

3. Doping in Indian Sports – Governance

As per the recent report of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), India has emerged as the highest contributor to doping violations for the third consecutive year, raising institutional credibility concerns amid ambitions to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Olympic Games. India's delegation, led by PT Usha (IOA President) and Gujarat Sports Minister Harsh Sanghavi, presented the 2036 Olympic bid at Lausanne, Switzerland. The interaction was not merely ceremonial; it functioned as a governance due-diligence exercise by the International Olympic Committee. The IOC explicitly identified doping as a systemic governance risk, signalling that hosting the Olympics is contingent on-

1. Integrity of sporting institutions
2. Credibility of anti-doping enforcement
3. Alignment with global ethical standards

This marks a shift from viewing doping as an "athlete problem" to treating it as a state capacity and governance issue.

India's Doping Crisis- Evidence from the WADA Report

Key Findings

Global Infamy

1. India recorded 260 doping violations, the highest globally.
2. Nearly three times France (91) and Italy (85).

China Contrast-

1. India- 260 positives out of 7,113 tests → 3.6% positivity.
2. China- 43 positives out of 24,000+ tests → 0.2% positivity.
3. This decisively invalidates the argument that "more testing leads to more positives."

Highest Positivity Among High-Testing Nations- India's positivity rate is the highest globally among countries conducting over 5,000 tests.

Sport-Specific Hotspots

1. Athletics (76 cases)
2. Weightlifting (43 cases)
3. Wrestling (29 cases)
4. Together account for over 50% of violations, indicating entrenched subcultures of doping.

Laboratory Red Flag- The National Dope Testing Laboratory reported a 3.65% positivity rate, the highest among all WADA-accredited labs. By contrast, labs in Cologne or Paris report <0.7%, suggesting

1. Higher prevalence
2. Poor deterrence
3. Possible testing concentration in high-risk cohorts

Implications for India's 2036 Olympic Bid

Reputational and Strategic Risks- IOC treats doping as a governance litmus test, not a technical flaw. Rival bidders such as Qatar or Indonesia can Question India's institutional readiness. Argue reputational risk to Olympic brand

Economic and Funding Impact- Corporate sponsors increasingly perceive Indian sport as high-risk. This threatens

1. Private sponsorship pipelines
2. Long-term sustainability of schemes like TOPS

Psychological and Ethical Consequences- "Win-at-all-costs" culture creates

1. Performance anxiety
2. Ethical erosion

Identity crises among young athletes forced to choose between Integrity , Livelihood security

Doping- Conceptual and Regulatory Foundations

Definition- Doping refers to the use of prohibited substances or methods to gain unfair advantage, including

1. Anabolic steroids
2. Erythropoietin (EPO)
3. Gene doping
4. Blood manipulation

Strict Liability Principle- Athletes are solely responsible for any banned substance found in their body. Intent is irrelevant, which

1. Protects sporting integrity
2. But disproportionately penalises uninformed or exploited athletes

Common Types of Doping and Performance Objectives

1. Muscle Strength- Anabolic steroids (Testosterone, Stanozolol)
2. Endurance- EPO, blood transfusions
3. Alertness and Aggression- Stimulants (Amphetamines, Cocaine)
4. Recovery and Growth- Human Growth Hormone (HGH)
5. Weight Control and Masking- Diuretics (Furosemide)
6. Precision Sports- Beta-blockers (Archery, Shooting)

Emerging Threats

Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators (SARMs)

1. Marketed as "safe supplements"
2. Short detection windows

Designer Peptides

1. Outpace current detection technology
2. Create a persistent science-regulation lag

Global Anti-Doping Architecture

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)- Established in 1999 by the IOC. Headquarters Montreal, Canada.

Functions

1. World Anti-Doping Code
2. Prohibited List (annual)
3. Laboratory accreditation
4. Education and compliance monitoring

National Anti-Doping Agency (India)- Established in 2009. Headquarters New Delhi. Legal Backbone National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025

Key Reforms under the 2025 Act

1. Statutory operational independence of Director General
2. Direct appeal for international athletes to Court of Arbitration for Sport
3. Mandatory WADA accreditation for all domestic labs

Structural Reasons Behind India's High Doping Numbers

Socio-Economic Pressures- Sports seen as a pathway out of poverty. Government jobs under sports quota create

1. High-stakes performance pressure
2. Incentives for short-term enhancement

Incentive Distortion- Large cash rewards for medals at

1. Olympics
2. Asian Games

Rewards outweigh perceived risk of detection.

The “Entourage Effect”- Doping is rarely individual. Involves

1. Coaches
2. Doctors
3. Pharmacists

Grassroots athletes lack bargaining power or informed consent.

Awareness and Education Gaps- Language barriers limit effectiveness of NADA outreach. Poor understanding of

1. Strict liability
2. Supplement contamination

Over 25% athletes consume supplements without verification.

Unregulated Supplement Market- Spiked “herbal” products. Weak enforcement of nutraceutical standards. Supplements often contain

1. Steroids
2. Stimulants

Institutional and Technical Constraints- Over-reliance on a single WADA-accredited lab. Delays in testing and results reduce deterrence. Historical bias toward in-competition testing allows Out-of-competition evasion

India’s Recent Anti-Doping Initiatives

Legal and Institutional- 2025 Amendment Act ensuring autonomy. NSF accountability under National Sports Governance Act.

Digital and Technological- NIDAMS portal

1. Algorithmic test selection
2. Reduced human interference

Dried Blood Spot (DBS) testing

1. Low-cost
2. Rural outreach

Education and Prevention- KYM App for medicine verification. 329 awareness programs in 2025. Centre of Excellence for Supplement Testing (NADA-FSSAI-NFSU).

Persisting Challenges

1. Ethical and Behavioural- Normalisation of evasion. Athletes fleeing tests reflects integrity deficit.
2. Technical- Rapid evolution of SARMs and peptides. Persistent detection lag.
3. Legal and Adjudicatory- Backlogs in disciplinary panels. Prolonged provisional suspensions violate natural justice.

Way Forward- Reforms Needed

Legislative- Criminalise trafficking and facilitation of PEDs. Shift liability to coaches and medical enablers. Enhanced protection for minors.

Cultural- Move from medal-centric to integrity-centric evaluation. Introduce “Spirit of Sport” Integrity Index for NSFs.

Technological- Intelligence-led testing. Universal Athlete Biological Passport in high-risk sports. Indigenous certified supplement development.

Institutional- Third-party audits of Test Distribution Plans. Decentralised lab infrastructure via IITs and AIIMS.

Conclusion

India’s doping problem is not an athlete morality issue, but a systemic governance failure. For a credible 2036 Olympic bid, India must demonstrate

1. Institutional independence
2. Supply-chain accountability

3. Ethical sporting culture
4. Scientific and intelligence-led enforcement

Only then can India align sporting excellence with global integrity norms, transforming from a rule-taker into a rule-setter in global sports governance.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/doping-menace-on-indian-sport-and-dope-positive-cases/article70437025.ece>

