatory conditions more physical capacity and mental function.

What are the concerns with its usage?

- Though not approved by the US FDA, the drug has been easily available over the counter in Eastern Europe and Russia.
- Since meldonium aids oxygen uptake and endurance, several athletes have been caught using it.
- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) put it on the list of banned substances in September 2015, and the ban went into effect on January 1, 2016.
- However, a number of athletes were using it before it was banned.
- Meldonium became famous after tennis superstar Maria Sharapova tested positive for it in 2016.
- In 2015, anti-doping group Partnership for Clean Competition said meldonium was found in 182 of 8,300 urine samples it tested as part of a study.
- WADA confirmed at the time of the Sharapova scandal that since the ban, meldonium had been found in 55 samples.
- A study published in Drug Testing and Analysis in 2015 concluded that the drug demonstrates –

    1. An increase in endurance performance of athletes
    2. Improved rehabilitation after exercise
    3. Protection against stress
    4. Enhanced activations of central nervous system (CNS) functions

- The manufacturing company has said meldonium can provide an improvement of work capacity of healthy people at physical and mental overloads and during rehabilitation period.
- However, it believed that the substance would not enhance athletes' performance in competition, and might even do the opposite.

What is the role of World Anti doping agency here?

- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was established in 1999 as an international independent agency composed and funded equally by the sport movement and governments of the world.
- Its mission is to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport.
- Its key activities include scientific research, education, development of anti-doping capacities, and monitoring of the World Anti-Doping Code (Code).
- The World Anti-Doping Code is the document that brings consistency to anti-doping rules, regulations and policies worldwide.
- Since 2004, and as mandated by World Anti-Doping Code, WADA has published an annual List of Prohibited Substances and Methods (List).
- The List, which forms one of the six International Standards, identifies the substances and methods prohibited in- and out-of-competition, and in particular sports.
- In India, National Anti Doping Agency (NADA) is responsible for promoting, coordinating, and monitoring the doping control programme in sports in all its forms in the country.
- The primary objectives are to implement anti-doping rules as per WADA code, regulate dope control programme, to promote education and research and creating awareness about doping and its ill effects.

What is the case with India?

- Jagtar, a decathlete, who appeared to give the urine sample at the Federation Cup in Patiala in 2017, has been tested positive for Meldonium.
- He was banned for a maximum period of four years for a first-time dope offence.
- Recently, his ban was reduced from four years to two, after he provided substantial evidence that helped bust a ring of illegal performance-enhancing drug suppliers.
- Jagtar contended that he had consumed the food supplements provided by a regular supplement supplier at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, who is also the husband of a Commonwealth Games participant.
- The case lead to the discovery of a very important source of illegal/unlicensed supply of prohibited substance to athletes at the

Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi.

- This is because the stadium also serves as a hub of national and international athletic sporting activity in India.
- Thus, the Anti-Doping Appeal panel directed NADA to issue appropriate warning to be affixed on notice boards/websites of NADA regarding prohibited substances and the risk of procuring any supplies by the athletes from illegal suppliers.

Source: The Indian Express

