1. What Was the Radical Students Union?

Background

The Radical Students Union (RSU) was a left-wing student organization in India, mainly active in Andhra Pradesh during the 1970s and 1980s. It played a key role in spreading Maoist ideology among the youth and became a recruiting ground for future Maoist leaders.

Origins and Ideology

• The RSU was inspired by Maoist principles, especially those related to armed revolution and agrarian struggle.
• It aimed to mobilize students against state oppression, feudalism, and social injustice.

Activities and Influence

• The RSU organized rallies, protests, and study circles on issues like poverty, land rights, and police brutality.
• It helped spread left-wing radical ideas among young people in colleges and universities.
• Some of its members later joined armed Maoist movements, especially the People's War Group, which later merged into the CPI (Maoist).

Legacy

• Although the RSU has weakened over the years, it left a lasting impact on left-wing activism in India.
• Many Maoist leaders trace their roots to student activism with RSU.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security
Source: Indian Express

2. Ship Sinks Off Kerala Coast: Oil Spill Fears Arise

Introduction

A Liberian-flagged cargo ship, MSC ELSA 3, sank off the coast of Kerala on May 25, raising concerns about a possible oil spill. The ship was carrying 640 containers, including 13 with hazardous cargo. Thankfully, all crew members were rescued by the Indian Coast Guard and Navy.

What Caused the Ship to Sink?
According to the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), the ship capsized due to flooding in one of its cargo holds in the early hours of Sunday.

Key details:

• 640 containers onboard

• 13 hazardous cargo containers, including 12 with calcium carbide. It is a compound with the chemical formula CaC_2 and also known as 'masala'. It is commonly used for ripening fruits like mangoes, releases acetylene gas which contains harmful traces of arsenic and phosphorus.

• Ship carried 84.44 tonnes of diesel and 367.1 tonnes of furnace oil. Furnace Oil is a heavy residual fuel obtained from distillation of crude oil.

Is There an Oil Spill?

• No oil spill has been reported yet, but monitoring is ongoing.

• ICG has deployed the ship Saksham, equipped with pollution response systems.

• Aircraft with oil spill mapping technology are also assessing the area.

What Is an Oil Spill and Why Is It Dangerous?

Oil spills:

• Occur due to accidents, natural disasters, or equipment failure.

• Spread rapidly, forming a layer that blocks sunlight, affecting marine plant life and oxygen production.

• Can poison fish, birds, and other marine animals.

• Have long-term environmental effects, especially near sensitive ecosystems.

Example: The 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill released over 4 million barrels of oil, devastating marine life for years.

Are There Global Rules to Prevent Oil Spills?

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) governs oil spills. It evolved from several older agreements and led to a protocol issued in 1978 following several oil spill disasters in the 1970s. India is also a signatory.

The MARPOL Convention has six annexes, covering prevention of pollution from ships by Oil, Noxious liquid substances, Dangerous goods in packaged form, Sewage, Garbage and Air pollution from ships.

It is enforced with the help of domestic legislation, such as the Merchant Shipping Act in India, which has provisions on civil liability and pollution prevention certificates. Indian ships and ships in Indian waters are mandated to follow these regulations. Ports also maintain oil spill contingency plans to handle local cases, while the Indian Coast Guard is the nodal agency.

How Are Oil Spills Cleaned Up?

Common methods:

1. Skimming – Collecting oil from the water surface.
2. In situ burning – Burning concentrated oil patches.
3. Chemical dispersants – Breaking oil into smaller droplets for natural breakdown.

Challenges:

• Oil spreads fast.

• Cleanup is hard in rough seas or remote areas.

• Some methods (like dispersants) may harm marine life.

What Should the Public Do?
The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) has issued these advisories:
• Do not touch any cargo or oil that washes ashore.
• Report immediately to the police if anything is spotted.
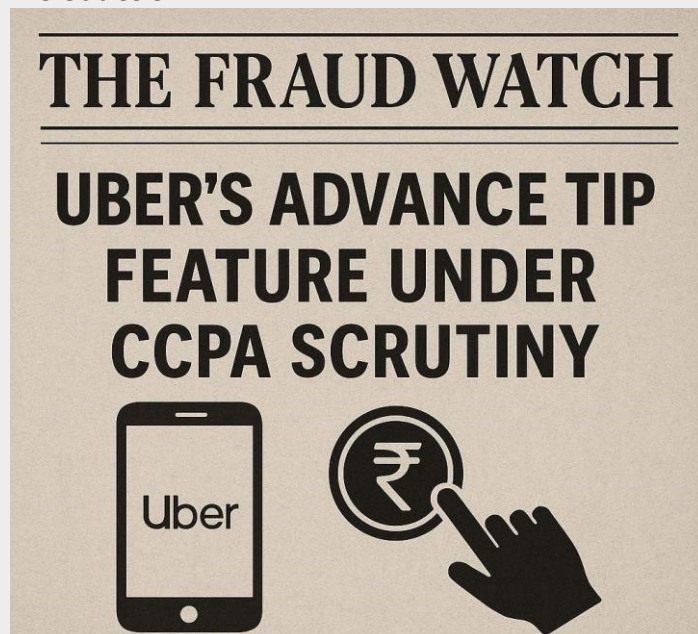• Oil films may appear along the coast.
According to the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), coastal areas like Alappuzha, Ambalapuzha, Arattupuzha, and Karunagappally could be affected within 36–48 hours if a spill occurs.

3. Why Is Uber's Advance Tip Feature in the News?

Introduction

Uber is under government scrutiny for its "Add a tip for faster pickup" feature. India's consumer protection authority (CCPA) issued a notice to the company, questioning whether this practice is ethical or fair.

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi called the feature "deeply concerning" and exploitative, saying tips should be voluntary and given after service, not before. The CCPA is also looking into similar practices by Ola and Rapido.

What Is an Advance Tip?
When booking a ride, Uber asks users to tip in advance to increase the chance of a faster pickup. The app says the driver gets 100% of the tip, and it cannot be changed later.

Other apps, like Rapido and Ola, have similar systems that encourage users to pay extra to increase the chances of finding a driver.

According to industry insiders, this model spread because:
• It allows drivers to earn more
• Tips are not taxed with GST, unlike ride fares
• Companies adopted it to avoid being at a competitive disadvantage

What Are the Main Concerns?
1. Unfair Pressure on Users

Law experts say the feature pressures customers into tipping by suggesting they'll get a ride faster. This creates a sense of urgency and feels coercive, even if it's optional.

2. Unfair Trade Practice
Under India's Consumer Protection Act (2019), any misleading or manipulative tactic that affects a user's buying decision could be considered unfair trade.

Is This a "Dark Pattern"?
Yes, it may fall under "dark patterns", which are tricks used in app or website design to push users into actions they wouldn't normally choose.

Common dark pattern tactics:
• False urgency: Making users feel they need to act fast (e.g. "add a tip now to get picked up")
• Drip pricing: Hiding the full cost until the final step
The CCPA issued guidelines in 2023 to prevent such misleading designs.

A 2024 study found that:
• 32% of apps, including Uber and Ola, used false urgency
• 42% used drip pricing, hiding costs until the end

How Are Companies Responding?
• Rapido says the tip is optional and just informs users about surge pricing.
• Namma Yatri renamed its feature to "Add more (voluntary)" after the CCPA warning.
• Companies claim it helps drivers earn more and improves service speed, but critics say it crosses ethical lines.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu