

Wrestlers Return Padma Honours

Why In News

- **Wrestler Bajrang Punia** was returning his **Padma Shri**, India's **fourth-highest civilian award**, to **oppose the election of Sanjay Singh**, a close aide of BJP MP and sexual harassment accused Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, as president of the Wrestling Federation of India.



- The **Union Sports Ministry** has **suspended the Wrestling Federation of India** body under the leadership of newly elected president Sanjay Singh.
- The Sports Ministry also asked the **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)** to constitute an ad-hoc body to control and manage the affairs of WFI.

What It Is All About

- **Punia**, who has won multiple medals for India, was stopped by the Delhi Police at **Kartavya Path** when he tried to walk towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence. **"I will give the Padma Shri award** to anyone who will take it to PM Modi," Bajrang said before he placed the award on the footpath and walked away.



- This was followed by deaflympics gold medallist **Virender Singh Yadav** making a similar announcement, saying he would give up his Padma Shri in solidarity with wrestler Sakshi Malik, who quit the sport to protest Singh's election.



- **Yadav posted on X**, "I will also return the Padma Shri for my sister and the country's daughter. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, I am proud of your daughter and my sister Sakshi Malik. But I would request the top players of the country to also give their decision... @sachin_rt @Neeraj_chopra1."



Ministry Of Sports Decision

- The **sports ministry** on Sunday suspended the newly-elected executive committee of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), just three days after the new body, led by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's aide Sanjay Kumar Singh swept the polls.

- The ministry's decision comes in the **wake of Sanjay announcing** the under-15 and under-20 Nationals in Uttar Pradesh's Gonda -- less than 50 km from Brij Bhushan's constituency of Kaiserganj.



- According to the ministry, **Singh's announcement was made hastily**, without giving sufficient notice to wrestlers who are to take part in the said nationals, and without following the provisions of the constitution of the WFI.
- As per clause 3 (e) of the **preamble of the constitution of WFI**, the objective of the WFI, among others, is to hold senior, junior and sub-junior national championships as per UWW (United World Wrestling) Rules at places selected by the Executive Committee, the ministry said in a release.



- **"Such decisions are to be taken by Executive Committee**, before which agendas are required to be placed for consideration," the ministry said, adding, "As per Article XI of the WFI constitution under the Heading 'Notices and Quorum for

Meetings', a minimum notice period for EC meeting is 15 clear days and the quorum is one-third of representatives."



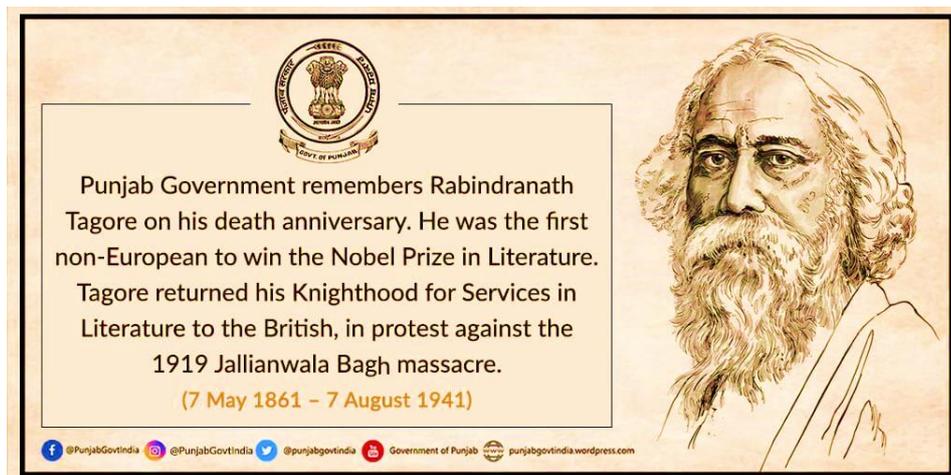
- The ministry added that even for an emergency EC meeting, a **minimum notice period of seven days** is required, with the same quorum requirement.
- "The newly elected body appears to be in complete control of **former office-bearers in complete disregard to the Sports Code** The business of the federation is being run from the premises controlled by former office-bearers," the ministry said, observing that the premises are also the same where wrestlers have alleged sexual harassment has taken place — the matter is sub judice.
- "Further, in terms of **Article X (d) of the constitution of WFI**, it is the secretary general of WFI who has been made responsible for carrying out the general business of the federation, keeping the minutes of the meetings, maintaining all the records of the Federation, calling the meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee."



