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Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present the first edition of "The Startup Trends Newsletter". As we step into 2026, the Indian startup ecosystem continues to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and long-term vision despite a globally cautious funding environment. January's funding landscape clearly signals a structural shift — capital is no longer chasing hype, but backing real technology, strong fundamentals, and sustainable growth.

Artificial Intelligence has firmly established itself as the leading investment theme, powering the next wave of productivity, automation, and deep-tech innovation. Alongside AI, sectors like

spacetech, logistics, and clean energy are attracting strategic capital, indicating India's growing role in building future-ready global infrastructure.

The objective of this newsletter is to share Funding news, Startup Stories, Founder Interview with national and international readers. We are sure that our newsletter will provide top-quality startup insights, articles, startup stories and founder interview. As always, our goal is simple: cut through the noise, highlight what truly matters, and bring you sharp, actionable insights from India's startup economy.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Happy Learning.

TOP FIVE FUNDING NEWS



AI powered App building platform Emergent raises \$23 Mn in Series A round led by Lightspeed

Emergent, an AI powered app building platform, has raised \$23 million in Series A funding led by Lightspeed, with participation from Together Fund, Y Combinator, Prosus Ventures, and angels including Jeff Dean, Devendra Chaplot, and Balaji Srinivasan. This brings Emergent's total funding to \$30 million, following a \$7 million seed round backed by Y Combinator and Together Fund. The Bengaluru based startup plans to expand its team, deepen R&D, and scale globally, including growing its presence in North America through a new hub in Palo Alto.

Its platform manages everything from UI screens and logins to payments, backend servers, and scaling, powered by a team of autonomous AI agents that code, test, and launch apps in real time. In just 90 days since launch, the platform claims to have achieved 15 million dollars in annual recurring revenue (ARR), with over one million users building more than 1.5 million apps globally. The startup has already seen diverse adoption from a Michigan jewellery retailer building pricing management software across 50 stores, to small businesses digitizing inventory systems, and founders creating consumer facing apps like EV marketplaces.



Spacetech startup Digantara raises \$50 Mn in Series B round

Digantara, a space surveillance and intelligence platform, has closed its Series B fundraise of \$50 million from a mix of new strategic and financial investors, including 360 ONE Asset, SBI Investments Co Japan, and Ronnie Screwvala, with continued participation from existing investors Peak XV Partners and Kalaari Capital. The fresh capital will support global expansion beyond India and the United States, the establishment of new manufacturing facilities for optical systems and satellite production, and the scaling of R&D teams worldwide. The company also plans to deploy 15 space surveillance satellites and two missile-warning satellites during 2026–27.

Its integrated platform, AIRA, combines sensing hardware, data processing, and analytics across space and terrestrial systems to enable surveillance and threat monitoring. The infrastructure includes the SCOT constellation for space surveillance, the ALBATROSS series for missile warning and tracking, and SKYGATE, a network of ground-based sensors. These systems are scheduled for phased deployment through 2026–27.

Digantara operates across India, Singapore, and the United States, and plans to expand into Europe by mid-2026 to strengthen its space and defence monitoring capabilities. In February 2024, the Aditya Birla Group and SIDBI Venture Capital acquired minority stakes in Digantara. Prior to this, the company had raised \$10 million in a Series A round. According to the sources, the company's shareholding details reflect these investments.

About Digantara

Digantara has been founded in December 2018 by Anirudh Sharma. Digantara is a space situational awareness company that develops space- and ground-based infrastructure to support safe and secure space operations. It provides data-driven orbital insights to governments, defence agencies, and commercial stakeholders globally.

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Travel products platform Escape Plan raises \$25 Mn led by Jungle Ventures

Travel products platform Escape Plan has raised \$25 million in a Series A funding round led by Jungle Ventures, along with participation from Fireside Ventures and strategic investor IndiGo Ventures, the corporate venture capital arm of IndiGo. The Bengaluru-based startup had previously mopped up \$5 million in a funding round led by Jungle Ventures through its First Cheque@Jungle initiative, along with Fireside Ventures and several angel investors, in July last year.

