

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)



- The New Development Bank (NDB), formerly known as the **BRICS Development Bank**, is a **multilateral development bank** established by **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS)**.
- **Objective:** NDB aims to **mobilize resources** for **infrastructure and sustainable development projects** in **BRICS countries and other emerging economies and developing countries**.
- The **agreement** for establishing the NDB was **signed** during the BRICS Summit held in **Fortaleza, Brazil**, on **July 15, 2014**.
- The bank **became operational in 2015** and is **headquartered in Shanghai, China**, with a regional office in **Johannesburg** and additional offices later opened in **São Paulo and Moscow**.
- **Membership** in NDB is **open to any member of the United Nations**.
- NDB's **key areas** of operation include **clean energy and energy efficiency; transport infrastructure; water and sanitation; environmental protection; social infrastructure; and digital infrastructure**.
- **Capital:** Its **founding capital** was set at **USD 100 billion**, with **initial subscribed capital of USD 50 billion** divided equally among the **five founding members**.
- **Governance Structure:**
 - The bank is governed by a **Board of Governors** made up of the **finance ministers of the five BRICS countries**, and a **Board of Directors**.
 - **Both the presidency and vice-presidency** of the NDB are **rotated among BRICS founding members**.
 - Unlike in the case of the World Bank or Asian Development Bank (ADB), **each member in the NDB has an equal voting power**.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

EARTHQUAKE SWARM



- **Occurrence:** It occurs when multiple seismic events of comparable intensity strike a small area in relatively quick succession.
- **Intensity:** It involves a series of many (sometimes thousands) low-intensity earthquakes without a discernible main shock that can occur over weeks in active geothermal areas.
- When seismic energy piles up inside the Earth and is released in small amounts from certain points, such a series of earthquakes can occur.

What Causes Swarm Sequences?

- **Fluid movement:**
 - In **volcanic environments**, this can be fluid released from deeper magma or circulating within active geothermal areas (in volcanic areas such as the Taupō Volcanic Zone).
 - The earthquakes triggered by fluids occur as fault slip on the cracks and faults through which the water is moving.
- **Active volcanism:**
 - Magma movement can also act as the ‘**driving mechanism**’ for swarms, creating the earthquakes as magma-filled cracks push their way through the Earth’s crust.
 - In such a case the earthquakes **commonly occur near the crack tip** (ahead of the magma where the crack is starting to open), or off to the side of the crack.
- **Slow-slip events:**
 - A slow-slip event is **essentially an earthquake in slow-motion**, and typically involves **centimetres to tens of centimetres** of movement along a fault, over weeks to years.
 - It is seen at the **Hikurangi subduction zone**, usually at least one or two per year.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

HARA MANGROVE FOREST



- **Location:** The Hara forests are a vital ecological treasure of the Persian Gulf, spanning the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- These mangrove forests consist mainly of **grey mangrove trees** (*Avicennia marina*). They have a **special filtration system** in their roots that allows them to **thrive in saline conditions**.
- The forests are designated as a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**.
- **Ecological Role:**
 - The same roots also **protect the coast against erosion** and are voluminous carbon sinks, sequestering significantly more carbon than terrestrial forests.
 - They serve as an **important nursery for marine life** as they shelter shrimp, crabs, and numerous fish species that sustain the region's fisheries.
 - The Hara forests' **canopy is also a major migratory hub** for birds like the great stone-curlew and various herons.
 - The mangroves are the backbone of the **sustainable tourism programmes of Qeshm**, an Iranian island in the Persian Gulf, and draw visitors to their labyrinthine waterways.



SAFTA

- It is the **free trade arrangement** of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.
- **Background:** The **agreement came into force in 2006**, succeeding the 1993 SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement. **SAFTA signatory countries:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- **Objective:** The Objectives of this Agreement are to **promote and enhance mutual trade and economic cooperation** among Contracting States by, inter-alia:

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

- **Eliminating barriers to trade** in, and facilitating the cross-border movement of goods between the territories of the Contracting States;
- **Promoting conditions of fair competition** in the free trade area, and ensuring equitable benefits to all Contracting States, taking into account their respective levels and pattern of economic development;
- **Creating effective mechanism** for the implementation and application of this Agreement, for its joint administration and for the resolution of disputes.
- **Establishing a framework for further regional cooperation** to expand and enhance the mutual benefits of this Agreement.

NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTE REDRESSAL COMMISSION



- It is a **quasi-judicial commission** set up in 1988 under the **Consumer Protection Act of 1986**.
- **Mandate:** To provide inexpensive, speedy, and summary **redressal of consumer disputes**.
- The Commission is headed by a **sitting or a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India** or a **sitting or a retired Chief Justice of High Court**.
- **Jurisdiction:** It shall have jurisdiction to entertain a **complaint valued more than two crore** and also have appellate and **revisional jurisdiction** from the orders of **State Commissions** or the **District fora** as the case may be.
- The provisions of this act cover 'goods' as well as 'services'.
- **Appeal:** Any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an appeal against such an order to **SC within a period of 30 days**.
- Its head office is **located in New Delhi**.
- A complaint may be filed by the following:
 - A consumer
 - The **Central Government or any State Government**
 - One or more consumers where there are numerous consumers.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

ROYAL INDIAN NAVY MUTINY OF 1946: THE FORGOTTEN NAVAL UPRISING THAT HASTENED INDIA'S FREEDOM

- On February 18, 1946, over a thousand sailors ("ratings") of the Royal Indian Navy at **HMIS Talwar**, a naval shore establishment in Bombay, revolted against British rule.
- The revolt cascaded rapidly, eventually involving more than 20,000 sailors across 78 ships and 20 shore establishments, spreading to Karachi, Calcutta, Madras, and Visakhapatnam.

Background: Why Discontent Was Building?

- **Wartime expansion, post-war contraction:** The RIN grew from under 2,000 personnel to nearly 30,000 during World War II, but Britain's post-war demobilisation cut this back to around 11,000, causing loss of status and job insecurity.
- **Racism and poor conditions:** Indian ratings faced discriminatory treatment, harsh language, poor food, and inferior living conditions compared to British sailors, despite performing on par with them during the war.
- **Prior unrest:** Between 1942 and 1945, the RIN had already witnessed **nine separate mutinies**, reflecting chronic morale and leadership problems under predominantly British officers.
- **Political radicalisation:** The Indian National Army (INA) trials at the Red Fort and public anger over the treatment of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's men fuelled nationalist sentiment among the ratings.

The Immediate Trigger

- On the eve of Navy Day (December 1, 1945), sailors at HMIS Talwar hoisted brooms and buckets with slogans like "Down with the British" and "Quit India."
- The new commanding officer, Commander Arthur Frederick King, mishandled the situation and, days before February 18, abused sailors by calling them "sons of coolies," further inflaming tensions.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

- When ratings formally complained against King, he refused to act and instead accused them of lying — the final spark for the mutiny.
- Because the mutiny began among Signal School (communication branch) sailors, who were better trained, the strike call spread quickly via wireless radio to naval stations nationwide.

Demands of the Mutineers

- The demands blended service grievances with larger anti-imperial politics:
 - Disciplinary action against Commander King and better service conditions.
 - Fair, speedy demobilisation with civilian employment prospects.
 - Better rations, pay parity with the Royal Navy, and access to NAAFI canteens (till then reserved for British personnel).
- **Political demands:** withdrawal of British Indian troops from Indonesia and free trials for INA detainees.

Historical Significance

- Many historians regard the mutiny as pivotal in convincing the British that Indian armed forces could no longer be relied upon to enforce colonial rule.
- Soon after, Prime Minister Clement Attlee dispatched the Cabinet Mission to India and announced Britain's withdrawal plan.
 - Justice Phani Bhushan Chakravarti later recorded that Attlee himself attributed Britain's departure to the INA trials and the RIN mutiny.
- Despite its significance, the mutiny received limited post-independence recognition — partly because it lacked a unifying leader like Netaji, and partly because independent **India's new Navy was uncomfortable memorialising a mutiny.**

Conclusion

The 1946 RIN Mutiny exposed the collapse of British authority over India's armed forces, shattering the myth of unquestioning loyalty.

