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ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**INDIA'S OLYMPIC
CHALLENGE: STRIVING
FOR MORE**

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Context

- The recently concluded Paris Olympics saw the Indian contingent return with six medals, with overall ranking of 71st out of 84 countries highlighted the discrepancy between investment and outcomes.

About

- India celebrated the achievements of athletes like **Neeraj Chopra** (who secured a silver medal), **Manu Bhaker** (with two bronze medals in shooting), and the **hockey team** (adding a bronze) in the Paris Olympics.
- However, there were disappointments—particularly in badminton, where no medals were won, and weightlifting, where Mirabhai Chanu narrowly missed the podium with a fourth-place finish.
- Earlier, India sent our **largest-ever contingent (124 athletes) to Tokyo 2020**, but returned with just 7 medals, including Neeraj Chopra's historic javelin gold. Still, India ranked a rather dismal **47th**.
- Abhinav Bindra's** 10m rifle shooting **Gold in 2008** was a breakthrough—an individual shining bright amidst the team sports.
- Our golden era was in **hockey**, where we clinched eight gold medals. But that was a while ago—like, **pre-Independence era**.
- Despite the encouraging signs, **India's total tally of 41 Olympic medals since its debut in 1900** is a stark reminder of the **need for introspection and strategic planning**.

Why does India struggle to secure more medals at the Olympics?

- Potential vs. Performance:** India, with its whopping population of 1.4 billion, should **theoretically be an Olympic powerhouse**. But alas, potential doesn't always translate into podium finishes.
- Funding and Training:** India's **Ministry of Sports and the Sports Authority of India** invested 470 crore across 16 disciplines for athlete training. Despite this funding, the overall performance left room for introspection.
 - The discrepancy between investment and outcomes is evident when its overall ranking—71st out of 84 countries. It raises **questions about the effectiveness of our strategies**.
- Mass Participation:** While India has made strides, mass participation remains a challenge. We need more accessible sports facilities, especially in rural areas, to encourage widespread engagement.
- Sporting Culture:** Cultivating a sporting culture from an early age is crucial. Schools, colleges, and local communities must actively promote sports beyond academics.
- Diverse Sports:** India's sporting ecosystem should embrace a variety of sports. While cricket dominates, disciplines like badminton, wrestling, athletics, and boxing have seen remarkable growth.
- Infrastructure Maintenance:** Developing infrastructure is essential, but maintaining and upgrading existing facilities is equally important.

Changing Landscape

- Sports Authority of India (SAI):** It plays a crucial role in developing sports infrastructure. It manages various sports facilities, provides coaching, and promotes talent across the country. Regional centres and academies set up by SAI contribute significantly to nurturing young athletes.

Do You Know?

- '**Sports**' being a **State subject**, the responsibility of development of sports, including promotion of traditional sports and holding their competitions, rests primarily with the respective State/Union Territory Governments.
- The **Union Government** only supplements their efforts by **bridging critical gaps**.

Sports Authority of India (SAI)

- It is an autonomous organisation under the aegis of the **Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports**, is running several sports promotional schemes across the country to identify talented sports persons in the **age group of 8-25 years** and nurture them to excel at national and international competitions.
- **Inclusivity and Diversity in Sports:** India is focusing on inclusivity and diversity in sports. Initiatives like the **Khelo India Games, Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India Winter Games**, and the upcoming **Khelo India Para Games** are nurturing talent across various disciplines.
- **Khelo India Scheme:** Launched in 2018, it aims to create a robust sports ecosystem at the grassroots level. It provides financial support for training and development, identifying and nurturing talent across different sports. Through this scheme, young athletes get a platform to showcase their skills.
 - ♦ Out of the 117 athletes representing India in Paris, 28 were Khelo India athletes.
- **Sports Infrastructure:** India now boasts approximately 100 sports facilities that meet international standards. These include stadiums, sports complexes, college and university grounds, community centres, and private facilities.
 - ♦ The **National Investment Pipeline (NIP) and the National Monetization Pipeline (NMP)** are two key initiatives to further enhance sports infrastructure:
 - ♦ **NIP:** Over 90 NIP projects for stadiums and sports complexes are underway, with a total investment of \$1.49 billion. Private sector participation is encouraged, with a 21% share in project implementation.
 - ♦ **NMP:** Two national stadiums and two SAI regional centres are earmarked for monetization. The mode of monetization involves **operation, management, and development agreements (OMDA)** with private concessionaires.
- **Private Players Participation:** The sports bureaucracy, once underfunded and stained by corruption, is now getting some attention. Private ventures are stepping in, training elite athletes with upward trajectories.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

- The TOPS program was launched in 2014 with a clear mission: to identify, groom, and prepare potential medal prospects for the Olympics, and to elevate India's medal prospects. It includes:
- **Elite Athlete Identification:** The heart of TOPS lies in identifying elite athletes who have the potential to stand on the Olympic podium. A **committee** — the **TOPS Elite Athletes' Identification Committee** — was formed to meticulously select these athletes. The focus is on sports that are **deemed 'High-Priority'** including archery, badminton, boxing, hockey, shooting, and wrestling.
- **Financial Support:** Once identified, these athletes receive targeted assistance. The scheme aims to add a premium to their preparations, ensuring they have the necessary resources for rigorous training and competition. Financial disbursements are made to support customised training programs tailored to each athlete's needs.

Conclusion and Way Ahead: Improve India's Global Standing in Sports

- Promoting Fitness at the Grassroots Level; Integrating Schools; Broadcasting More Sports; Corporate sponsorship, investment, and philanthropy; Upgrading Sports Infrastructure are crucial.
- NITI Aayog suggests including sports in school curriculum, roping in world-class coaches, and improving infrastructure through public-private partnerships.
- Strategic planning, improved infrastructure, and scientific training methods are essential. Additionally, addressing the mental and emotional aspects of competing at the highest level is crucial.
- After all, it's not just about physical prowess; it's about mental resilience, too.
- India confirmed its commitment about hosting the **2036 Summer Olympics** along with expressing **its willingness to host the 2029 Youth Olympics**. It comes with significant challenges. Infrastructure, logistics, and ensuring a seamless experience for athletes and spectators—all of these factors need meticulous

planning. But as our Prime Minister rightly said, India will leave “**no stone unturned**” in its efforts to bid for this prestigious event.

- ◆ After this, India will become only the fourth Asian country to host the Olympic Games.
- India's Olympic challenge is multifaceted. It's about more than just medals; it's about nurturing a culture of sports, supporting our athletes, and aiming for excellence.

Source: BL



Mains Practice Question

[Q] How can India overcome its historical underperformance in the Olympic Games and achieve sustained success on the world stage?