The proceeds will be deployed to strengthen its brand, pricing, and distribution across India and select international markets. This includes deepening its omni-channel presence across metros, tier I and tier II cities, expanding its physical retail footprint to over 200 stores, and increasing availability across major travel hubs and corridors, Escape Plan said in a press release.

Escape Plan claims it is currently operating at an annualised revenue run rate of over Rs 300 crore, driven by demand across cities, channels, and a wide range of travel use cases. The company also plans to enter select international geographies aligned with Indian outbound travel. Escape Plan also aims to strengthen its technological capabilities to build deeper control across the value chain. The company will invest in core tech systems to improve speed, availability, and consistency across channels, while advancing product innovation through design-led and sustainability-focused materials.

About Escape Plan

Escape Plan has been Co-founded in 2025 by Abhinav Pathak and Abhinav Zutshi. Escape Plan is a travel products platform built around the needs of the modern Indian traveller. The company curates and creates luggage, accessories, and mobility solutions across multiple travel use cases. It operates across online marketplaces, direct-to-consumer channels, and a rapidly expanding retail network across India.



Optimist raises \$12 million in seed and pre-Series A funding led by Accel and Arkam Ventures

With the help of well-known angel investors, Accel and Arkam Ventures led a \$12 million seed and pre-Series A investment round for Optimist, a technology-driven cooling solutions firm dedicated to creating air conditioners that are ready for the future.

According to a news release from Optimist, the new capital will be used to scale manufacturing, R&D, and go-to-market operations.

Optimist was founded in 2024 by Pranav Chopra and Ashish Goel, the former CEO and co-founder of Urban Ladder, with the goal of changing people's lives by providing technology-driven cooling solutions. Supported by extensive consumer research and knowledge of Indian culture, the company is creating and producing goods that are suited to the changing demands of the nation. Its cooling systems are designed to function dependably in the face of severe heat and power limitations.

Optimist wants to create and produce customer-focused, incredibly efficient cooling solutions for India's intensely hot and energy-constrained markets.

The company intends to sell its goods through a combination of brand stores and direct-to-consumer methods, initially focusing on small business and household clients. Beginning in February 2026, optimist air conditioners will be offered in Bengaluru, Telangana, Rajasthan, and Delhi NCR, with plans to expand to further cities.



WiCommunity travel platform WanderOn Raises \$5.9 million in its Series A funding round

WiCommunity travel platform WanderOn has raised nearly \$5.9 million in its Series A funding round. India-based WanderOn said it will use the funding to scale globally and create better trips. The company is backed by DSG Consumer Partners and the Client Associates Alternate Fund (CAAF). Founded by a group of engineers from the National Institute of Technology Kurukshetra, WanderOn is a dispersed agent-based model that provides experiential, community-first travel experiences meant to appeal to younger generations.

"With DSG Consumer Partners and CAAF joining us, we're stepping into a new chapter," WanderOn CEO Govind Gaur wrote on Instagram. "One that lets us dream bigger, reach further and take our idea of travel to the world."

DSG said WanderOn has a grasp on shifting consumer behavior, which is showing increased preference for experiences over physical possessions.

"Their community-led approach and consistent execution have helped them scale organically over the years," DSG said. "We are excited to support their next phase of growth as they continue to strengthen their product and technology."

CAAF said WanderOn's model is differentiated and resonates with modern travelers. "Their strong community and growth trajectory make them an exciting investment opportunity in India's travel ecosystem."



Shark Tank To Scale: The Rise Of Nasher Miles In India's Premium Luggage Space

India's travel and luggage market has long been dominated by legacy giants, but over the past few years, a new-age brand has quietly built a strong challenger position — Nasher Miles. Founded with a vision to make stylish, durable, and affordable luggage accessible to modern Indian travelers, the company has grown from a small startup into a fast-scaling consumer brand riding the wave of India's booming travel economy.

