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UPI Keeps Small Merchant Payments Free as Zero-MDR Framework Expands

India's September 2026 UPI framework keeps small merchant payments up to ₹2,000 MDR-free, while introducing defined charges for selected higher-value transactions.

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SEBI's IGP Framework Opens Wider IPO Access for Innovation-Led Companies

SEBI's IGP framework broadens IPO access for innovation-led companies, enabling eligible startups to raise public capital and accelerate growth.

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Carbon Credit Markets Shift Toward Stronger Verification and Transparency

Global carbon markets are adopting stricter verification standards, increasing demand for transparent, technology-driven monitoring and higher-quality carbon credits.

StartupTimes

Friday, September 18, 2026 NEW DELHI, 10 PAGES

Indian Startup Ecosystem Gains Momentum as VC Inflows Reach $392 Million in a Week

India's startup funding environment witnessed a notable resurgence in mid-September 2026, with venture capital investments touching approximately $392 million within a single week. The strong inflow reflects renewed investor confidence in high-growth businesses that are demonstrating sustainable revenue models, operational efficiency, and clear paths to profitability.

A significant portion of the capital was directed toward vertical SaaS platforms, which continue to attract attention for their ability to solve industry-specific challenges across sectors such as healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, and financial services. Investors are increasingly favoring companies that provide specialized software solutions with recurring revenue streams and scalable business models.

The enterprise AI segment also emerged as a major beneficiary of funding activity. Startups developing automation tools, intelligent analytics platforms, and AI-powered productivity solutions are gaining traction as businesses accelerate digital transformation initiatives. Demand for technologies that improve efficiency and decision-making remains a key growth driver.

Meanwhile, several direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands secured fresh capital by demonstrating strong unit economics, customer retention, and disciplined expansion strategies. Investors appear to be rewarding startups that prioritize sustainable growth over aggressive cash burn.

Deep Tech Policy Push Sparks Rise in University-Led Innovation

India's deep tech ecosystem is witnessing increased activity following the revised startup framework that extends recognition eligibility to 20 years and raises the turnover threshold to ₹300 crore. Incubators and innovation centers report a growing number of university spin-offs, research-driven ventures, and intellectual property-focused hardware startups entering the ecosystem. The policy changes are expected to provide longer development timelines for advanced technologies, encouraging commercialization of research and supporting innovation in sectors such as semiconductors, robotics, aerospace, and biotechnology.

Page 9 SPORTS

Indian Sports Franchises Unlock New Revenue Through D2C Merchandising and Digital Fan Engagement

Tier-2 and Tier-3 Cities Fuel India’s Next Wave of Startup Growth

Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are contributing significantly to India’s startup growth, with around 35% of pre-seed applications coming from emerging hubs. Cities like Coimbatore, Jaipur, and Indore are benefiting from regional incubators, angel networks, and improved digital infrastructure, helping local founders access capital, mentorship, and wider markets.

India’s startup landscape is becoming increasingly decentralized, with founders from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities accounting for nearly 35% of pre-seed funding applications in recent months. Cities such as Coimbatore, Jaipur, and Indore are emerging as important innovation hubs, attracting attention from angel investors, startup accelerators, and regional incubators seeking opportunities beyond traditional metropolitan centers.

The growing participation of entrepreneurs from smaller cities reflects broader improvements in digital infrastructure, access to online learning resources, and the availability of remote work opportunities. Founders no longer need to relocate to Bengaluru, Mumbai, or Delhi to build technology-driven businesses. Instead, many are choosing to establish startups within their local ecosystems, leveraging lower operational costs and closer access to regional markets.

A major factor contributing to this growth is the rise of decentralized incubators and innovation centers. Universities, industry associations, and state-backed startup missions have expanded support programs that provide mentorship, networking opportunities, workspace facilities, and early-stage funding assistance. These initiatives are helping entrepreneurs refine business models, connect with investors, and accelerate product development.

Angel syndicates are also playing a significant role in supporting startups from emerging regions. Investors are increasingly recognizing that promising opportunities can originate from diverse geographic locations and not solely from established startup hubs. As a result, founders in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are finding it easier to access seed capital and strategic guidance during the critical early stages of growth.

Many startups emerging from these cities are focused on solving localized challenges in sectors such as agritech, healthcare, logistics, education technology, manufacturing, and financial inclusion. Their proximity to underserved markets often allows them to develop solutions that address real-world problems more effectively. This practical approach has made several regional startups attractive investment prospects.

The trend is also encouraging a more balanced distribution of entrepreneurial activity across the country. By fostering innovation outside major metropolitan areas, regional startup ecosystems are creating employment opportunities, strengthening local economies, and reducing the concentration of talent migration toward larger cities.

Industry observers believe that the continued expansion of regional incubators, combined with greater investor interest and supportive government initiatives, will further strengthen startup creation in smaller cities. As access to capital and mentorship improves, Tier-2 and Tier-3 founders are expected to play an increasingly important role in shaping India’s innovation economy.

The rise of these emerging hubs highlights a significant shift in the country’s startup ecosystem, demonstrating that entrepreneurial talent and scalable business ideas are thriving well beyond India’s traditional technology centers.

Indian Rupee Capital Pools Strengthen Early-Stage Startup Funding

India’s startup ecosystem is witnessing a gradual expansion of domestic, rupee-denominated capital, with local Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) increasing their participation in seed and pre-seed funding rounds. The development is creating additional financing channels for Indian founders and may help reduce their dependence on offshore dollar-denominated funds during the early stages of business development.

Domestic AIFs are becoming an increasingly important part of India’s alternative investment landscape. By raising and deploying capital within the Indian financial ecosystem, these funds can provide startups with access to rupee-based funding while developing closer relationships with founders and management teams. Their growing participation also brings greater attention to local market conditions, customer behaviour, regulatory requirements, and sector-specific challenges.

A More Diversified Startup Funding Ecosystem

For several years, international venture capital firms have played a major role in financing India’s technology, consumer, fintech, SaaS, healthcare, and other emerging businesses. Global investors continue to contribute substantial capital, international networks, sector expertise, and access to overseas markets.

However, the increasing participation of domestic funds is creating a more diversified financing environment. Founders now have additional options when planning their fundraising strategies, particularly during periods when international investors become more selective or global investment conditions turn cautious.

The development does not represent a replacement for international venture capital. Instead, domestic capital can complement global funding by providing another source of financing across different stages of a startup’s journey.

Growing Importance of Seed and Pre-Seed Capital

The expansion of domestic rupee capital could be particularly relevant for startups at the seed and pre-seed stages. Young companies often require comparatively smaller amounts of funding to develop their products, build initial teams, test their business models, acquire early customers, and establish market demand.

Domestic investors participating at this stage can potentially help founders build a stronger foundation before approaching larger institutional investors. Local funds may also have a better understanding of India's diverse consumer markets and the operational realities faced by early-stage businesses.

As startups progress, this early capital can form part of a broader funding pipeline, moving from seed and pre-seed rounds toward Series A and later-stage financing.

Sector-Focused Funds Expand Opportunities

India’s alternative investment industry is also becoming more specialized. Fund managers are establishing investment vehicles focused on areas such as technology, consumer businesses, financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, climate technology, and other emerging sectors.

This specialization can give startups access to investors with relevant sector knowledge and networks. Investors are increasingly examining factors such as customer demand, revenue visibility, unit economics, scalability, capital efficiency, and the ability of management teams to execute their business plans.

For founders, the changing funding environment means that fundraising is increasingly about finding the right strategic investor rather than simply securing capital. Investors can potentially contribute industry knowledge, partnerships, hiring support, market connections, and guidance alongside financial resources.

Stronger Continuity Between Funding Rounds

Another potential advantage of greater domestic participation is continuity between different funding stages. Investors who participate during a company's early development may continue supporting the business as it grows, subject to their investment strategy and portfolio requirements.

Domestic investors may also help connect startups with larger institutional funds and other investors during subsequent fundraising rounds. Such relationships can contribute to a more connected domestic funding ecosystem, where companies have pathways from early-stage financing to larger growth capital.

A stronger domestic funding pipeline can also be useful when global venture markets experience periods of uncertainty. Startups with access to multiple sources of capital may have greater flexibility when determining when and how much funding to raise.

International Capital Remains Important

Despite the growth of domestic rupee-based funding, international venture capital remains an important component of India's startup ecosystem. Global funds can provide substantial financial resources and offer founders access to international networks, expertise, partnerships, and overseas markets.

Semicon 2.0 Strengthens India’s Semiconductor Ecosystem

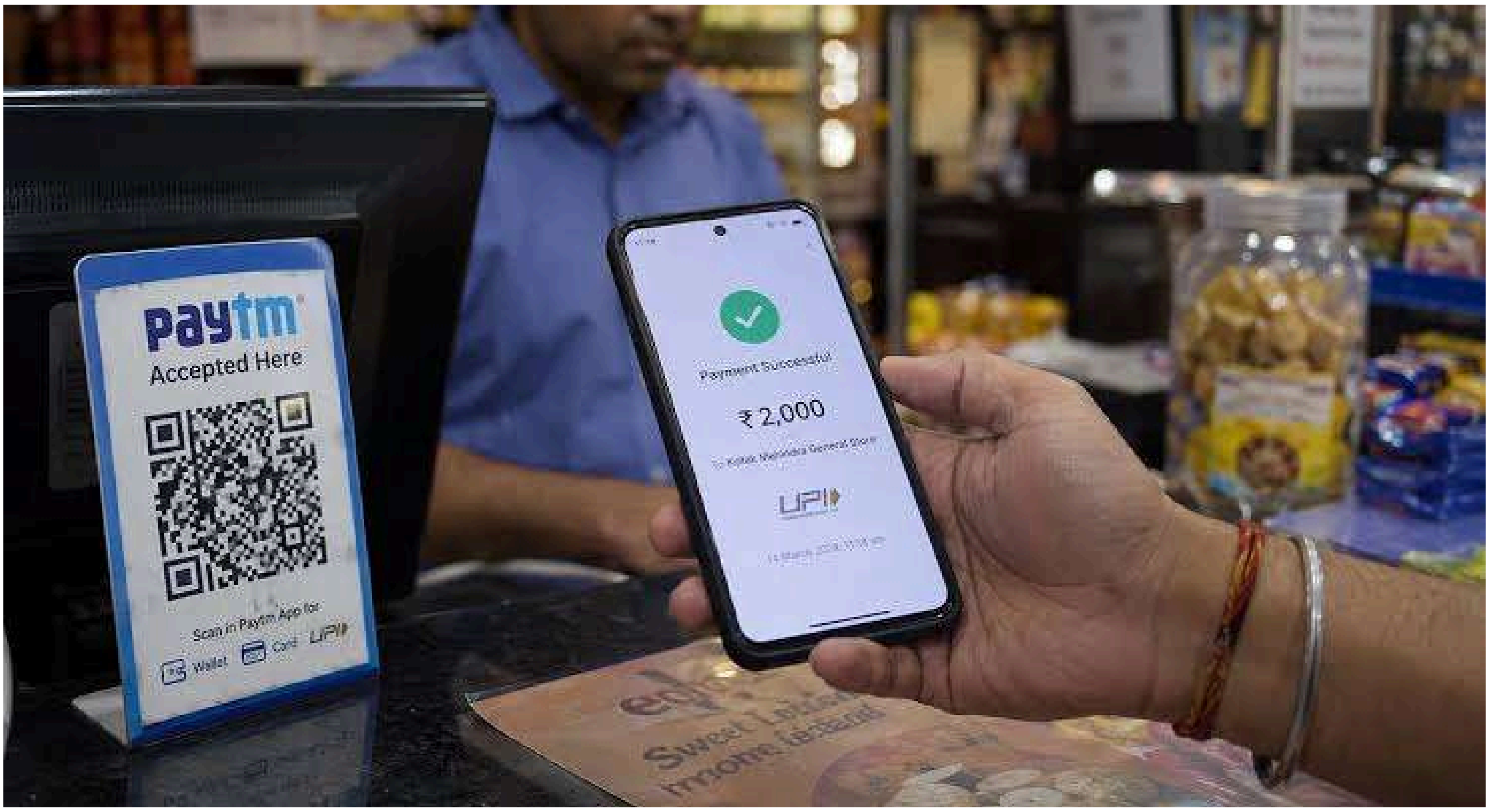
India is stepping up efforts to expand its semiconductor ecosystem with Semicon 2.0, approved with a total outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore. The programme covers six key areas: chip design, semiconductor equipment and materials, fabrication facilities, advanced packaging, research and development, and talent development.

