

6. Short News

Critical Minerals Ministerial

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar participated in the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial in Washington DC.

About the Critical Minerals Ministerial

The Critical Minerals Ministerial is a high-level international forum that brings together ministers and senior officials to coordinate policies on securing, diversifying, and stabilising global critical mineral supply chains.

Host- United States in Washington, DC, USA

Key Objectives of the Ministerial-

1. De-risk supply chains by reducing over-dependence on a few countries
2. Promote diversification in mining, processing, and refining
3. Strengthen international cooperation among trusted partners
4. Ensure affordability, sustainability, and resilience of mineral supplies

About Critical Minerals

Meaning- Minerals essential for economic development & national security, with high supply risk due to concentration, geopolitics, or limited substitutes.

Examples- Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, rare earth elements (REEs), copper, gallium, germanium.

Strategic importance- Backbone of energy transition (EVs, batteries, renewables), defence, electronics, and semiconductors.

Global concentration- Mining & processing dominated by a few countries, e.g., lithium (Chile, Australia), cobalt (Congo), Rare Earth Elements processing (China).

2. Operation Kiya

Operation Kiya gained attention after Indian security forces neutralised two Pakistani terrorists in a joint counter-terrorism operation in Udhampur's forested Basantgarh area.

Operation Kiya

Operation Kiya is a joint, intelligence-based counter-terrorism operation launched by Indian security forces to neutralise infiltrated terrorists operating in the forested and mountainous regions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Objective

To track, contain and eliminate terrorist elements hiding in difficult terrain. To prevent inter-district movement and escape of terrorists and safeguard nearby civilian habitations. To disrupt cross-border terror networks by neutralising active modules at the infiltration stage.

Focus Area

Conducted primarily in remote forested and hilly areas such as Basantgarh (Udhampur district). Based on specific and credible intelligence inputs. Employs a cordon-and-search strategy, sealing exit routes and tightening area domination. Executed through a joint security grid involving the Army's White Knight Corps, Counter Insurgency Force (Delta), Jammu and Kashmir Police, and CRPF.

Significance

Strengthens internal security by preventing regrouping of terrorist modules. Enhances area domination over vulnerable infiltration corridors in Jammu and Kashmir. Demonstrates inter-agency

coordination and operational preparedness in prolonged, high-risk operations. Reinforces India's counter-terrorism posture against cross-border terrorism in challenging terrain.

3. Turtle Trails

Proposed in the Union Budget 2026–27, the “Turtle Trails” initiative establishes regulated eco-tourism circuits across Odisha, Karnataka, and Kerala, aims to harmonize marine conservation with local livelihoods through scientifically managed, nature-based tourism.

Budget 2026–27 on Turtle Trails

A Turtle Trail is not just a path; it is a managed ecological corridor. These are designated zones near nesting sites where visitor activity is strictly monitored to ensure the survival of marine life.

Regulated Eco-Tourism- Shift from unmanaged mass tourism to guided, low-impact pathways near nesting sites to minimize anthropogenic stress on marine life.

Strategic Geographies- Focus on the Gahirmatha and Rushikulya rookeries in Odisha, and critical stretches along the Arabian Sea in Kerala and Karnataka.

“Dark-Sky” Infrastructure- Funding for non-intrusive, temporary observation zones and lighting systems designed to prevent hatchling disorientation.

Community Stewardship- Promoting “Turtle Guardians”—incentivizing local fishing communities and youth to lead conservation efforts as professional naturalists.

Tech-Driven Monitoring- Investment in satellite telemetry and AI-enabled surveillance to track migratory patterns and enforce seasonal “no-go” windows.

About the Olive Ridley Turtle

Scientific Name- *Lepidochelys olivacea*, the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.

The Arribada- Renowned for their unique mass-nesting behaviour, where tens of thousands of females congregate on the same beach to lay eggs.

Conservation Status-

1. IUCN Red List- Vulnerable.
2. Wildlife Protection Act (1972)- Schedule I (offering the highest legal protection in India).
3. CITES- Appendix I.

Ecological Role- They act as oceanic gardeners, maintaining the health of seagrass beds and providing vital nutrients to beach ecosystems through unhatched eggs.

Major Threats- Entanglement in trawl nets (bycatch), coastal erosion, illegal egg poaching, and marine plastic pollution.

4. Startup Recognition Framework

Recently, the Government revised the Startup Recognition Framework to strengthen the Startup India Action Plan as the initiative entered its second decade.

Changes in Startup Recognition Framework (2026)

Turnover threshold enhanced- Increased from ₹100 crore to ₹200 crore, expanding eligibility for growing startups.

