

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI)

August 29, 2023 • vajiramandravi.com



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Why in news?

- The **United World Wrestling (UWW)** has indefinitely suspended the membership of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) due to the federation's failure to conduct the necessary elections.
 - UWW is the international governing body for the sport of wrestling.
 - Its duties include overseeing wrestling at the World Championships and Olympics.

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI):

- **About**

- Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is a governing body of wrestling based in **New Delhi**.
- It promotes wrestling players for the Olympics, Asian Games, National Wrestling Championships, and World Wrestling Championships.

- **WFI's Contract System for Wrestlers:**

- In 2018, the WFI rolled out its revolutionary contracts system for the grapplers.
- Under the system, the wrestlers have been placed in four grades –
 - Grade A offers financial assistance of 30 lakh rupees;
 - Grade B offers a financial assistance of 20 lakh rupees;
 - The C category offers support of 10 lakh rupees;
 - The D category offers support of 5 lakh rupees.
- The contracts are reviewed after one year.

Background of the case

- **India's Top Wrestlers Protesting**

- Veteran Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat had alleged that WFI President Brij Bhushan has been involved since many years in sexually exploiting women wrestlers.
- She further claimed that several coaches at the national camp in Lucknow have also exploited women wrestlers.
- The wrestlers have also alleged financial mismanagement and arbitrariness in the functioning of the WFI.

- **Demands of the protestors**

- The wrestlers demanded that:
 - an FIR be registered against Brij Bhushan on the basis of their police complaint, and
 - he be arrested under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act as one of the complainants is a minor.
- They have also demanded that he should be removed as the WFI president, and that the federation should be dissolved.

- **Formation of Oversight Committee**

- In January 2023, the government persuaded the wrestlers to call off their protest by forming an Oversight Committee.
- The six-member committee, headed by boxing legend MC Mary Kom, was given four weeks to come up with its findings. However, it submitted its report only in the first week of April.
- The committee has since been disbanded.

- **Election in WFI**

- Following the fresh protests, the Government declared the ongoing process for the WFI elections, which were scheduled for May 7th, **null and void**.
- Later, the federation was supposed to hold elections in June 2023. However, the elections have been repeatedly postponed.
- The Sports Ministry halted the polls and asked **the IOA (Indian Olympic Association) to form an ad-hoc committee** to complete the election process within 45 days.
 - The IOA appointed Justice (retd.) M.M. Kumar as the returning officer for the WFI elections on June 12 after which the polls were scheduled for July 6.
- In May, both the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UWW (United World Wrestling) asked the IOA to conduct the WFI polls within the stipulated time frame.
- However, polls could not be held in the stipulated timeframe due to:
 - Demand of the protestors that Brij Bhushan's family members should be stopped from contesting the elections.
 - Brij Bhushan himself was not eligible to contest the WFI polls after completing three terms (12 years).
 - Disgruntled state associations seeking voting rights filed petitions in the respective High Courts.
- The stays on the elections, first by the Guwahati High Court on June 25 and then by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on August 11 (a day before the latest date fixed for the elections), further caused the delay.

News Summary: Wrestling Federation of India membership suspended on world stage

- The United World Wrestling (UWW) has taken the decision to suspend the membership of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) indefinitely.
- It has been suspended due to the postponement of Elections to designations in WFI due to Protests and Legal Battles.

Why did UWW take this decision?

- The **UWW Disciplinary Chamber** found sufficient grounds to provisionally suspend the WFI due to the prevailing situation for at least six months.
- The absence of an elected president and a board did not comply with UWW regulations and its conditions for membership.
- The Chamber also considered the protection of athletes after the allegations against the former WFI president and the necessity to restore the functioning of the federation as another ground to suspend the national body.

What is the impact?

- Wrestlers and their support personnel will be able to participate in all UWW sanctioned events.
 - This includes the World championships to be held in Belgrade in September 2023.
- However, they will not be able to compete in these events with an Indian flag. They will have to compete as 'neutral athletes' under the UWW flag."
 - No national anthem will be played if an Indian wrestler wins a gold medal.

What next?

- Different factions of the WFI need to realise the immense loss the sport has suffered because of the ongoing issue.
- The only way to bail the country out of international embarrassment and give the athletes their right to compete under the Tricolour is to conduct the WFI elections in a free and fair manner.

Q1) What is International Olympic Committee (IOC)?

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is a global organization responsible for overseeing and coordinating the Olympic Games. The IOC's primary mission is to promote and support the Olympic Movement, which encompasses the values and principles of the Olympic Games.

Q2) What is United World Wrestling (UWW)?

United World Wrestling (UWW) is the international governing body for the sport of wrestling, overseeing and promoting various forms of amateur wrestling worldwide. UWW was formerly known as the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles (FILA) until it underwent a rebranding and restructuring in 2014.

Source: [Wrestling Federation of India membership suspended on world stage](#) | [The Hindu](#) | [Outlook India](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/wrestling-federation-of-india-wfi/>

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