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1. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the disputed Iturup (Ithurup) Island in the Pacific, marking his first-ever visit to the Kuril Islands.
 - i. Japan strongly condemned the visit, asserting its sovereign claim over the Southern Kurils, which it refers to as its "Northern Territories".
 - ii. The Kuril Islands, originally under Japanese control, were seized by the Soviet Union in 1945 at the end of World War II, a territorial dispute that has historically prevented both nations from signing a formal peace treaty.
 - iii. During his regional inspection tour, Putin visited local fish-processing factories, public hospitals, and schools on the island.
2. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) officially nominated Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir (78), the country's current Home Minister, as its presidential candidate.
 - i. The presidential election, scheduled for August 20, will be decided via votes cast by the elected members of the Bangladesh Parliament.
3. India's exports to the United States grew by 12.85% in July, reaching a value of \$9.02 billion (approximately ₹85,800 crore) compared to the same month last year.
 - i. Exports to China saw a substantial growth of 64.57% during the same month, totaling \$2.02 billion (approximately ₹1.92 lakh crore).
 - ii. India's imports from China and the US also increased in July, rising by 34.42% (\$14.67 billion) and 18.11% (\$5.5 billion) respectively.

- iii. Bilateral exports to Singapore witnessed an 83.7% jump, reaching \$1.6 billion (approximately ₹1.52 lakh crore).

4. Malaysia extended its 30-day visa-free entry policy for Indian tourists until the year 2027 to boost international travel and commercial ties.

- i. The policy, initially introduced in December 2023 under the "Visit Malaysia 2026" campaign, has resulted in a massive surge of Indian visitors.
- ii. In 2025 alone, over 15 lakh Indian tourists visited Malaysia, with South India contributing 71.7% of the total tourist traffic.

5. The World Surfing League (WSL) international tournament was hosted at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, with surfers from Japan dominating the competitions.

6. During the "Vetri Tamil Nadu Investors Conference" in Chennai, the State Government signed seven specialized bilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with foreign corporate entities.

- i. The partner companies belong to friendly foreign countries, including Russia, Kazakhstan, and New Zealand.
- ii. These agreements focus on expanding bilateral technological cooperation in fields such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), advanced manufacturing, and semiconductor skill development.

7. The Growth of Bike Taxis Amid Urban Traffic Congestion

- Traffic congestion has become a critical issue across Indian cities due to rapid population growth, road encroachments, and an exponential increase in private vehicles.

- Overcrowded public transport systems have created a strong demand for rapid transit, positioning bike taxis as a highly popular and faster alternative for commuters.
- Large app-based aggregators such as Rapido, Ola, and Uber have successfully expanded these services, making them virtually unavoidable in metropolitan, tier-2, and tier-3 cities alike.

(i) The Legal Stance and Regulatory Gaps in Tamil Nadu

- The Tamil Nadu Government recently stated before the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court that bike taxis are not legally permitted in the state. This admission came during a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking official regulations, guidelines, and licenses for the service.
- In response to the state's stance, the High Court criticized the Government, asking why this lack of permission had not been advertised to warn the general public and who would bear liability in the event of an accident.

(ii) The Karnataka Case and Safety Objections

- In Karnataka, the State Government has challenged a High Court order permitting bike taxis by appealing to the Supreme Court of India.
- The Karnataka Government argues that motorcycles lack passenger safety features, making them prone to high accident risks.
- The state's petition also raises concerns over women's safety, inappropriate physical touch, and the lack of proper insurance coverage for passengers.
- Traditionally, under the Motor Vehicles Act, carrying pillion passengers for rent on two-wheelers was prohibited.

(iii) Central Government Intervention and State-Level Policy

- Recognizing the utility of these services, the Central Government amended rules to allow motorcycles to be registered as commercial transport vehicles, enabling legal pillion-for-hire operations.
- The Centre released revised Motor Vehicle Service Guidelines, granting State

Governments the power to permit and regulate bike taxis.

- Over ten Indian states, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and Rajasthan, have already utilized these guidelines to officially legalize and regulate bike taxis.

(iv) Public Preference vs. Livelihood and Safety Concerns

- Despite safety risks, the public heavily favors bike taxis because they offer swift travel at reasonable fares compared to traditional autos and cabs.
- In regions like Karnataka where the transport department clamped down and seized unauthorized bike taxis, auto and taxi rates instantly doubled, further driving the public back to bike taxis.
- While regulating bike taxis, states must ensure that the livelihoods of traditional auto and taxi drivers are not unfairly affected.

(v) The Recommended Solution is the Stricter Policy Integration

- Tamil Nadu's current state of allowing bike taxis to run continuously without formal legal sanction is unsustainable.
- The State Government must swiftly introduce a policy framework that officially licenses bike taxis.
- Bike taxi operators must be held to strict safety standards, passenger insurance requirements, and code-of-conduct rules similar to those governing commercial autos and taxis to ensure passenger welfare.

8. The 16th edition of the Women's Hockey World Cup is scheduled to commence on Saturday, August 15, 2026. The prestigious international tournament is being co-hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands.

- i. A total of 16 top international teams, including India, will compete for the championship title across 36 scheduled matches
- ii. 1st Women's Hockey World Cup (1974) was held in France.