Denial of Visas – ISSF World Cup Controversy

Why in news?

India recently refused visa requests from two Pakistani shooters expected to participate in the ongoing ISSF World Cup in India.

What is the importance of world cups in shooting?

- Unlike other sports, shooting has multiple World Cups every year, with World Championship being the marquee quadrennial event.
- Every year there three or four stages of the in Rifle/Pistol events usually between March and August across countries.
- The first-ever ISSF World Cup series was held in 1986 in an attempt to bring together the various international competitions under one banner and homogenise the system for qualification to the Olympic shooting competitions.
- From then on, every World Cup in the year before an Olympic Games has quota places for medal winners, adding more weight to the competition.
- The International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup to be held in Delhi had 16 Tokyo 2020 quota places for eight events, which will have participation of 500 shooters from 60 countries.
- The quotas were reduced to 14 after the recent controversy of denying visas for Pakistani athletes from Indian side.
- ISSF is a qualification competition for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 in which direct quotas are earned by the respective National Olympic Committees.
- India has already clinched the two maximum slots possible in the women's 10m air rifle category when Anjum Moudgil and Apuruvi Chandela finished second and fourth at the 2018 World Championship in Changwon, Korea.
- Thus, India will be competing for remaining 12 quotas in the competition.

What is the recent controversy?

- India recently refused to grant an entry visa to the Pakistani delegation comprising two athletes and one official who were meant to participate in the ISSF World Cup.
- This was done in the backdrop of heightened bilateral tensions after the terror attack in Pulwama.

- The two Pakistani athletes were due to compete in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol event in which <u>two quota places</u> are available for the event.

- At this backdrop, International Olympic Committee (IOC)sent a letter to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).
- The IOC has declared that denial of visa is against the Olympic Charter's principles, of which non-discrimination, equal treatment of all athletes and sporting delegations and political non-interference are supreme.
- IOC also made it clear that all future international sporting events in India would be put on hold unless the host gave a written guarantee that there would be no discrimination on participation of athletes.
- It further said that such written guarantees must ensure the entry of all participants in such events in full compliance with the rules of the Olympic Charter.

Has Olympic qualification been withdrawn for all events now?

- With this controversy, the IOC decided to withdraw the recognition of the 25m rapid fire pistol competitionas an Olympic qualification event in the Delhi ISSF world cup.
- This is the event that the denied Pakistan athletes were about to participate.
- The ISSF now has to make a proposal on how these two available Olympic quota places will now be otherwise reassigned.
- However, the ISSF <u>retained 14 remaining quotas for other events</u> and restricts the withdrawal of recognition to just one event.

What are the concerns?

- There have been precedents of strong action by IOC in similar cases.
- Ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics, the Asian Shooting Championship in Kuwait had its qualification status removed after an Israeli delegate wasn't granted a visa.
- Recently, Malaysia was stripped of the World Para Swimming Championship for turning down visa requests from Israeli participants.
- However, such bans on sportspersons and interactions in international sports events will have no meaningful effect.
- India is also aspiring to host the 2026 Youth Olympics, 2030 Asian Games and 2032 Olympics.
- Thus, the recent controversy shows that India's future as a host for sporting events remain uncertain.