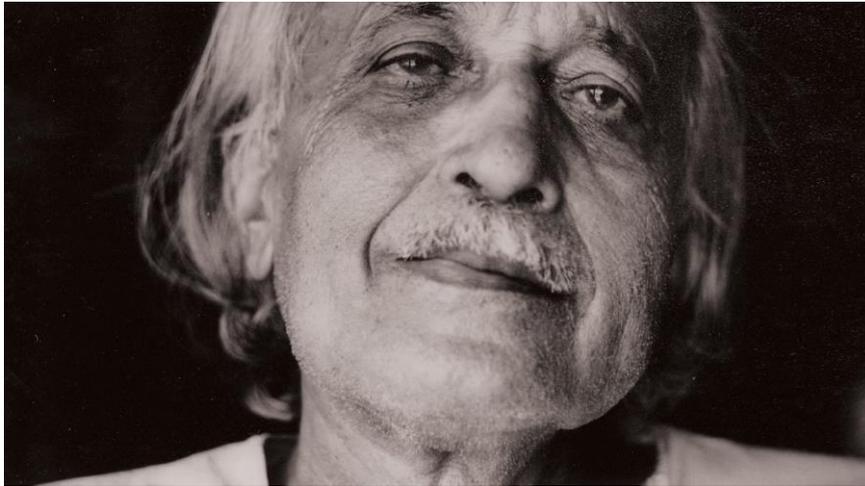
- The ministry noted that the **secretary general appears** not to have been involved in the EC meeting under question, which was held without any notice or quorum.
- "The decisions made by the newly elected executive body of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) **demonstrate a blatant disregard** for the established legal and procedural norms, violating both the WFI's constitutional provisions and the National Sports Development Code," the ministry said.
- The ministry added that the actions "**smack of complete arbitrariness** on the part of the President, which is against the settled principles of good governance and devoid of transparency and due process".
- "Adherence to governance norms is vital for ensuring fair play, transparency and accountability. There are crucial to building trust among athletes, stakeholders, and the public. Further, UWW, the international body for wrestling, is yet to issue official communication lifting the suspension of WFI," it said.
- The WFI has been instructed to suspend all its activities till further orders.

Award Wapsi Not New

- The "award wapsi" is by no means a recent phenomenon in India. One of the earliest examples of this goes back to 1919, when **Rabindranath Tagore** returned his knighthood (the title of 'Sir'), granted by the British, in response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- In post-independence India, too, many recipients have returned awards and honours granted by the government. This is not counting those who have refused to accept the awards.



- When former **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi** imposed a **state of Emergency** on the country, several prominent civil society members rose up in protest. Two of them went as far as to return the civilian honours granted to them — writer **K Shivarama Karanth** from Karnataka returned his Padma Bhushan, while author **Phanishwar Nath “Renu”** from Bihar gave up his Padma Shri.



- A call to return awards had been given by feminist-socialist Durga Bhagwat, who remained steadfast in her opposition to the Emergency despite going to jail.
- In 1984, poet and novelist **Khushwant Singh** returned his Padma Bhushan, awarded in 1974, to protest Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple.
- In the same year, **Kashmiri writer Akhtar Mohiuddin** returned the Padma Shri, which he received in 1968, over the hanging of Kashmiri separatist Maqbool Bhat.