What sets Nasher Miles apart is its sharp focus on design, digital-first distribution, and understanding the evolving needs of young travelers. From early traction through online marketplaces to building a recognizable omnichannel presence, the brand has steadily expanded its footprint while maintaining strong growth momentum. Its appearance on Shark Tank India further accelerated visibility, helping the company strengthen both brand recall and investor confidence.

Today, with revenues crossing the ₹150+ crore mark and ambitions to enter the ₹200 crore league, Nasher Miles is positioning itself not just as a luggage company, but as a modern travel brand built for aspirational India. The journey reflects a larger shift in India's consumer landscape — where smart branding, product innovation, and digital scale can turn a niche startup into a national contender.

About Founders

Abhishek Daga, Lokesh Daga, and Shruti Kedia Daga are the co-founders of Nasher Miles, a luggage bag brand. They are from Mumbai. Abhishek and Lokesh are first cousins, and Shruti is Lokesh's wife. They were distributors of VIP bags in the past.

Abhishek Daga, Lokesh Daga, and Shruti Kedia Daga are the visionaries behind Nasher Miles, each bringing a wealth of experience and expertise to the table. With a shared passion for innovation and a commitment to excellence, they have established Nasher Miles as a digital-first brand dedicated to redefining the travel experience.

With a diverse distribution strategy encompassing both online marketplaces and their own website, Nasher Miles had captured significant market share. Their association with renowned cricketer Rishab Pant as a brand ambassador further bolstered their visibility and credibility in the market.

Problem Solved by Nasher Miles:

Style, diversity, and fashion are the hallmarks of the New Age baggage company Nasher Miles. More than 100 hues are offered for their products. Given that their vibrant bags can be seen for miles, their unique selling point is their style. Moreover, well-known tourist spots like Paris, Istanbul, and other places serve as inspiration for their designs. The founders noted that in addition to being attractive, their items are also reasonably priced and long-lasting.

Nasher Miles is well known for its unique lines of custom luggage and travel bags. Their line of luggage, which includes both hard side and soft side options, is stylish and functional, designed to withstand the rigours of travel. Travellers have a plethora of options with Nasher Miles, guaranteeing that their trolley bags last and represent their own identities, creating enduring impressions. Travel in style and convenience with coordinating baggage sets that meet a range of demands. With their exquisite craftsmanship and well-considered design, these sets are an essential travel companion.

Funding Rounds:

Total Funding Raised: about \$4.28 Million (₹35 Crore)

Major Funding Events

1. Shark Tank India (Early stage)

- Around ₹3 Cr seed funding (small equity dilution) for 1.5% Equity With 1% Royalty until INR 3 Crores is recouped at a valuation of 200 Crores from Aman Gupta, Anupam Mittal, Namita Thapar, Vineeta Singh, and Ritesh Agarwal.

2. Bridge Round — July 2024

- \$4 Million raised
- Valuation: ~\$30 Million
- Investors included Singularity Fund, Mohit Goyal, Narendra Rathi, etc.

In conclusion, Nasher Miles invites everyone to embark on a journey filled with comfort, style, and unforgettable adventures.



Empowering Rural India: How Farmdidi Is Creating Income, Identity & Impact

Across India's vast agricultural landscape lies an untapped reservoir of culinary talent and entrepreneurial potential: its rural women. For generations, these women have been the custodians of traditional recipes, yet they often face barriers to economic independence. Tapping into this potential is FarmDidi, a purpose-driven agri-tech startup that is redefining the farm-to-fork supply chain. Established in 2022, FarmDidi is a social enterprise that empowers rural women to become micro-entrepreneurs right from their village.

In 2021, the social enterprise FarmDidi Services Pvt. Ltd. was founded, with its main office located in Pune, Maharashtra. Making it possible for rural women to start their own businesses is the goal of FarmDidi. Through collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), FarmDidi educates women on entrepreneurship, quality assurance, and functional food production. Chutneys, papads, and pickles created using traditional recipes are among the company's many handcrafted, all-natural, and preservative-free products. Customers across the country can purchase these traditional rural flavors via their website, Amazon, and Flipkart, among other platforms.

