

The New York Times

Uber to Introduce Driver Background Checks in India

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JANUARY 16, 2015 12:03 PM

Uber plans to introduce background check procedures for its drivers in India, the company said on Thursday evening, in a move that comes weeks after a driver was charged with rape there. The incident prompted wider scrutiny of the ride-hailing service that is now banned in some parts of the country.

The company began service in the Delhi region of India in late 2013, but has not screened those drivers, according to [local Uber executives](#). Previously, Uber accepted new drivers if they presented proof of insurance, a driver's license and a commercial permit to drive a taxi. That will soon change. Uber will run a series of more stringent checks on its drivers, which include a formal background check, verification of character by the local police and checks to detect fraud in driving and vehicle permits.

Last month, an Uber customer in the Delhi region was raped, and authorities have said [her Uber driver had confessed](#). He had [previously been detained](#) for seven months on suspicion of raping another female passenger three years ago.

A New Delhi court charged the driver with rape, kidnapping and criminal intimidation on Tuesday, and authorities were still contemplating whether to pursue criminal charges against Uber for misrepresenting the safety of its service, according to an [Associated Press report](#). Uber was banned from continuing its operations in the Delhi region shortly after the rape was reported.

"The tragic event in Delhi was a deeply sobering reminder, that we must always be vigilant in the endeavor to achieve best-in-class safety," Deval Delivala, Uber's safety lead in India, said in a statement on Thursday. "Our teams have worked tirelessly in the past month to reverify all safety aspects of our operations in India."

As of Friday morning, more than 60,000 people had signed a Change.org petition calling for Uber to adopt stricter background checks.

"If your company had run a background check and got police verification done, this crime could've been avoided," said Alina Tiphagne, a New Delhi citizen who created the petition.

“What’s worse, you have a three-step background check process in the U.S. but not in India. These are double standards.”

Uber, which allows customers to summon a private car using a smartphone app, is expanding in more than 250 cities worldwide. Last year, Uber said, it completed more than [140 million rides](#). But the company’s expansion has come at a cost. Uber has been able to push into new cities [by brushing past local lawmakers and regulations](#), circumventing many of the laws by which other taxi and livery services are required to abide.

Some lawmakers, and citizens of the cities in which Uber operates, say the company’s approach has put millions of riders at unnecessary risk.

The victim in India plans to sue Uber in the United States, according to a [Guardian report](#). She has hired Douglas Wigdor, a New York litigator who previously represented a hotel maid in a sexual assault case against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former chief of the International Monetary Fund. That [case was settled](#) in 2012 for an unspecified amount.

In the fallout of the rape, Uber has pointed out the difficulty in screening drivers in hundreds of cities across the world, an argument that the company has also used in the United States to support its background check methodology.

“This unfortunate incident has highlighted challenges in the systems due largely to nondigitized record-keeping and the lack of a centralized database for criminal offenders,” Mr. Delivala said. “To ensure verifications are legitimate and reliable, more needs to be done at the ground level.”

In the United States, background checks for Uber are conducted by Hirease, a third-party service, which checks city, state and federal records.

Lawmakers in many states, including California, Colorado and Illinois, have contested this approach, citing the more stringent checks required of taxi and limousine drivers.

After months of aggressive lobbying campaigns by the taxi and limousine industry and public outcry, [Uber pledged in December](#) to strengthen its background check policies and said it would develop new technology to more comprehensively screen its drivers.

“Our teams continue to explore opportunities to work together with government, authorities and organizations,” Mr. Delivala said, “leading the way in women’s safety and empowerment to get you moving again safely.”