The initiative was highlighted at SEMICON India 2026, being held at Yashobhoomi in New Delhi from September 17–19. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the event on September 17, bringing together global semiconductor companies, investors, researchers, startups and policymakers.

Semicon 2.0 is designed to expand domestic capabilities beyond chip manufacturing by supporting the wider supply chain, including materials, machinery, packaging and semiconductor design. The government has also notified dedicated measures covering all six pillars of the programme.

India already has 12 semiconductor projects approved under the broader programme, representing committed investments exceeding ₹1.64 lakh crore, with three projects having started commercial production by 2026.

The expanded policy framework could provide greater opportunities for semiconductor startups, component manufacturers, research institutions and engineering talent, while supporting the development of a broader domestic electronics supply chain.



UPI Keeps Small Merchant Payments Free as Zero-MDR Framework Expands

India continues to support low-cost digital payments by maintaining zero MDR on eligible UPI merchant transactions up to ₹2,000. The framework benefits micro-merchants and small businesses while keeping P2P payments free. New provisions establish charges for selected higher-value transactions, creating a structured payment framework for banks, fintechs, and merchants.

India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is retaining zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for merchant payments of up to ₹2,000, supporting low-cost digital transactions for consumers and small businesses. The framework was clarified by the government in September 2026 following amendments to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act and subsequent notifications.

Under the updated framework, person-to-person (P2P) UPI transactions remain completely free, regardless of transaction value. For person-to-merchant (P2M) payments, transactions up to ₹2,000 continue without MDR. In addition, small merchants receiving up to ₹1 lakh per month through eligible UPI QR transactions under the P2PM category continue to receive zero-MDR treatment.

The policy is particularly relevant for micro-merchants, neighbourhood retailers, street vendors and other small businesses that rely heavily on digital payments. Keeping costs low can support continued adoption of QR-based payments and reduce concerns about payment-processing expenses.

For selected merchant transactions above ₹2,000, the new framework provides for a 0.4% MDR, with a maximum charge of ₹300 for transactions of ₹75,000 or more. Certain essential sectors, including railways, telecommunications, insurance, fuel and agricultural inputs, have separate provisions.

Importantly, MDR is a charge within the merchant-payment ecosystem rather than a fee directly imposed on customers. The government has stated that banks should ensure merchants do not pass the charge on to customers, while UPI application providers are prohibited from imposing platform or hidden charges under the framework.

The policy also comes as UPI continues to operate at significant scale. Government data reported 55.49 crore onboarded users as of June 2026, highlighting the importance of maintaining an affordable and accessible payment infrastructure.

For fintech companies, banks and payment-service providers, the framework provides clearer rules around how merchant transactions can be charged while preserving zero-MDR coverage for smaller payments. The approach combines continued support for everyday digital transactions with a mechanism for selected higher-value merchant payments to contribute toward the wider payment ecosystem.

Overall, the September 2026 framework keeps small-value UPI merchant payments free of MDR, while establishing defined conditions for charges on certain higher-value transactions. This creates a clearer structure for merchants and payment companies as India's digital-payment ecosystem continues to expand.

SEBI's IGP Framework Opens Wider IPO Access for Innovation-Led Companies

SEBI's Innovators Growth Platform provides technology and innovation-led companies with an alternative route to public-market funding. The framework accommodates businesses that may not yet meet conventional profitability requirements while setting investor eligibility and due-diligence standards. It can also provide venture investors with greater opportunities for liquidity as startups transition toward public markets.

SEBI's Innovators Growth Platform provides innovation-led companies with an alternative public-market route, supporting fundraising, investor participation, and potential shareholder liquidity while maintaining eligibility requirements and regulatory safeguards.

India's capital markets are continuing to develop dedicated pathways for technology-driven and innovation-focused businesses through the Innovators Growth Platform (IGP). The platform is designed for companies with technology, innovation, or intellectual-property-led business models and provides a framework for accessing public-market capital while accommodating the characteristics of emerging businesses.

The IGP framework is particularly relevant for startups and growth companies that may not fit conventional main-board listing requirements. Unlike mature businesses, technology companies can require substantial investment in research, product development, and market expansion before reaching consistent profitability. The platform provides an alternative listing route intended for such businesses.

SEBI's framework also establishes specific eligibility requirements for Innovators Growth Platform Investors (IGPIs). Eligible investors include individuals with annual gross income of at least ₹50 lakh and liquid net worth of ₹5 crore, as well as corporate entities with a net worth of ₹25 crore. Certain family trusts are also covered under the regulatory framework.

For a company seeking IGP listing, eligible investors must meet prescribed conditions relating to pre-issue shareholding. SEBI's framework requires IGPIs to account for at least 25% of pre-issue capital for the relevant eligibility calculation. Stock exchanges and depositories are responsible for investor accreditation, while merchant bankers must conduct due diligence during the listing process.

The platform can also create an additional route for early investors to participate in public-market transactions. Venture capital funds, angel investors, and other early-stage investors typically hold shares for several years while companies develop their products and expand operations. Once a company becomes publicly listed, existing shareholders may gain greater opportunities to manage or exit their investments, subject to applicable lock-ins, disclosure requirements, market conditions, and securities regulations.

SEBI has continued to review and update its broader securities-market framework during 2026, including measures aimed at simplifying regulations and improving ease of doing business. Its current regulatory framework includes the Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements Regulations, which govern public issues and listings, including companies using the IGP route.

For technology startups, the IGP can therefore serve as a bridge between private funding and public-market participation. It provides companies with an avenue to access a broader investor base while retaining a framework specifically designed around innovation-led businesses.

The development is significant for India's startup ecosystem because stronger public-market pathways can complement traditional venture capital and private-equity funding. As more technology businesses mature, structured mechanisms such as the IGP can provide additional options for fundraising, shareholder liquidity, and long-term expansion while maintaining regulatory safeguards for investors.

GOVERNMENT

MSME Credit Guarantees Expand Support for Clean Energy and Solar Adoption

India's micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) ecosystem is gaining access to broader financing support for clean-energy investments, including renewable-energy installations and resource-efficient technologies. Credit-guarantee mechanisms are designed to reduce lending risks for financial institutions and make it easier for eligible enterprises to secure loans without relying entirely on collateral. The government has also expanded the overall credit-support framework for MSEs in recent years.

The Credit Guarantee Scheme for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) plays an important role in this ecosystem by providing guarantees to lenders against eligible credit facilities extended to MSEs. As of April 2025, the guarantee ceiling under the scheme was increased from ₹5 crore to ₹10 crore, while the standard annual guarantee fee was reduced to as low as 0.37% per annum. These changes are intended to improve the availability and affordability of institutional credit for smaller businesses.

Clean-energy financing is also being supported through the Ministry of MSME's MSE GIFT initiative under the RAMP programme. The scheme is specifically designed to encourage MSMEs to adopt green technologies and cleaner energy solutions. It provides a 2% interest subvention on term loans up to ₹2 crore and includes a risk-sharing facility under which eligible loans can receive 75% credit-guarantee coverage.

The programme covers several areas relevant to manufacturing businesses, including resource efficiency, waste management, water efficiency, pollution control, green buildings, clean transportation, electric vehicles, EV charging infrastructure, compressed biogas, bio-ethanol, smart grids, and other climate-focused projects. This broader approach allows enterprises to consider sustainability investments as part of their operational and expansion strategies.

Solar adoption has also received dedicated attention. CGTMSE has previously partnered with the World Bank and KfW to implement a Solar Rooftop Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, supporting lending to MSMEs and renewable-energy service companies involved in scaling rooftop solar installations. CGTMSE's environmental and social policy also specifically covers new financial products and services for MSME solar rooftop projects.

For manufacturing units, access to such financing can be particularly relevant because energy costs form an important part of operating expenses for many businesses. Installing rooftop solar systems, improving energy efficiency, upgrading machinery, or adopting cleaner production technologies can require significant upfront investment. Credit support and guarantee mechanisms can help reduce some of the financing barriers associated with these projects.

The wider credit-guarantee ecosystem is also becoming more accessible to different categories of entrepreneurs. Government data shows that enhanced guarantee coverage is available for certain special categories, including women-led MSEs. In addition, businesses located in identified credit-deficient districts can receive benefits such as a discount on the annual guarantee fee and additional guarantee coverage.

