

**Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** released the updated guidelines on ECBs through **Foreign Exchange Management (Borrowing and Lending) (First Amendment) Regulations, 2026**.

- RBI has made amendments to the **Foreign Exchange Management (Borrowing and Lending) Regulations, 2018** by exercising power conferred under the **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999**.

ECBs refer to the borrowing of funds from foreign sources in the form of loans, **Foreign Currency Convertible Bond (FCCB)**, or other financial instruments.

- An eligible borrower may raise ECB denominated in **foreign currency (FCY)** or **Indian Rupee (INR)**.
- Importance ECBs:** Interest rates are lower compared to domestic funds, etc.

#### ECB Framework

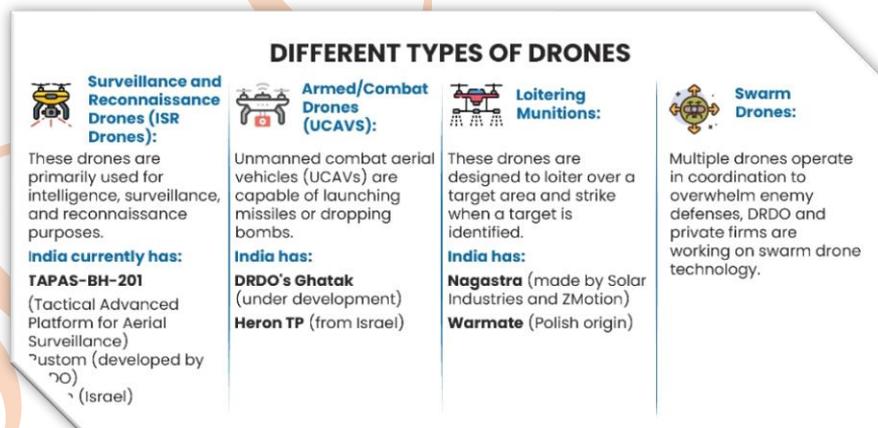
- Eligible borrowers:** Any non-individual resident entity incorporated under central or state law is now eligible to raise overseas loans, subject to statutory permissions.
- Increased Borrowing Limits and Maturity**
  - Higher Caps:** Eligible companies can now raise ECBs of up to \$1 billion or 300% of their net worth.
  - Maturity Periods:** The general minimum average maturity period is set at **three years**.
    - Borrowers in the manufacturing sector are permitted a shorter average maturity period of 1 to 3 years under certain conditions.
- Conversion of ECB into non-debt instrument:** An ECB (including those which is matured but unpaid) may be converted into a **non-debt instrument**, subject to compliance with the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019.
- Arm's length principle:** ECB from a related party shall be carried out on an arm's length basis.
  - Arm's length principle** means a transaction between two related parties that is conducted as if the transacting parties were unrelated, so that there is no conflict of interest.

**End-Use Restrictions:** ECB funds cannot be used for: Chit funds or Nidhi companies, Stock market investments, etc

#### India's Drone Ecosystem

India has transitioned from pilot drone projects to a regulated drone ecosystem with 38,500+ registered drones (**Unique Identification Number (UIN)**).

- The expanding drone ecosystem is reshaping public service delivery, infrastructure management, agriculture, and national security.



#### Transformation of Public Service Delivery through Drone Technologies

- Agriculture & Livelihoods:** Namo Drone Didi Scheme (2023) provides drones to Women SHGs to generate sustainable rural livelihoods.
- Land Mapping:** SVAMITVA Scheme (2020) uses drones for rural abadi surveys to resolve land disputes and enable property cards, improving access to institutional credit.
- Highway Monitoring:** NHAI mandates monthly drone-video mapping of highway projects for progress tracking, digital reporting, discrepancy checks, and use as evidence in dispute resolution.
- Disaster Management:** E.g., North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR) *drones* provide real-time aerial visuals during floods and landslides, aiding rapid assessment, coordinated rescue, and emergency response.

- **Railway Surveillance:** Ministry of Railways deploys UAVs for inspection of tracks, bridges, and hard-to-reach infrastructure, improving maintenance efficiency and safety.
- **Defence Applications:** Drones enable border surveillance, intelligence gathering and precision strikes; integrated with radar and air-defence networks, they enhance **rapid threat detection** and protection of **critical infrastructure** (e.g., Operation Sindoor).

#### Accelerating Drone Adoption in India

- **Drone Rules, 2021 and Drone (Amendment) Rules 2022 & 2023:** It has significantly liberalised India's drone ecosystem.
  - **E.g.,** Nearly 90% of Indian airspace was declared a Green Zone for drone operations, allowing flights up to 400 feet.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI):** PLI scheme for drones and drone components has an approved outlay of ₹120 crore.
- **GST Rationalisation:** GST on drones reduced to 5%, replacing earlier 18% and 28% slabs.
- **Digital Sky, 2018 and eGCA:** The regulatory services such as drone registration, remote pilot certification, Type certification and RPTO authorisation has been migrated from Digital Sky platform to eGCA.
- **Ecosystem Development and Capacity Building through Flagship Programmes:** E.g., National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR) engages students and researchers.

