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India's Doping Crisis — Category A Classification and the Anti-Doping Challenge

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India's Doping Crisis — Category A Classification and the Anti-Doping Challenge

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WHY IN NEWS

India has been classified as a “**Category A**” nation by the **Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)** — the highest doping-risk category — following a surge in **Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs)**: India recorded **260 doping violations in 2024**, the **highest of any country globally**, with a positivity rate of **3.6%**. India’s ADRV count has escalated from **48 (2022)** to **63 (2023)** to **71 (2024)** in athletics alone. The Government of India is now considering **criminalising doping** under a strengthened legal framework, and **NADA (National Anti-Doping Agency)** faces pressure to expand testing infrastructure and education.

INDIA’S DOPING PROBLEM — THE DATA

Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) Trend

YEAR	ADRVs (INDIA)	GLOBAL RANK
2019	~96	Top 5
2020	~43 (COVID-reduced testing)	—
2022	48	Top 5
2023	63	Top 3
2024	71 (athletics alone); 260 total	#1 globally

India’s **260 total doping violations** in 2024 surpassed all other nations — a figure that reflects both the scale of the problem and **increased testing volume** by NADA.

Sports Most Affected

SPORT	PROPORTION OF ADRVS
Athletics (track and field)	Highest share
Wrestling	Significant
Weightlifting	Significant
Bodybuilding	High (but not Olympic)
Cycling	Growing

Most violations occur in **strength and endurance sports** where performance-enhancing substances offer the greatest competitive advantage.

Substances Most Commonly Detected

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES	EFFECT
Anabolic steroids	Stanozolol, testosterone, nandrolone	Muscle mass, recovery
Stimulants	Methylhexaneamine (DMAA), amphetamines	Speed, alertness
Diuretics	Furosemide	Masking agents; weight class
Peptide hormones	EPO, growth hormone	Endurance, oxygen carrying
SARMs	Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators	Anabolic effects; newer detection challenge

A significant share of violations involve **supplements contaminated with banned substances** — an issue the Sports Ministry is addressing through a certified supplements programme.

THE ATHLETICS INTEGRITY UNIT — CATEGORY A CLASSIFICATION

What Is the AIU?

The **Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)** is an **independent body** established by **World Athletics** (formerly IAAF) in 2017 to manage integrity in athletics — including anti-doping, competition manipulation, and betting.

The AIU maintains a **Risk Categorisation System** that classifies athletes from high-risk countries for targeted testing:

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	TESTING IMPLICATIONS
Category A	Highest doping risk	Athletes subject to most intensive AIU testing pool; mandatory whereabouts requirement
Category B	Moderate risk	Standard testing
Category C	Lower risk	Lighter testing requirements

India’s Category A classification means Indian athletes competing in international athletics are subject to the most stringent whereabouts tracking, out-of-competition testing, and passport monitoring under the **Athlete Biological Passport (ABP)** programme.

Consequences of Category A Status

- ❶ **Mandatory Whereabouts:** Athletes must file quarterly whereabouts — specifying location for one hour per day — for out-of-competition testing
- ❷ **Increased international scrutiny:** Indian athletes may face more frequent testing at international competitions
- ❸ **Reputational damage:** Category A status signals systemic failure to international sports bodies
- ❹ **Funding risk:** Athletes competing under enhanced scrutiny may face funding withdrawal from federations

INDIA’S ANTI-DOPING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)

NADA was established in **2005** as India’s national anti-doping organisation:

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Established	2005
Type	Autonomous body under Sports Ministry
Statutory backing	National Anti-Doping Act, 2022
Functions	Testing, adjudication, education, laboratories, whereabouts management
Accredited lab	National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL), New Delhi

National Anti-Doping Act, 2022

The **National Anti-Doping Act, 2022** is India's dedicated anti-doping legislation — passed after decades of relying on administrative frameworks:

PROVISION	DETAIL
Statutory NADA	Gave NADA statutory status
ADRVs defined	Lists 11 anti-doping rule violations aligned with WADA Code
National Anti-Doping Tribunal (NADT)	Independent adjudicatory body for doping cases
NDTL statutory	National Dope Testing Laboratory gets statutory recognition
Appeals	NADT decisions appealable to Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)
Government athletes	Covers athletes receiving government funding

The Act aligns Indian anti-doping law with the **WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) Code 2021**, the international standard.

National Anti-Doping Tribunal (NADT)

The NADT is a **quasi-judicial body** that:

- Hears cases brought by NADA against athletes with ADRVs
- Issues sanctions (bans from competition)
- Provides a legally defined appeals pathway
- Operates independently of sports federations

Before the Act, doping cases were heard by the **Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel (ADDP)** — an administrative body without the same legal authority.