The venture was founded by a dynamic trio: Manjari Sharma, Anukrit Johari, and Asmita Ghodeswar. Their innovative model enables rural women, or "Didis," to produce high-quality, homemade, and chemical-free pickles and condiments at the farm gate. By integrating treasured traditional recipes with modern food safety and quality systems, FarmDidi is not just selling food products; it's delivering authenticity, creating livelihoods, and building a sustainable future for rural communities.

Founders' Journey

The foundation of FarmDidi was laid by the shared vision of its three founders, Manjari

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Sharma, Anukrit Johari, and Asmita Ghodeswar. With backgrounds and expertise that complement each other, they identified a critical gap in the agricultural value chain. They saw that while rural women possessed invaluable knowledge of traditional food preparation, they lacked the technical know-how, quality control training, and market access needed to turn their skills into a viable business.

Manjari Sharma, the founder of FarmDidi, has a remarkable journey that led her to create a transformative business empowering rural women across India. Growing up in Bahadurgarh, Haryana, a place known for its high rates of female foeticides, Manjari was influenced by her grandfather's social work, which sparked her passion for community service. Her parents supported her to pursue a path that balanced purpose, respect, and financial success. Little did they know, this would lead her to build a company that would change lives across rural India.

Their journey began with extensive research in rural communities, where they observed the challenges of post-harvest management and the economic vulnerability of women. The founders envisioned a decentralised production model where value addition happens at the source.

Problem Solved by FarmDidi

FarmDidi addresses a dual-sided problem with a single, elegant solution. On one side, it tackles the issue of rural women's underemployment and the lack of economic opportunities in villages. By transforming them into trained producers and entrepreneurs, FarmDidi creates a sustainable source of income, reduces dependency, and fosters financial independence. This model also helps in reducing post-harvest losses by converting surplus farm produce into value-added products with a longer shelf-life.

On the other side, FarmDidi caters to the growing demand from urban consumers for transparent, natural, and authentic food. In a market saturated with mass-produced goods containing artificial preservatives and additives, FarmDidi offers a trustworthy alternative. The core of their solution is the successful integration of traditional recipes with modern food safety protocols. Consumers receive a product that carries the taste of a grandmother's kitchen, backed by the assurance of scientific quality control.

Their product line primarily consists of a variety of pickles, chutneys, and other traditional condiments, all made with locally sourced ingredients and no chemical preservatives. Each jar tells a story of empowerment, connecting the consumer directly to the woman who made it.

In a short period, FarmDidi had established itself as a leading social enterprise in rural empowerment. The business model combined technology with traditional knowledge to enhance production, traceability, and distribution. Over time, more women joined the company, benefiting from the steady income and entrepreneurial opportunities FarmDidi

Sprovided. The company's commitment to quality, safety, and empowerment led to a steady increase in both product demand and social impact.

Funding Rounds:

1. Early / Pre-Seed (2022)

- Around ₹40–45 Lakhs raised in early stage
- Backed by early angels & incubation ecosystem
- Valuation around ₹10 Cr (early stage)

2. Shark Tank India Funding (2023–24)

- ₹1 Crore investment
- Investors: Vineeta Singh & Peyush Bansal
- Approx valuation: ~₹20–25 Cr range

3. Seed Round (Major Round — 2025)

- ₹7 Crore raised
- Led by: Samved Ventures
- Other investors: LetsVenture, Indigram Labs, IIM Calcutta Innovation Park, Angel investors
- Funds used for:
 - Tech & quality systems
 - Team expansion
 - Scaling rural women network (2,000 → 5,000+)

Conclusion

Farm Didi's earnings, business plans, tactics, and other technicalities, the organization's primary goal is to empower one million rural women. In order to improve the lives of thousands of rural women, she made the decision to make her goal a reality by leaving her lucrative career, leaving a life of financial security, and accepting the greatest risk imaginable—being in a financially precarious situation.



