Russia's Ban from Global Sporting Events

Why in news?

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has decided to ban Russia from global sporting events for a four-year period.

What is the case?

- The issue has its roots in the scandal that erupted on the eve of the 2016 Rio Olympics.
- Whistle-blower reports alleged Russia for running one of the most sophisticated doping programmes.
- The allegations were of replacing dope-tainted urine samples with clean ones during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.
- There was active collusion of Russian anti-doping experts, the sports ministry and members of the country's intelligence service in this.
- In September 2018, as part of the resolution of that case, Russia reluctantly agreed to open up its database to corroborate the findings of the reports.
- WADA has now ruled that the country manipulated this very database in order to cover up large-scale violations.

What are the implications?

- The anti-doping watchdog's move will hurt Russia the most at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.
- The nation's flag, name and anthem will not be allowed in these occasions.
- Russia can approach the Court of Arbitration for Sport with an appeal within three weeks.
- But, if the sentence is upheld, it could bar Russia from participation in several high-profile global sporting events including the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar.

What is the significance?

- Some athletes do cheat, but when they do so with official sanction, it is a serious crisis.
- WADA's decision makes it arguably the biggest sporting crisis Russia has faced till date.

How effective have earlier bans been?

- There is considerable doubt among anti-doping experts if the current measures would be effective.
- Even ahead of the Rio games, WADA had recommended that Russia be expelled.
- But, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), under President Thomas Bach, had left the decision to individual sports' governing bodies.
- Subsequently, athletes who were cleared of doping were allowed to compete as neutrals.
- A similar episode had played out during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games.
- Russia was again banned from this but individual athletes competed.

How does the future look?

- The IOC may be forced this time around by the sheer magnitude of the findings.
- However, there remains a similar possibility of Russian competitors still participating.
- It may be worth noting that despite Sochi, Russia still played host to events such as the 2015 World Aquatics Championships and the 2018 FIFA World Cup.
- It is again slated to host the swimming event in 2025.
- In a sense, both the IOC and WADA have had to balance between two powerful but opposing arguments.
- One is of punishing the country for its misdemeanors while the other is preserving natural justice for athletes who are clean.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Fact

World Anti-Doping Agency

- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was established in 1999.
- It is an international independent agency composed and funded equally by the sport movement and governments of the world.
- Its key activities include scientific research, education, development of anti-doping capacities, and monitoring of the World Anti-Doping Code (Code).
- The Code is the document harmonizing anti-doping policies in all sports and all countries.



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