WADA AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)

The **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)** is the international body that:

- Maintains the **Prohibited List** — updated annually — of banned substances
- Sets the **WADA Code** that all sports federations and national anti-doping organisations must follow
- Manages the **ADAMS** (Anti-Doping Administration and Management System) — the global database for test results and whereabouts

- Funds anti-doping research and investigates non-compliance by national agencies

WADA is headquartered in **Montreal, Canada**, established in **1999** following the Tour de France doping scandal.

India's Compliance Status

India has had periods of **WADA non-compliance** when NADA's standards or the NDTL's accreditation lapsed:

- **NDTL accreditation** was suspended temporarily in 2019-2021 due to technical non-compliance — during which Indian samples had to be sent to foreign labs
- The 2022 Act and NDTL accreditation restoration improved compliance status

CRIMINALISATION OF DOPING — POLICY DEBATE

The Government's Proposal

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is considering **amendments to the National Anti-Doping Act** to:

- Make doping a **criminal offence** (not just a sports violation)
- Allow prosecution of **coaches, support staff, and suppliers** who provide banned substances
- Create deterrents beyond sport bans (which are temporary and reversible)

International Precedent

COUNTRY	STATUS
France	Criminal offence (doping by third parties especially)
Italy	Doping criminally prohibited under national sports law
Australia	ASADA Act allows criminal prosecution for trafficking
USA	USADA act targets trafficking and distribution
India	Currently only sport sanctions (ban from competition)

Arguments For Criminalisation

- Sport bans alone don't deter coaches and drug suppliers who profit from doping
- Criminal penalties would target the **supply chain** — labs producing banned substances, coaches administering them

- India's positivity rate indicates an organised doping ecosystem, not just individual athlete choices

Arguments Against Criminalisation

- Risk of **over-criminalisation** of athletes who may have taken contaminated supplements unknowingly
- **Strict liability** in anti-doping (athlete is responsible even for unknowing ingestion) conflicts with criminal law's *mens rea* (intent) requirement
- Young athletes from low-income backgrounds face **disproportionate** consequences

SYSTEMIC FACTORS DRIVING INDIA'S DOPING PROBLEM

Supplement Industry Issues

- India's sports supplement market is largely **unregulated**
- Many supplements marketed as herbal/natural contain banned steroids
- FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) has limited capacity to screen sports supplements for banned substances

Awareness and Education Deficit

- Rural and semi-urban athletes often lack anti-doping knowledge
- Coaches — especially in wrestling and weightlifting — sometimes actively encourage supplement use without verifying legality
- NADA's education programmes have limited reach outside elite sports academies

Pressure for Performance

- India's sports system creates intense pressure on athletes (TOPS, national federation quotas) to produce results for Olympics/Asian Games
- Economic incentives for international medals are high (state government cash awards, government jobs)

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Governance	NADA, National Anti-Doping Act 2022, NADT, sports governance
GS3 — S&T	WADA prohibited list, Athlete Biological Passport, doping science
GS2 — Social Justice	Sports equity, supplement regulation, athlete welfare
GS4 — Ethics	Integrity in sports, use of performance-enhancing drugs
Mains Keywords	NADA, WADA, National Anti-Doping Act 2022, NADT, NDTL, Category A, AIU, ADRV, Athlete Biological Passport

FACTS CORNER

- **2024 violations:** 260 total ADRVs — highest globally; 3.6% positivity rate
- **ADRV trend:** 48 (2022) → 63 (2023) → 71 (2024) in athletics alone
- **Category A:** Highest risk tier under AIU; subjects Indian athletes to most intensive testing
- **AIU:** Athletics Integrity Unit — established by World Athletics (IAAF successor) in 2017
- **NADA:** National Anti-Doping Agency — established 2005; statutory status under 2022 Act
- **National Anti-Doping Act, 2022:** India's first dedicated anti-doping legislation; aligned with WADA Code 2021
- **NADT:** National Anti-Doping Tribunal — quasi-judicial body for doping cases; appeals go to CAS
- **NDTL:** National Dope Testing Laboratory, New Delhi — India's WADA-accredited testing lab
- **WADA:** World Anti-Doping Agency; HQ Montreal; founded 1999; maintains Prohibited List
- **Athlete Biological Passport (ABP):** Longitudinal biological profiling to detect doping patterns — not just banned substances
- **FSSAI:** No current specific regulation for sports supplement banned substance screening — a governance gap
- **Criminalisation proposal:** Government considering extending sanctions beyond sport bans to criminal penalties for coaches and suppliers

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