CARS24 Acquires CarInfo — Building a Full Vehicle Ownership Ecosystem

In a strategic move to expand beyond car buying and selling, CARS24 has acquired vehicle information and management platform CarInfo, signaling its ambition to become a full-stack automotive ecosystem. The acquisition marks CARS24's second major purchase within a year and reflects the company's long-term strategy to deepen engagement with vehicle owners throughout the ownership lifecycle.

Deal Overview

While the companies did not officially disclose full financial details, industry estimates place the deal value in the range of ₹118 crore to ₹400+ crore, depending on the structure and reporting sources. Regulatory filings indicate that CARS24 has signed agreements to acquire equity shares from CarInfo's founders, and once completed, the platform is expected to become a wholly owned subsidiary of CARS24.

Why This Acquisition Matters

CARS24 has traditionally been known as a marketplace for buying and selling used cars. However, car purchases happen only once every few years, while vehicle ownership requires ongoing management such as insurance renewals, pollution certificates, and challan payments. By acquiring CarInfo, CARS24 aims to move beyond transactions into daily vehicle ownership and compliance management.

The acquisition allows CARS24 to solve a long-standing pain point — fragmented vehicle data — by integrating CarInfo's real-time information and compliance tools into its platform, improving user experience and operational efficiency.

About CarInfo

Founded in 2019, CarInfo is a widely used vehicle information platform that helps users manage RC details, insurance validity, pollution certificate status, FASTag, challans, and

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other vehicle records in one place. The platform has grown steadily and now serves over 12 million monthly users, becoming a commonly used tool for everyday vehicle management.

CarInfo will continue operating as a standalone app within the CARS24 ecosystem, retaining its team and product roadmap while benefiting from CARS24's scale and technology capabilities.

Strategic Impact for CARS24

This acquisition strengthens CARS24's push to build a complete vehicle ownership platform, covering buying, selling, financing, insurance, compliance, and post-purchase services. It also follows the company's earlier acquisition of automotive community platform Team-BHP, showing a clear consolidation strategy in the auto-tech space.

By integrating recurring ownership services, CARS24 can increase user engagement, improve retention, and generate more frequent revenue streams — a key step as the company prepares for future growth and potential public market ambitions.

The Bigger Picture

The CARS24-CarInfo deal highlights a broader trend in the auto-tech sector: companies are shifting from one-time vehicle transactions to building end-to-end mobility ecosystems. With millions of users already relying on CarInfo for vehicle data, the acquisition positions CARS24 to become a daily-use platform for car and bike owners — not just a marketplace.

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UPI Continues Record Growth

India's UPI ecosystem started 2026 on a strong note, maintaining its position as the world's largest real-time payments system. Monthly transactions remained above 12+ billion, driven by merchant adoption, AutoPay growth, and deeper rural penetration. Banks and fintechs are now focusing on credit-on-UPI and international UPI expansion as the next growth lever.

RBI Tightens Digital Lending Oversight

The Reserve Bank of India signaled stricter compliance monitoring for digital lending apps, pushing fintech lenders toward stronger KYC, transparent pricing, and regulated partnerships with NBFCs/banks. The move aims to improve consumer protection while stabilizing the fast-growing digital credit market.

