

Thalassemia

❖ Context

- The Union government will soon launch a national mission to tackle thalassemia - beginning with a country-wide screening exercise, wherever required.

❖ What is Thalassemia?

- Thalassemia is a chronic blood disorder. It is a genetic disorder due to which a patient cannot make enough haemoglobin found in **Red Blood Cells (RBC's)**.
- This leads to anemia and patients also require blood transfusions every two to three weeks to survive.
- Thalassemias are inherited disorders passed from parents to children through genes. Each red blood cell can contain between **240 and 300 million** molecules of haemoglobin.
- The severity of the disease depends on the **mutations involved** in the genes, and their interplay.

❖ Types of Thalassemia:

- **Thalassemia minor:**
 - In Thalassemia minor, the hemoglobin genes are inherited during conception, one from the **mother and one from the father**.
 - People with a Thalassemia trait in one gene are known as carriers or are said to have thalassemia minor.
 - Thalassemia minor is not a disease and they have only mild anemia.
- **Thalassemia Intermedia:** These are patients who have mild to severe symptoms.
- **Thalassemia Major:**
 - This is the most severe form of Thalassemia. This occurs when a child inherits two **mutated genes**, one from each parent.
 - Patients Children with thalassemia major develop the symptoms of severe anemia within the first year of life.
 - They require regular transfusions in order to survive or a **bone marrow transplant** and are at a grave risk of iron overload and other complications.

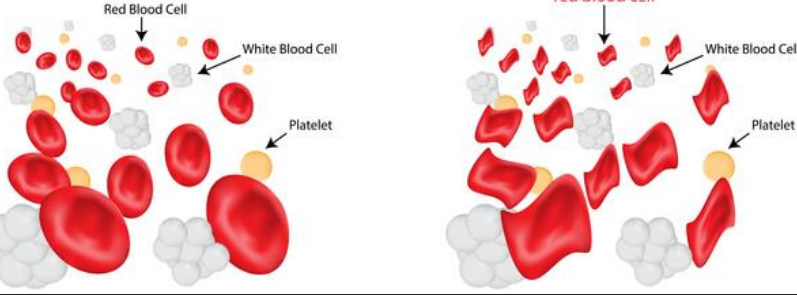
❖ Key Facts:

- India is the thalassaemia capital of the world with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month.
- Over **1,00,000 patients** across the country die before they turn 20 due to lack of access to treatment.
- The first case of thalassaemia in India was reported in **1938**. Every year **10,000 children with thalassaemia major** are born in India.

Thalassemia

Normal

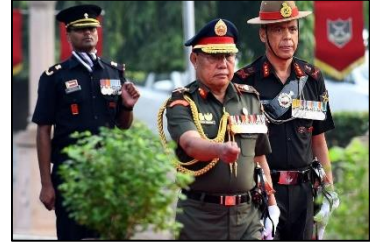
Thalassemia



Common Uniform In Army

❖ Context

- Brigadier and above rank officers of the **Indian Army** will wear a common uniform starting from August 1 2023, regardless of their regiments and services.



❖ Key Highlights:

- This change aims to promote a sense of common identity among senior leadership.
- The new **uniform will feature** standardized headgear, shoulder rank badges, gorget patches, belts, and shoes for flag-rank officers, including Brigadiers and Generals.
- Lanyards, which are cords or straps worn around the neck, shoulder, or wrist, will no longer be part of the uniform.
- The headgear will be a **green beret cap** for all senior officers, and the belt buckle will bear the Indian Army crest instead of unit insignia.
- The officers will also wear **black brogue** shoes with a single approved pattern in the front.
- While distinct uniforms and accoutrements have historically represented specific arms, regiments, and services within the Army, the aim now is to foster **camaraderie, esprit de corps**, and regimental ethos among junior leadership and the rank and file.

- At the unit and battalion level, a distinct sense of identity promotes a strong bond among officers and soldiers from the same regiment.
- The Indian Army's uniform has undergone several changes over the years.
 - The first significant shift occurred after Independence when **Olive Green** color was adopted to **differentiate from the Khaki uniform** worn during British rule.
 - Following the 1971 war with Pakistan, camouflage patterns were introduced as combat attire to **align with global military trends**.
 - The most recent change was the introduction of the "Digital Pattern Combat Uniform" in 2022 to address security concerns related to unauthorized proliferation.
 - The Army also obtained **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)** for the design and camouflage pattern of the new uniform.

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Lithium Reserves In Rajasthan



❖ Context

- Lithium reserves have been discovered in Rajasthan's Degana, surpassing the recently found reserves in Jammu and Kashmir, according to state government officials.

❖ Key Highlights:

- They claim that these reserves can fulfill around **80% of India's lithium demand**.
- The government is focusing on rare earth exploration for electric vehicle batteries.
- Lithium reserves are concentrated in the lithium triangle in South America – **Argentina, Bolivia & Chile, with 50% of the deposits concentrated in these regions.**
- China, meanwhile, has the lead over other countries and China controls **75% of Lithium refining.**

- India's plan to increase EV penetration by **30% by 2030** relies heavily on lithium - as of now, only a little more than **1% of all vehicle sales** in the country are electric vehicles.

