

Highlights of 18 August 2026 Current Affairs

- August 18, 2026, marked 81 years since the reported passing of **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose** in 1945. A central figure of India's freedom struggle who strongly advocated for total independence (*Purna Swaraj*), Bose led the Indian National Congress as President (1938, 1939) before resigning to form the **Forward Bloc** due to tactical differences over non-violence.
 - After his escape from house arrest in 1941, he took command of the **Indian National Army (INA / Azad Hind Fauj)** and proclaimed the **Provisional Government of Free India (Azad Hind)** on October 21, 1943. Rallying the nation with slogans like "*Delhi Chalo*", his forces led military campaigns in the Imphal-Kohima sector. Official records attribute his death to a plane crash in Taihoku (Taipei) on August 18, 1945—a event that remains historically debated following inquiries like the 2005 Mukherjee Commission.
- An 85-member Indian Army contingent—primarily represented by the **9 Gorkha Rifles**—arrived at Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp in Surat Thani, Thailand, for Exercise MAITREE-XV 2026 alongside the Royal Thai Army's 3rd Battalion, 25th Infantry Brigade. Instituted in 2006, the 15th iteration of this annual bilateral exercise focuses on company-level counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism drills in jungle and semi-urban terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
- During his official four-day visit to Kathmandu (August 16–19, 2026), Chief of the Army Staff General Dhiraj Seth was conferred the honorary rank of General of the Nepali Army by President Ram Chandra Paudel at Shital Niwas.
 - **Historic Tradition:** The reciprocal conferment of the honorary General rank between the Army Chiefs of India and Nepal is a unique military tradition dating back to 1950, symbolizing mutual trust and strategic continuity.
 - **Key Engagements:** General Seth inspected a Guard of Honour at the Nepali Army Headquarters, laid a wreath at the Tundikhel Army Pavilion, and held bilateral talks with his counterpart General Ashok Raj Sigdel to expand defence cooperation.
 - **Disaster Response & Capability Support:** As part of India's capacity-building assistance, General Seth handed over military vehicles and medical equipment to strengthen disaster response capabilities. He also inaugurated an Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) Polyclinic in Kohalpur to serve the veteran community in Nepal.
- Shabnam Sinha—currently serving as an Independent Director on the board of Airtel Payments Bank —has been appointed as the bank's **Chairperson for a three-year term starting October 1, 2026**. She succeeds Sunil Bharti Mittal, Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, who steps down on September 30 after leading the bank since April 2016.
- The Ministry of Defence signed a **₹1,943-crore contract** with US defence manufacturer **General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI)** to lease two **MQ-9B Sea Guardian High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE)** Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) for the Indian Navy.
 - **Contract Terms:** The 30-month lease arrangement provides a bridging mechanism to ensure continuous airborne intelligence, surveillance, and

reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities until deliveries commence for the 31 armed MQ-9Bs.

- **Operational Impact:** Operating out of Naval Air Station Rajali (Tamil Nadu), these unarmed long-endurance RPAS feature 360-degree surface-search multi-mode radars, Automatic Identification System (AIS) receivers, and electro-optical/infrared payloads to expand Maritime Domain Awareness across the Indian Ocean Region.
- The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) approved Asia's first desert-themed night safari and zoological park at Juna Deesa in Deesa. [Click to open side panel for more information.](#) Executed by the Gujarat Forest Department at an estimated cost of **₹542.14 crore**, the project covers **103 hectares** of government-owned land tailored to desert and arid ecosystems.
- India launched its first-ever comprehensive **Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)**. The document was formally released, by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, at an official side event during the 17th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.