Fintech Funding Shows Early Recovery

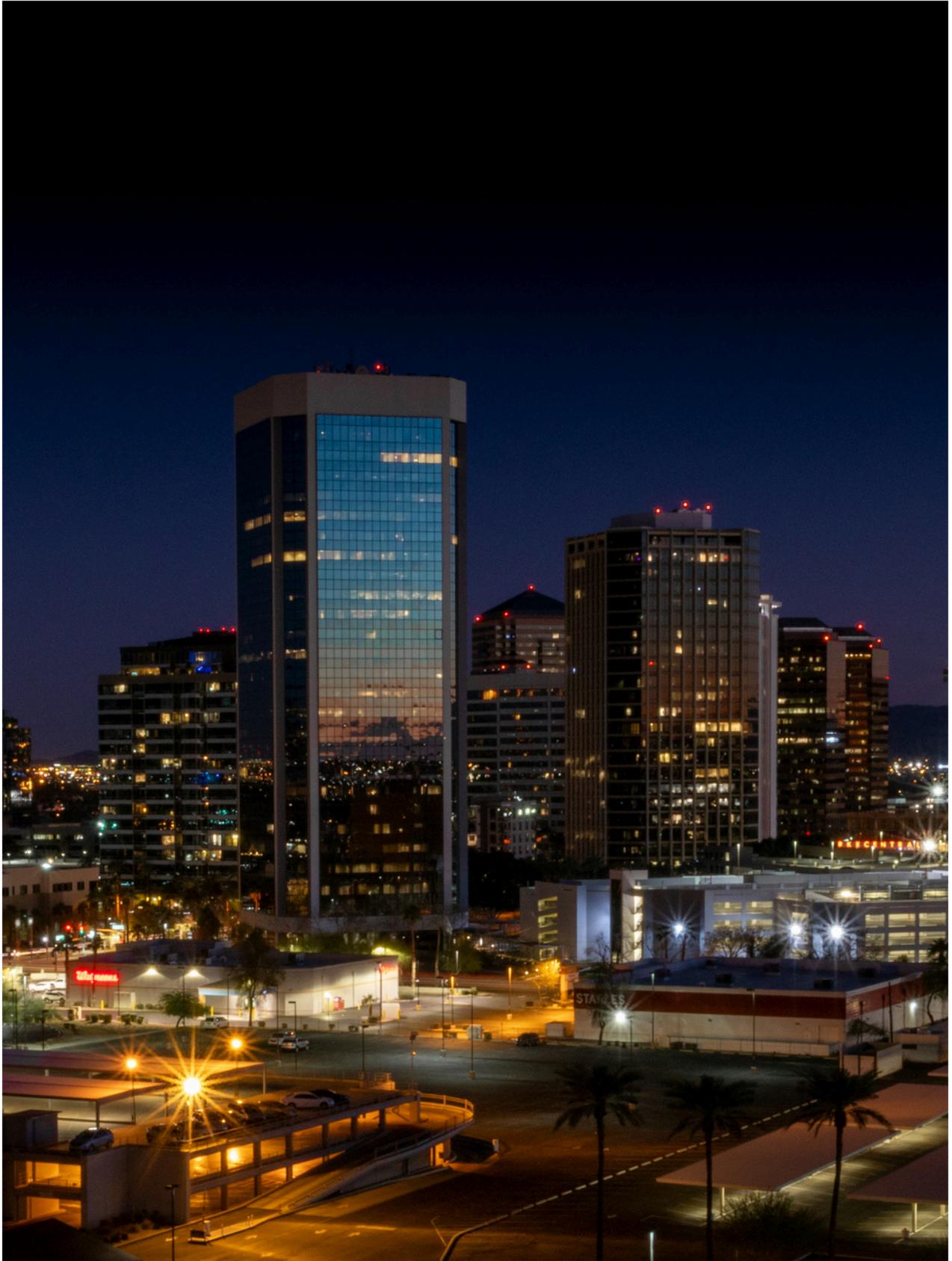
After a slow 2024–25 cycle, January 2026 saw select early-stage funding returning in payments infrastructure, embedded finance, and MSME credit startups. Investors remain cautious but optimistic, prioritizing profitability and sustainable unit economics over aggressive growth.

Neobanks Shift Toward Profitability

Indian neobanks and digital banking platforms are focusing on revenue expansion through lending, subscriptions, and SME banking rather than pure user growth. Several players reported improving margins and reduced burn, signaling a maturing fintech landscape.

Cross-Border & Remittance Innovation

Fintech companies are increasingly building low-cost cross-border payment and remittance solutions, targeting freelancers, exporters, and global Indian users. UPI-linked international corridors and real-time FX innovation remain key themes for 2026.



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