For lenders, credit guarantees can reduce the risk associated with extending loans to smaller enterprises that may have limited collateral or shorter operating histories. For businesses, this can potentially improve access to formal financing for productive investments. The government has also stated that scheduled commercial banks should not accept collateral security for certain MSE loans up to ₹20 lakh, further supporting collateral-free lending.

The growing integration of MSME financing with clean-energy objectives reflects a broader effort to combine industrial development with sustainability.

Ashish Singh: Building Trust Beyond Transaction in Wealth Management

Ashish Singh is transforming wealth management through a client-first, consultancy-driven approach, combining personalized financial planning, cross-border expertise, transparency, and long-term relationships across India and the UAE.

Ashish Singh builds trust-driven wealth management through personalized financial planning, cross-border expertise, transparent advisory, disciplined strategies, and long-term relationships, helping families and businesses achieve sustainable financial growth.

Ashish Singh, Founder and CEO of Rudraksh Group of Companies, is building a client-first approach to wealth management centered on trust, transparency, and value. With more than a decade of experience in planning, investment strategy, and wealth management, Singh works with high-net-worth individuals, families, and businesses across Indian and global markets.

A Certified Financial Planner with a Master's degree in Finance & Wealth Management, Singh believes financial planning should begin with understanding a client's goals, responsibilities, risk appetite, and priorities. His philosophy, "Building Trust Beyond Transaction," reflects his belief that wealth management should extend beyond individual products or transactions.

Before establishing Rudraksh Group, Singh held a senior leadership position in wealth management, where he led a team of professionals and worked closely with clients. He observed that clients with different family structures, financial goals, and life stages could receive similar solutions. This encouraged him to create a more personalized consultancy-driven model through Rudraksh Investment Consultancy LLC and Rudraksh Capital LLC.

The UAE's diverse financial landscape highlighted the importance of trust and cross-border expertise. Entrepreneurs, professionals, investors, and families often manage financial interests across India and the UAE, creating complexities involving investments, currency exposure, taxation, estate planning, and wealth transfer. Rudraksh Group aims to address these needs through continuous engagement, transparent communication, regular portfolio reviews, and customized strategies.

Its consultancy-first model covers goal-based financial planning, retirement and education planning, budgeting, investment advisory across Indian and global markets, insurance advisory, estate planning, wealth transfer, and mortgage advisory. Singh emphasizes research-driven decisions, disciplined risk assessment, and adapting strategies as clients' circumstances evolve.

Building the company independently also required Singh to establish systems, processes, standards, and culture from the ground up. Rather than prioritizing rapid expansion, he has focused on maintaining advisory quality, hiring suitable professionals, strengthening internal systems, and keeping client objectives at the center. Financial education is another important area, as investors can often be influenced by market headlines, fear, overconfidence, and short-term trends.

One of Singh's most meaningful milestones was seeing former clients continue their relationships with him after he launched Rudraksh Group. Former colleagues also joined the venture, reinforcing the firm's client-first philosophy. Media appearances and financial literacy events have followed.

Looking ahead, Singh aims to expand Rudraksh Group across India and the UAE, strengthen cross-border capabilities, develop an advisory team, and use technology to improve portfolio visibility and financial education. His broader ambition is to become a trusted partner for families across generations.

Global Rate Outlook Shifts as Central Banks Reassess Inflation Risks

Global monetary policy is entering a more uncertain phase as major central banks balance inflation pressures with economic growth. Recent policy decisions from the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank (ECB) indicate that policymakers remain focused on inflation rather than moving uniformly toward monetary easing.

On September 16, 2026, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest-rate target by 25 basis points to 3.75%–4%. The Fed said inflation remains elevated and that the decision was intended to support a return toward its 2% inflation objective. Its latest projections show PCE inflation expected to decline toward 2% over the medium term.

The ECB also adopted a cautious approach. On September 10, it raised its three key interest rates by 25 basis points, taking the deposit facility rate to 2.50%. The ECB projected euro-area headline inflation at 3.0% for 2026, 2.5% for 2027 and 2.1% for 2028, while highlighting continued uncertainty around energy prices and geopolitical developments.

These decisions suggest that global investors continue to monitor inflation, interest-rate expectations and economic growth closely. Changes in monetary policy can influence borrowing costs, currency movements and capital allocation across international markets.