❖ Significance of Lithium Batteries:

- A lithium battery is the **only alternative for electric vehicles** since it has a high power-to-weight ratio, enabling it to provide a large charge while keeping the vehicle's curb weight low.
- It is more energy efficient and performs better at a wide range of temperatures. This makes it a safer, more reliable method than other materials.

Gold Rush by Central Banks



❖ Context

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) gold reserves touched **794.64 metric tonnes in fiscal 2023**, an increase of nearly **5% over fiscal 2022**, when it held 760.42 metric tonnes of gold.
- As on March 31, 2023, the country's total **foreign exchange reserves stood at \$578.449 billion**, and gold reserves were pegged at \$45.2 billion.

❖ Key Highlights:

- Central banks in **Singapore, China, and Turkey too have been buying gold.**
- In calendar year 2022, central banks around the world purchased a **record 1,136 tonnes of gold.**
- The **Central Bank of Turkey** reported the largest buying in 2022. (From 148 tonnes to 542 tonnes)
- **Reasons Behind Increasing these Reserves :**
 - As part of the **diversification process**, the RBI has been adding gold to its reserves.
 - Gold is considered a more **safe, secure, and liquid asset**, to safeguard its returns amid **global uncertainty** and a **rising inflation scenario.**
 - This change in strategy has been driven by **negative interest rates** in the past, the weakening of the dollar and growing geopolitical uncertainty.
- **Gold Purchased by RBI :**
 - The RBI bought **34.22 tonnes of gold in fiscal 2023.**
 - In fiscal 2022, it had accumulated 65.11 tonnes of gold.
 - Between the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019 and fiscal 2023, the RBI's gold reserves swelled by 228.41 tonnes.
 - 437.22 tonnes of gold is held overseas in safe custody with the **Bank of England and the Bank of International Settlements (BIS)**, and 301.10 tonnes of gold is held domestically.
 - The share of gold in the total foreign exchange reserves increased from about **7% at the end of March 2022** to about **7.81%** at the end of March 2023.

❖ About Foreign Exchange Reserve:

- Foreign Exchange reserves or Forex reserves are **assets such as foreign currencies, gold reserves, treasury bills, etc retained by a central bank or other monetary authority.**
- The **majority of foreign exchange reserves are held in US dollars.**
- **India's foreign exchange reserves include :**
 - Foreign Currency Assets.
 - Gold Reserves.
 - Special Drawing Rights (SDR).
 - Reserve position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- **Significance :**
 - Forex **reduces** the likelihood of **balance-of-payments crises.**
 - It helps **preserve economic and financial stability** against pressures on exchange rates and disorderly market conditions, and **create space for policy autonomy.**
 - To ensure that RBI has **backup funds** if their national currency rapidly devalues or becomes altogether insolvent.
 - If the value of the Rupee decreases due to an increase in demand of the foreign currency then RBI sells the dollar in the Indian money market so that **depreciation of the Indian currency can be checked.**
 - A good forex reserve **helps in attracting foreign trade and earns a good reputation** in trading partners.



Medical Tourism



❖ Context

- India aims to eliminate healthcare disparities across the globe via **Medical Value Travel (MVT)** under its G20 presidency this year.

❖ Key Highlights:

- India ranked **tenth globally for medical tourism**, as per the Medical Tourism Index 2020-2021 (MTI).
- India earned an estimated ₹1,35,193 crore, ₹1,54,146 crore, and ₹1,77,874 crore in foreign exchange in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively from MVT.
- NITI Aayog estimates that the Indian economy could earn an additional **\$9 billion by 2026 from MVT** and wellness tourism.

❖ Government Initiatives:

- India hosted the **'One Earth One Health – Advantage Healthcare India - 2023'** programme in New Delhi on April 27, & 28, 2023 in a bid to promote India as a hub for medical tourism.
- The two-day summit aimed to promote the export of medical services from India and provide networking opportunities for **Medical Value Travel (MVT)** experts, industry stakeholders and professionals.
- The Centre has launched a **'Heal in India'** campaign to market the nation as a wellness and medical tourism destination.
- India has launched **e-visas for MVT travellers** from 156 nations and has also accredited **AYUSH centres**, formalising their status in the Indian medical industry.

❖ About Medical Tourism:

- Medical tourism is also known as medical value travel, health tourism or global healthcare.
- It is the **practice of travelling across international borders seeking medical services, mainly elective or complex surgeries.**
- Stakeholders in medical tourism include **airlines, hospitals, wellness centres & hotels, among others.**
- Currently, the most sought-after destination for such procedures is Canada with its favourable environment, its robust medical tourism industry and its top-quality facilities and services.
- While universal healthcare is available to its citizens, most government hospitals in Canada also cater to foreign patients.
- **Reasons why India is a Preferred MVT Destination :**
 - Availability of cost-effective healthcare service.
 - Presence of quality diagnostic equipment and trained doctors, with many of them fluent in English.
 - India also has **ayurveda, yoga & naturopathy** and other traditional systems of medicine for the treatment of various ailments, promoting wellness tourism.

