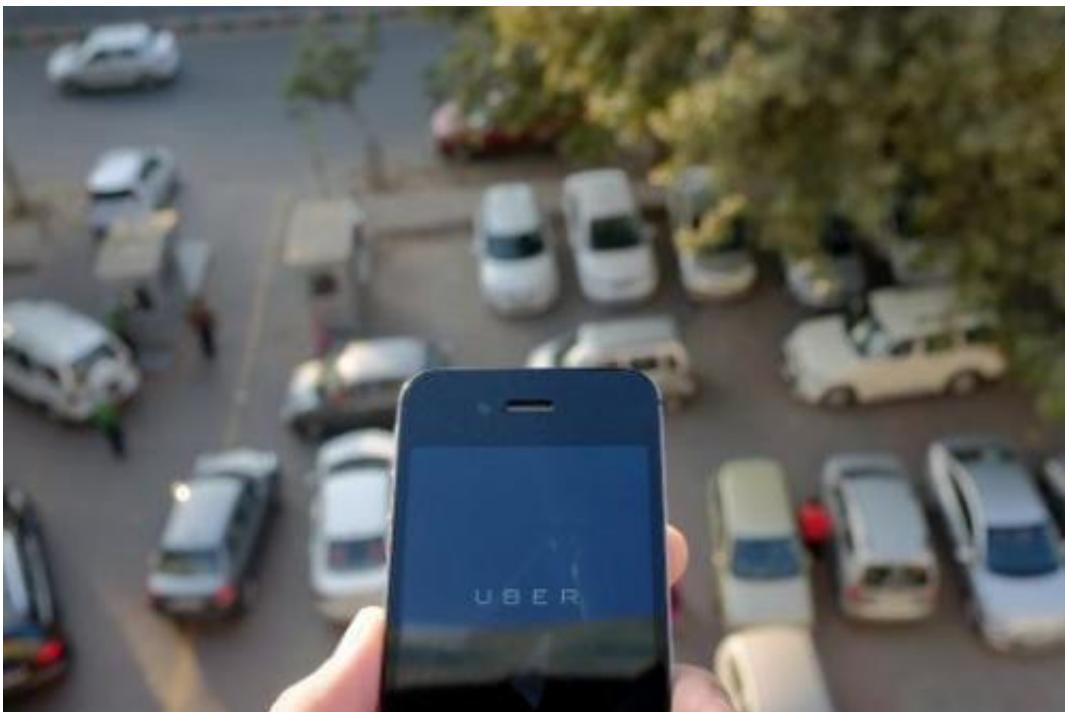


Uber to launch 'panic button' for users in India

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Uber is launching a "panic button" and other safety features for users in India, following news that Mumbai was readying a ban on the ride-sharing service.

The move also follows concerns about Uber's practices in the wake of

rape allegations against a driver in New Delhi last year.

Uber said in a blog post that starting February 11 riders in India would have an "in-app panic (SOS) button that allows a rider to alert the local police at the push of a button in case of an emergency."

Riders will also have a "safety net" feature allowing them to share their trip details and real-time location with up to five friends and family members.

A spokeswoman for Uber said these initiatives were "specific to India."

Uber said it faced "some misconceptions" about its safety initiatives in India. It noted that it already conducts background checks on driver applicants and this week launched a "third party driver screening program" which goes beyond the standard transport licensing process.

The California-based startup which operates in more than 50 countries said that it had established in India "a dedicated team and process to manage emergencies" if anyone uses the panic button. The team will be available 24 hours a day and can notify police.

Uber said it is not recommending physical panic buttons, saying they "cause confusion and are prone to wear and tear, but will allow independent drivers to install them with safeguards.

"We have expressed willingness to install physical buttons provided that... there is only one physical panic button per car... (and) pressing the button calls the local police directly, since they are best positioned to react to a law and order situation."

Uber has faced regulatory issues in many locations as it expands to over 200 cities, but claims it offers choices for consumers who face a taxi

sector protected by regulators.

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