For emerging-market technology companies, global liquidity conditions remain important because foreign institutional investors often reassess allocations as interest rates and risk premiums change. However, investment flows can also depend on company fundamentals, valuations, currency conditions and broader market sentiment.

Overall, the latest decisions point to diverging policy conditions rather than coordinated easing, with both central banks maintaining a data-dependent approach as they assess inflation and economic risks.

Crude Oil Volatility Pushes Logistics Startups Toward Electric Fleets

Fluctuations in global crude oil prices are creating fresh cost pressures for logistics, delivery and transportation businesses, encouraging companies to explore alternatives to conventional fuel. Brent crude prices have remained sensitive to changing expectations around global supply, demand and production decisions by OPEC+ members.

For logistics startups, fuel is a major operating expense, particularly for businesses managing large delivery networks and high-frequency last-mile operations. Sudden changes in diesel and petrol prices can affect delivery costs, fleet utilization and overall operating margins. This has increased interest in electric vehicles (EVs), which can offer more predictable energy costs and lower maintenance requirements for suitable commercial applications.

The shift toward electric fleets is particularly visible in last-mile delivery, e-commerce logistics and hyperlocal transportation. Companies operating predictable urban routes can benefit from EVs because vehicles can return to designated charging locations between delivery cycles. As charging infrastructure expands, businesses are also evaluating electric three-wheelers, vans and two-wheelers for different delivery requirements.

However, transitioning an existing fleet to electric vehicles involves significant upfront investment. Companies must consider vehicle acquisition costs, charging infrastructure, battery performance, financing, maintenance and route suitability before making large-scale fleet decisions.

The broader logistics ecosystem is therefore increasingly looking at a combination of fuel-efficient vehicles, route-optimization software and EV deployment to manage transportation costs. Startups are also exploring battery-swapping systems and charging partnerships to reduce vehicle downtime.

Global Tech Valuations Shift Toward Sustainable Revenue Growth

Global technology valuations are increasingly being assessed through more fundamental business metrics, with investors paying closer attention to recurring revenue, customer retention, profitability and cash-flow efficiency. The shift is particularly visible in the enterprise software sector, where annual recurring revenue (ARR) has become an important indicator for evaluating the quality and durability of a company's growth.

Enterprise software businesses typically operate through subscription-based models, generating predictable revenue from customers over extended periods. This recurring revenue structure allows investors to examine growth more consistently while comparing companies across different stages of development. As market conditions become more selective, businesses with strong retention rates and sustainable ARR growth are receiving greater attention from investors.

The changing valuation environment also reflects increased scrutiny of customer acquisition costs and operating expenses. During periods of abundant venture capital, some technology companies focused heavily on rapid expansion, customer acquisition and market share, even when those strategies required substantial cash expenditure. Investors are now increasingly examining whether growth can translate into stronger margins and long-term financial sustainability.

Capital-efficient companies can benefit from this environment because they are less dependent on continuous external fundraising. Businesses that demonstrate efficient sales strategies, strong customer retention and disciplined spending may have greater flexibility when raising future capital or managing slower funding conditions.

For enterprise software startups, this means growth strategies are increasingly being evaluated alongside unit economics. Metrics such as ARR growth, net revenue retention, gross margins, customer acquisition costs and lifetime value can provide investors with a broader understanding of business performance.

SPORTS

Asian Games 2026 Drive Fresh Momentum for Sports Technology and Sponsorship

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 is creating new opportunities for sports technology, digital fan engagement and sponsorship. Startups in analytics, fantasy sports, ticketing and digital platforms can leverage the event's growing audience, while brands gain opportunities to strengthen visibility across Asian markets.

The 20th Asian Games, officially known as Aichi-Nagoya 2026, are bringing renewed attention to sports technology, digital engagement and sponsorship opportunities across Asia. Scheduled to take place in Japan from September 19 to October 4, 2026, the Games will bring together athletes from across the continent, creating a major platform for brands, broadcasters and technology companies.

The build-up to the event has increased interest in sports marketing technology as companies look for new ways to connect brands with fans. Digital platforms are increasingly being used to deliver athlete stories, live statistics, interactive content and personalised experiences. These technologies allow sponsors to engage audiences beyond traditional television advertising and physical venue branding.