#### India and France upgrade ties to Special Global Strategic Partnership

The French President's visit to India resulted in 21 important outcomes in areas from defence to critical minerals.

#### Key Outcomes

- **Defence and Security**
  - **H125 Helicopter Final Assembly Line** Inaugurated at Vemagal, Karnataka
    - **H125** is a light utility single-engine Helicopter of Airbus, the only helicopter to land on Mt. Everest Summit.
  - Joint venture between Bharat Electronics and Safran to produce **HAMMER missile** in India launched.
    - **Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range (HAMMER)** is a Smart Precision Guided Air-to-Ground Weapon system adaptable for Rafale and LCA Tejas aircrafts.
- **Technology & Innovation Cooperation**
  - Launch of **India-France Year of Innovation 2026** and **India-France Innovation Network**.
  - Constitution of a **Joint Advanced Technology Development Group** and Indo-French Centre for **Digital Sciences and Technology**.
  - **Indo-French Centre for AI in Health (AIIMS, New Delhi)** launched.
- **Critical Minerals and Energy Cooperation**
  - Joint Declaration on cooperation in **critical minerals** to ensure diversified and resilient supply chains.
  - To deepen cooperation in **large nuclear power projects (including Jaitapur), Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs)**.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation**
  - Amending the **Double Tax Avoidance Agreement** between India and France.
- **Other Areas of Cooperation:** Startups, Health, Renewable Energy, student mobility and Skilling.

#### India-France Relations

- **Strategic Partnership:** Established in 1998, this was India's first strategic partnership with a Western nation.
- **Horizon 2047 Roadmap:** Adopted in 2023, to guide the relationship for the next 25 years.
- **Bilateral trade:** More than doubled in the last decade to Euros 12.67 billion in 2024-25.
- **Joint defence exercises:** SHAKTI (Army), GARUDA (Air Force), VARUNA (Navy).

#### SAHI and BODH Initiatives launched at the India AI Impact Summit 2026

Both SAHI and BODH initiatives mark a significant step in India's journey towards building a robust, responsible, and globally competitive health AI ecosystem.

## Strategic Pillars of SAHI



Establishing Governance and Safety Foundations



Strengthening Data and Digital Infrastructure



Building Workforce and Institutional capacity



Enabling Responsible Innovation and evidence generation



Supporting Ecosystem-level Adoption and Scale

### Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India (SAHI)

- It is the **national framework** to guide the **responsible integration of AI into India's health system**.
- **Vision:** To enable the **safe, ethical, evidence-based, and inclusive adoption** of AI across India's healthcare system.
- It leverages **digital public infrastructure** to expand access, improve outcomes, and establish India as a **global leader** in responsible healthcare AI.
- It **supports ecosystem stakeholders** by providing shared principles, strategic direction, etc.

### About Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI (BODH) initiative

- **Developed by:** IIT Kanpur in collaboration with **National Health Authority (NHA)**.
- **Purpose:** It is a **privacy-preserving benchmarking platform** that enables rigorous evaluation of AI models using diverse, real-world health data without sharing underlying datasets.
- It has been positioned as a **digital public good** under the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission**.

### Other Initiatives for AI in Healthcare

- **Centres of Excellence for Artificial Intelligence:** AIIMS Delhi, PGIMER Chandigarh, and AIIMS Rishikesh lead the development of indigenous AI solutions.
- **Ethical Oversight:** All AI deployment follows the **ICMR Ethical Guidelines (2023)**
- **IndiaAI Application Development Initiative under IndiaAI Mission:** Aims to develop, scale, and promote the adoption of impactful AI solutions designed to tackle significant national challenges.

## Places in News: Republic of Ireland

### Republic of Ireland (Capital: Dublin)

India and Ireland agreed to work closely in the field of ICTs through structured engagement, exchange of best practices, capacity building, and industry linkages.

#### Political Features

- It occupies greater part of an island lying to west of Great Britain.
- Surrounding water bodies: Atlantic Ocean (west), Celtic Sea (south), and Irish Sea (east).
- Ireland is separated from Great Britain by **North Channel, Irish Sea, and St. George's Channel**.

#### Geographical Features

- **Highest Peak:** Carrauntoohil

**Longest river:** River Shannon



## Bharrana site

After performing **radiocarbon dating at Bharrana in Haryana** the researchers now show the possibility that the **Harappan Civilisation of the Indian subcontinent** could be over 8,000 years old.