Enforcement Directorate (ED)



❖ Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court said it **might revisit its 2021 ruling** that the tenure of a superannuated officer may be extended only in exceptional circumstances.
- In 2021, the court was dealing with the appointment of Sanjay Kumar Mishra, Director of the **Enforcement Directorate (ED).**

❖ About Enforcement Directorate (ED):

- ED is a **law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency** responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- **On 1st May 1956**, an **'Enforcement Unit'** was formed, in the Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947.
 - In the year 1957, this **Unit was renamed as 'Enforcement Directorate'.**

• Functions :

- It enforces the following two laws.
 - Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (**FEMA**).
 - Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (**PMLA**).
- **Parent Ministry :**
 - It is part of the **Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government Of India.**
- **Composition :**
 - It is **headed by the Director of Enforcement**, who is an **IRS officer** (Indian Revenue Service).
- **Headquarter :**
 - New Delhi.
 - It has many regional offices all over the country.

News in Between the Lines

Persona Non Grata

❖ Context

- A day after Canada announced it would expel a Chinese diplomat over allegations of involvement in a campaign to intimidate a Canadian politician, **China declared a Canadian diplomat in Shanghai as persona non grata.**

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❖ **Persona Non Grata:**

- Persona non grata is a Latin phrase which means “**unwelcome person.**”
- In diplomacy, it refers to a diplomat or foreign person whose entering or remaining in a certain country has been **prohibited** by that country.
- The designation received diplomatic meaning at the **1961 Vienna Convention for Diplomatic Relations.**
- **Article 9** of the treaty mentions that a country can declare any member of a diplomatic staff persona non grata “at any time and without having to explain its decision.
- Soon after the declaration, the person concerned usually returns to their home nation.
- In case they fail to do so within a reasonable period, the country “may refuse to recognise the person concerned as a member of the mission.” The article also says that a person can be declared persona non grata even before arriving in a country

Haifa



❖ **Context**

- Recently Israeli Foreign Minister said that Arab train networks in future would be carrying Indian goods to the Israeli port of Haifa.

❖ **About Haifa:**

- Haifa is a city located on the northern coast of Israel. It is the third-largest city in the country, after **Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.** Haifa is home to Israel's largest and busiest seaport, making it a significant center for international trade and commerce.
- Haifa is situated on the slopes of **Mount Carmel**, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.
- The port handles a wide range of goods, including oil, chemicals, and various cargo shipments.
- **Attractions:** Haifa offers several attractions and landmarks for visitors. One of the most famous sites is the **Baha'i Gardens**, a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its terraced gardens and stunning views.

Tungnath Temple



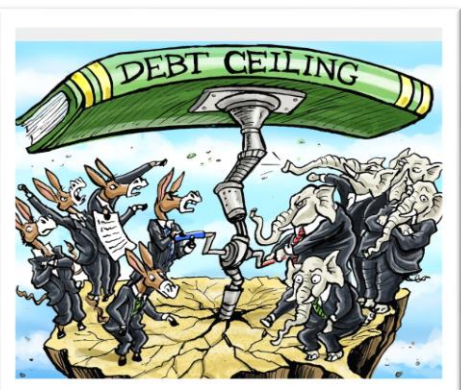
❖ **Context**

- The central government issued a notification recently declaring the **Tungnath temple**, situated in the **Rudraprayag** district of **Uttarakhand**, as a **monument of national importance.**

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The temple holds immense **religious significance** for Hindus and is recognized as the third of the five **Panchkedars** of Uttarakhand.
- The Tungnath Temple, situated at an **elevation of 12,800 feet**, holds the distinction of being the **highest ancient 'Shivalaya' in Asia**, located at the highest point above sea level. It stands as one of the **tallest temples dedicated to Lord Shiva** and is the highest among the **five Panch Kedar temples.**

U.S. Debt Ceiling



❖ **Context**

- Recently, **United States Treasury Secretary** notified Congress that the country could default on its debt as early as June 1, 2023 if the **House of Representatives and President Joe Biden's White House** did not reach a consensus to raise or suspend the **debt ceiling.**

❖ **About Debt Ceiling:**

- The debt ceiling was **introduced in 1917 during World War I.**
- It is the maximum amount that the **US federal government** can borrow to fulfill its financial obligations.
- As the government spends more than it earns through taxes and other revenues, it needs to borrow money in order to pay for expenses, such as social security and Medicare benefits, military etc.
- In 2021, this borrowing limit was raised to **\$31.4 trillion.**
- **Consequences of Breaching Debt Ceiling :**
 - The Treasury Secretary warned that if they failed to raise the debt limit by June, the **government would default on its debt, which might trigger an economic catastrophe.**
 - Once the debt default happens, analysts say that the **dollar would weaken**, the stock markets would collapse.

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