Dedicated Deep Tech Startup category introduced- Age limit extended to 20 years and turnover cap raised to ₹300 crore for deep tech startups, recognising long gestation and high R&D intensity. Earlier there was no separate category and the general age limit is 10 years.

Cooperatives made eligible- Multi-State and State-registered Cooperative Societies included, promoting grassroots innovation in agriculture and rural sectors. Earlier only private entities (companies, LLPs, partnerships) were eligible

Policy intent- Facilitate long-term patient capital, deepen innovation, and strengthen India's high-technology ecosystem.

About Recognised Startup (India)

A Recognised Startup is an entity granted official recognition by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) based on notified eligibility criteria, enabling access to policy and fiscal incentives.

Categories-

1. General Startups- Up to 10 years from incorporation; annual turnover $\leq$ ₹200 crore.
2. Deep Tech Startups- Up to 20 years from incorporation; turnover cap ₹300 crore.
3. Eligible entities- Private Limited Companies, LLPs, Partnership Firms, and Cooperative Societies.

Benefits of Recognition-

1. Tax incentives- 100% income tax exemption on profits for three consecutive years under the Income Tax Act, 1961.
2. Regulatory relief- Exemption from preparing cash flow statements.
3. Ecosystem support- Access to schemes like Startup India, AIM (*Atal Innovation Mission*), GENESIS (*Gen-Next Support for Innovative Startups*), and *National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations* (NIDHI).

Startup India

Startup India is a flagship initiative to build a robust, inclusive and innovation-driven startup ecosystem across sectors and regions.

Launched- 16 January 2016

Nodal Body - Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)

Objectives- Promote entrepreneurship and innovation beyond technology sectors. Expand startups from Tier-1 cities to Tier-2, Tier-3, rural and semi-urban areas. Support job creation, manufacturing and emerging technologies.

Key Pillars

1. Simplification & Handholding- Self-certification, startup portal, faster exits.
2. Funding Support & Incentives- ₹10,000 crore Fund of Funds, tax incentives.
3. Industry-Academia Partnership- Incubation, research and innovation support.

5. Sabhasaar Initiative

As of January 2026, over 1.11 lakh Gram Panchayats (GP) across States/UTs have adopted SabhaSaar, the AI-based Gram Sabha meeting summarisation tool.

SabhaSaar Initiative

SabhaSaar is an AI-enabled voice-to-text meeting summarisation platform launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on 14 August 2025 to digitise and standardise Gram Sabha and Panchayat proceedings.

Nodal Ministry- Ministry of Panchayati Raj

AI & Cloud Infrastructure- Provisioned through the IndiaAI Compute Portal under the IndiaAI Mission, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Data Governance– Regulated under the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 framework; data processed entirely within government systems.

Objectives

Enable automated, accurate preparation of Minutes of Meetings (MoM). Improve transparency, record-keeping, and accountability in local governance. Support monitoring of Gram Sabha frequency, participation, and follow-up actions.

Significance

Strengthens e-governance at the grassroots level. Reduces manual workload and errors in Panchayat documentation. Facilitates evidence-based monitoring of Panchayat functioning and resolution compliance.

Top States with Adoption (No. of GPs)– Uttar Pradesh (31,477), Tamil Nadu (12,451), Chhattisgarh (8,834), Andhra Pradesh (9,285) and Odisha (6,720) Sabha Saar marks a key step in integrating AI with Panchayati Raj Institutions to deepen participatory democracy.

6. PLASTINDIA 2026

PLASTINDIA 2026, the world's largest plastics exhibition, commenced on 5 February 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

About PLASTINDIA

PLASTINDIA is a triennial global exhibition of the plastics industry, organised with support from the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals (DCPC), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, to showcase innovations across the plastics value chain.

Theme of PLASTINDIA 2026– “Bharat Next”

Aligns with the national vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat, highlighting advanced manufacturing and circular economy practices.

Objectives

Promote trade, technology transfer, and sustainable plastics manufacturing. Showcase India's capabilities in advanced machinery, materials, and recycling solutions. Strengthen skill development and industry–academia linkages.

Structured around five pillars– Trade, Technology, Talent, Tradition, and Tourism.

Participants

1. Over 2,000 international and domestic exhibitors.
2. Active participation by CIPET (Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering & Technology) in skill development, R&D, and technology dissemination.
3. Engagement of industry leaders, startups, students, and policymakers.

Significance– Organised as a Zero Waste Exhibition, reinforcing circular economy principles. Enhances India's global positioning in plastics manufacturing and employment generation.

Status of Plastic Economy in India– The Indian plastics industry is valued at ₹3–3.5 lakh crore, supporting infrastructure, consumer goods, and exports. India plays a critical role in global supply chains as it advances towards a USD 10 trillion economy.