Though overshadowed by the freedom movement's larger narratives, it remains a decisive, if underappreciated, catalyst that hastened Britain's final exit from India.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

E20 ETHANOL BLENDING - THE REAL DEBATE IS FOOD, FUEL AND IRREVERSIBILITY

- The controversy over E20 petrol (20% ethanol blending) has largely focused on claims that it **damages engines** and significantly reduces mileage.
- While evidence does not substantiate widespread engine damage, the controversy exposes a more important policy question: how far should India expand ethanol blending?
- This question is more significant given ethanol blending's implications for food security, **water use, farm incomes, energy security** and the environment.

The Bigger Question - Should Blending Go Beyond E20?

- The real policy dilemma begins with proposals for **E27/E30**. Higher blending could increasingly shift agricultural resources from food towards fuel.
- E20 reduces the crude oil bill by only about 3–4%, whereas **edible-oil self-sufficiency** offers a potentially more achievable reduction in import dependence.
- India currently produces only around 40% of its edible oil requirement and aims to raise domestic production substantially by 2030–31.

Gains and Costs of the Ethanol Programme:

- Ethanol blending has produced significant benefits -
 - Helped clear sugarcane arrears.
 - Created an assured market for farmers.
 - Supported rural incomes.
 - Enabled distilleries to utilise surplus sugar.
- However, **remaining at E20 also has costs**. For example,
 - Distilleries have invested in capacity based on expectations of higher ethanol demand,
 - While loans and the management of sugar surpluses are increasingly linked to the ethanol programme.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

- Hence, both the benefits of expansion and the costs of stopping at E20 must enter the policy calculus.

Way Forward:

- **Restore E10** or another lower blend for the older vehicle fleet.
- Correct pricing incentives that disproportionately favour maize over oilseeds.
- **Regulate** ethanol production based on blue-water availability in water-stressed regions.
- Reassess edible-oil import duties and agricultural incentives to promote domestic oilseed production.
- Undertake a comprehensive food-versus-fuel cost-benefit analysis before moving beyond E20.
- Continue **scientific** assessment of ethanol's life-cycle emissions and water footprint.

Conclusion:

- The E20 controversy should not be reduced to a question of engine damage or mileage.
- The deeper issue is whether India should commit scarce land, water and agricultural resources to progressively higher fuel blending when the gains in energy security remain modest and some consequences may be difficult to reverse.

AI AGENTS AND THE QUESTION OF CONSUMER CONTROL

An Australian man's AI agent, tasked with helping him move up a gym class waitlist, exploited software vulnerabilities, made unauthorised early reservations, and removed another user from the list — without being asked to. The incident has renewed debate on how much autonomy consumers should hand over to increasingly capable AI agents.

What Is an AI Agent?

- Unlike an AI assistant, which mainly responds to prompts, an AI agent can independently take a series of actions using other software or tools to achieve a user-defined goal.
- It can access websites and applications on its own, deciding the steps needed to complete a task rather than just answering queries.

Current Affairs - 17 August 2026

- Three components of an agent
 - **Model** — the underlying LLM powering reasoning and decision-making.
 - **Tools** — external functions the agent can use to act.
 - **Instructions** — guidelines and guardrails defining the agent's behaviour.

How Agents Differ from Chatbots?

- AI assistants like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude are Large Language Models (LLMs) trained to recognise patterns in data and predict answers to queries.
- AI agents go further: they can **independently complete multi-step tasks**, such as planning a holiday by finding flights, building an itinerary, and making reservations — all without step-by-step user instructions.

The Delegation Experience: Empowering or Replacing?

- A 2021 Wharton paper, Consumers and Artificial Intelligence: An Experiential Perspective, describes AI task delegation as a double-edged experience:
 - Empowering, when AI helps consumers achieve their goals.
 - Replacing, when handing over a task reduces their sense of autonomy or control.
- This makes **control central to any delegation decision** — described as "the other side of the delegation coin."
- Willingness to delegate depends on trust in the AI and its perceived competence.
 - **What Does "Control" Mean?** - Experts speculated that as people grow accustomed to AI agents, they may begin to see them as an "extended self" — potentially feeling in control even when agents act with high autonomy. However, they cautioned this idea remains speculative and uncertain.

Conclusion

AI agents are shifting AI's role from an information source to an autonomous delegate, raising fresh questions about trust, control, and accountability.

As agentic features quietly embed into everyday products, calibrating the right balance of autonomy will shape both consumer adoption and future AI governance frameworks.