Sports technology companies are also benefiting from growing demand for data-driven experiences. Real-time performance statistics, digital fan platforms, content distribution tools and mobile applications can help broadcasters and sporting organisations provide more detailed coverage. As audiences increasingly consume sports through smartphones and digital platforms, technology is becoming an important part of the overall sporting experience.

Fantasy sports and fan-engagement platforms are another area receiving attention around major sporting events. Such platforms can encourage users to follow matches more closely by offering interactive competitions based on player and team performances. Their commercial potential has made them relevant to advertisers seeking highly engaged digital audiences.

Sponsorship remains an important source of revenue for major sporting events. Companies across financial services, technology, consumer products, telecommunications and other sectors can use large tournaments to build brand visibility across multiple Asian markets. The Asian Games provide sponsors with exposure to audiences in both established and emerging markets.

For startups, major sporting events can also provide opportunities to demonstrate new products and services. Sports analytics companies, ticketing platforms, digital advertising providers and fan-engagement startups can use the increased attention surrounding the Games to reach potential customers and business partners.

Japan's hosting of the 2026 Asian Games also highlights the country's role in combining sports infrastructure with technology. The event is being held across venues in Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya, with organisers focusing on delivering a large-scale international sporting competition across multiple disciplines.

The commercial impact of the Games is expected to extend beyond the competition period. Sponsors and technology companies can use the event to establish longer-term partnerships with sporting organisations, athletes and digital platforms. Increased investment in sports technology could also support innovation in areas such as performance analysis, broadcasting, ticketing and fan engagement.

As the opening ceremony approaches, the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games are therefore creating a significant ecosystem for sports, media, technology and marketing. The event demonstrates how large international tournaments are increasingly becoming platforms not only for athletic competition but also for digital innovation and commercial partnerships.

Carbon Credit Markets Shift Toward Stronger Verification and Transparency

Global carbon markets are moving toward stricter verification, transparency, and traceability. European regulatory frameworks are increasing demand for independently validated carbon-removal projects, while satellite monitoring, AI, and digital platforms help businesses assess carbon credits and support more reliable climate-related claims.

The global carbon credit market is moving toward stricter verification as regulators, businesses and investors place greater emphasis on the environmental credibility of carbon removal projects. European regulatory developments are increasing attention on how carbon credits are measured, verified and monitored, particularly for companies seeking to make credible climate-related claims.

A key area of focus is the quality and traceability of carbon credits. Businesses purchasing credits increasingly want evidence that a project has actually removed or reduced the stated amount of carbon dioxide. This has increased interest in independent validation, transparent project records and continuous monitoring systems.

Satellite-based monitoring is emerging as an important technology in this process. Remote sensing can help track forests, agricultural land, wetlands and other carbon-removal projects over time. Combined with ground-based measurements and digital reporting systems, satellite data can provide additional evidence about changes in land use, vegetation and environmental conditions.

The demand for reliable data is particularly relevant as European institutions develop frameworks for assessing permanent carbon removals, carbon farming and carbon storage in products. The European Union Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming (CRCF) Regulation establishes an EU-wide voluntary framework for certifying different types of carbon removals and carbon farming activities. The framework places emphasis on quantification, additionality, long-term storage and sustainability.

For carbon-market platforms, stronger verification requirements could increase operating costs because projects may need more extensive monitoring, reporting and third-party certification. However, standardized verification can also improve transparency for buyers and reduce uncertainty around the quality of credits.

Technology companies are responding by developing platforms that combine satellite imagery, artificial intelligence, geographic information systems and blockchain-based records to improve carbon-credit tracking. These systems can help buyers examine project locations, monitoring data and certification information before purchasing credits.

For enterprises, the changing market means carbon-credit procurement is increasingly becoming a due-diligence exercise rather than simply a purchasing decision. Companies are examining project methodology, permanence, additionality, monitoring systems and certification before making climate-related claims.

Key Highlights

- Carbon markets are facing stricter verification and transparency requirements.
- Businesses increasingly demand high-quality, traceable carbon credits.
- Satellite monitoring is improving project tracking and environmental measurement.
- EU frameworks emphasize quantification, additionality, permanence, and sustainability.
- Stronger audits may increase verification costs for carbon projects.
- AI, GIS, satellite imagery, and blockchain are supporting monitoring.
- Enterprises are conducting deeper due diligence before purchasing credits.