## About Bhirrana Site

- **Excavated by:** Shri L.S.Rao along the paleo-channels of **Ghaggar river**.
- **Period-IA: Hakra Wares Culture:** Characterised by well-plastered subterranean dwelling pits dug into natural soil, Ceramic assemblage.
- **Period-IB: Early Harappan:** Houses constructed with mud bricks, Pottery shows six fabrics similar to Kalibanga-I.
- **Period-IIA: Early Mature Harappan:** Marked by transformation in city layout, Settlement enclosed by a mud-brick fortification wall.
- **Period-IIB: Mature Harappan:** Steatite seals, Standard Harappan antiquities
- **Antiquities include:** Beads of semiprecious stones, Terracotta objects, Copper bangles, bone objects etc.

## Project Vault

Recently, the **United States unveiled Project Vault**.

### About Project Vault

- It is a supply chain security initiative establishing the **U.S. Strategic Critical Minerals Reserve**
- It is an independently governed **public-private partnership** that will buy and store critical minerals and rare earth elements.
  - E.g. **gallium and cobalt, essential for modern technology** and defence equipment.
- **Objective:** To store 60 critical minerals listed in the U.S. Geological Survey's 2025 Critical Minerals List to **strengthen the resilience of industries against supply chain disruptions**.
- It will combine **\$1.67 billion in private seed funding** and **\$10 billion** from the US government's Export-Import Bank (EXIM).

## Strait Hormuz

**Iran** closed the Strait of Hormuz for several hours for live fire drills amid talks with the US in Geneva.

### About the Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Oman and Iran.
- It is a crucial maritime passage that **connects the Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman & the Arabian Sea**.
- It narrows to **just 33 km at its slimmest point**.
- **Strategic Importance:** About 20-25% of the world's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

## Bharat VISTAAR

Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has launched the First Phase of the Artificial Intelligence-based '**Bharat VISTAAR**' scheme in Rajasthan.

### About Bharat VISTAAR

- Objective: Promote the use of India's major AI-powered digital public infrastructure for the agriculture-related needs of farmers.
- Bharat-VISTAAR stands for **Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources**.
  - It provides a multilingual AI-based conversational advisory system, integrating resources from AgriStack, ICAR, various agricultural schemes, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), mandi prices, and state systems into a single digital system.
- Farmers can query the system through **phones** (including feature phones) to get instant agricultural solutions and market price information.

## Snowball Earth

A study has reported evidence that **shorter climate cycles** still operated during at least one phase of this **snowball earth**.

### About Snowball Earth

- Snowball Earth refers to hypothesized period of **extreme glaciation episodes** during the **Cryogenian Period** (~720–635 million years ago) when ice likely covered even tropical regions.
  - **Oceans were largely frozen, weakening climate–ocean interactions**.
- This glaciation was reinforced by the albedo effect and is believed to have had a major impact on the evolution of life during the Proterozoic aeon.

## Loggerhead turtles

Loggerhead turtles face significant threat due to climate change.

### Loggerhead turtles

- Marine turtle
- **Habitat:** Temperate and tropical oceans worldwide; prefers coastal bays, estuaries, and continental shelves.
- **Key Feature:** Large head and powerful jaws adapted for crushing hard-shelled prey like crabs and molluscs.
- Loggerheads are carnivores, only occasionally consuming plant material.
- **Lifespan:** 70 to 80 years or more.
- **Protection Status**
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- Protected under **Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**
- **Distribution in India:** Occasional sightings along Indian coasts; not as common as Olive Ridley.
- **Key Threats:** Bycatch in fishing nets, coastal development, plastic pollution, etc.

### BeeCorridors

NHAI has announced to develop First of its Kind 'BeeCorridors' Along the National Highways.

#### About Beecorridors

- **Beecorridors** are a **continuous linear stretch of bee-friendly vegetation comprising flowering trees and plants.**
- It will ensure the **availability of nectar and pollen throughout the year.**
- **Significance:** The initiative will help reduce the increasing **ecological stress faced by honeybees and other pollinators.**

#### Bees & their Significance:

- **Characteristics**
  - Only female bees have stingers (which are modified ovipositors, organs originally used to lay eggs).
  - Feed exclusively on sugary nectar and protein-rich pollen from flowering plants.
- **Significance:** A third of the world's food production depends on bees.

### Super-Earth

**Super-Earths** are a **unique class of planets** that are larger than Earth but lighter than "ice giants" like Neptune and Uranus.

#### Key Features:

- **Size and Mass:** have a **mass up to 10 times** that of Earth and a diameter about **2 times Earth's radius.**
- **Composition:** can be made of rock, gas, or a combination of both.
- **Importance:** help scientists understand **how planets form and evolve.**