

NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE BILL 2025 – POLITY

NEWS: Union Sports Minister introduced the **National Sports Governance Bill** in the Lok Sabha.

- The bill proposes a comprehensive overhaul of sports governance in India, including the creation of a **National Sports Board (NSB)** and **National Sports Tribunal**.
- Further, the Bill seeks to provide for recognition of national sports bodies and regulate their functioning.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Rationale Behind the Bill

- **Legacy of Non-Statutory Frameworks:**
Indian sports governance has, so far, operated under the **National Sports Development Code (2011)**, which lacks statutory backing. This has led to limited enforcement, fragmented regulation, and inconsistent compliance by sports bodies.
- **Need for Legal Clarity and Institutional Coherence:**
The Bill aims to provide a **clear legal framework**, reducing the need for frequent **judicial intervention**, and bringing **administrative consistency** to sports governance.
- **Recurring Litigation and Ad Hocism:**
In the absence of a binding legal regime:
 - Multiple **NSF elections and decisions** have been challenged in courts, leading to prolonged litigations.
 - Several **sports federations are managed by ad hoc committees**, hampering long-term planning and stability.
- **Incorporation of Past Policy Experiences:**
The Bill draws from earlier efforts such as:
 - **Draft National Sports Policy, 2007**
 - **National Sports Development Bills of 2011 and 2013**
These earlier drafts were never enacted, but now serve as a blueprint for current reforms.

Key Objectives of the Bill

- **Establishment of Statutory Institutions:**
 - **National Sports Board (NSB):** To recognize and regulate National Sports Federations (NSFs).
 - **National Sports Tribunal:** A civil court-equivalent authority to adjudicate athlete-federation disputes.
- **Transparency and Good Governance:**
The Bill seeks to embed accountability and ethical conduct across all recognized sports bodies.

- **Athlete-Centric Policy Reforms:**

Promotes **active representation of athletes** in decision-making bodies to make policies more inclusive and responsive to their needs.

Major Provisions of the Bill

- **RTI Compliance:**

- All recognized sports bodies, including the **Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)**, will come under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**.
- This promotes transparency and public oversight of decisions involving public interest and funds.

- **Athlete Representation:**

- Minimum **10% of voting members in NSFs** must be sportspersons of outstanding merit.
- **Gender-balanced executive committees** are mandatory.
- At least **25% of federation executives** must be former athletes, promoting experiential knowledge in administration.

- **Safe Sport Policy:**

- Introduces mandatory safeguards against **harassment, abuse, and exploitation**, especially for **women and minors**.
- Aligns with the **POSH Act (2013)** to institutionalize gender-sensitive redressal mechanisms.

- **Term and Age Limits:**

- Introduces **term caps** for presidents and senior officials to prevent the entrenchment of individuals in key positions.
- However, it **raises the maximum age to 75**, ostensibly to facilitate international representation — a move that has invited criticism.

- **Election Oversight:**

- A dedicated **National Sports Election Panel** will oversee elections to ensure fairness, transparency, and legitimacy in NSF leadership appointments.

- **Athlete Dispute Resolution Mechanism:**

- Establishes a **multi-tiered grievance redress system**:
 1. Internal redress mechanisms within federations.
 2. Appeals to the National Sports Tribunal.
 3. Final appeal to the **Supreme Court**.

- This model is inspired by **FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber** and the **Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)**.

Global Alignment and Olympic Aspirations

- **International Framework Adoption:**
 - The Bill incorporates norms from the **Olympic Charter, Paralympic Charter**, and takes input from global bodies such as the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** and **FIFA**.
- **Addressing Past Mismanagement:**
 - Seeks to clean up misgovernance in bodies such as the **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)** and various **NSFs** through statutory regulation.
- **Boosting India's Olympic Bid:**
 - The Bill is seen as an institutional signal of India's readiness to host the **2036 Olympic Games**, by showcasing professional, ethical, and accountable sports governance.

Key Concerns Surrounding the Bill

- **Age and Tenure Criticism:**
 - Though term caps are introduced, the **increase of the age limit to 75 years** and removal of tenure restrictions for some posts could lead to **institutional capture**.
 - Critics argue this **undermines leadership renewal** and may entrench long-serving administrators.
- **Threat to Autonomy of Sports Bodies:**
 - The establishment of the **Sports Regulatory Board** may infringe on the **autonomy of the IOA and NSFs**.
 - This could trigger **IOC sanctions or suspension** for governmental interference, violating the Olympic Charter's principles.
- **Exclusion of State Olympic Associations:**
 - The Bill does not clearly define the role and powers of **State Olympic Associations**, potentially weakening federal cooperation and grassroots coordination.
- **Judicial Overreach or Oversight?:**
 - Although designed to reduce judicial involvement, the Bill **replaces lower courts** with a specialized tribunal but allows **final appeals to the Supreme Court**, raising concerns of excessive centralization.

Implications for the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India)

- **Historical Independence:**

- BCCI has traditionally operated **outside the purview of government and NSFs**, maintaining unique status and autonomy.
- **Bringing BCCI Under Regulation:**
 - The Bill seeks to bring BCCI within the RTI and regulatory framework **despite it not being a recognized NSF**.
 - Governance standards like **age limits, term restrictions, and dispute redressal mechanisms** will now apply to BCCI as well.
- **Resistance Expected:**
 - This move could face resistance from BCCI, which has historically enjoyed **legal exceptions and self-regulation**.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sports/national-sports-governance-bill-key-features-what-changes-bcci-10146476/>