



## SITARA & BDIA Dialogue on Digital Sovereignty, FTAs and National Security

### Press Release

**New Delhi, September 22, 2025** – The Science Indigenous Technology & Advanced Research Accelerator (SITARA) and the Bharath Digital Infrastructure Association (BDIA) jointly organised a high-level discussion at the India International Centre on the urgent need for implementing a **Digital Atmanirbharta programme**. The session was chaired by Ambassador Ashok Kantha and came at a critical juncture following the imposition of supplementary 50% tariffs on Indian exports to the US and the recent hike in H1B visa fees — both posing severe setbacks to India's economy.

Distinguished speakers included **Dr. Sasmit Patra**, Hon'ble MP, **Shri Parminder Jeet Singh**, Digital Affairs Expert, **Shri Abhishek Bhatt**, Founder & Secretary General, BDIA, **Shri Ashish Sonal**, AI & Security Specialist, and **Amb. Smita Purushottam**, Founder, SITARA. Shri K.N. Shrivastava, Director IIC graced the event and made some critical observations on the need for laws and incentives to spur private sector R&D investment and utilisation of indigenous services like sovereign indigenous clouds.

The deliberations highlighted that while the Government has taken transformative steps through initiatives such as **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, **Jan Dhan**, **Aadhaar**, **UPI**, **the National AI Mission**, and **the Semiconductor Mission**, the next phase must be focused on **Digital Atmanirbharta**. Experts emphasised that this programme could add **US\$1 trillion annually** to India's economy, create high-quality employment, and fortify national security.

Key themes included:

- Underscoring that **Digital Atmanirbharta** is not only an economic imperative but also a strategic and national security necessity.
- Building a **deep-tech ecosystem** that could reabsorb skilled professionals returning from abroad and retain Indian talent, countering AI-driven job displacement and catalysing exponential growth in India along the lines delivered by digital industrial policy in countries as diverse as the US, Russia, China and Iran.
- As part of a **digital industrial policy**, declaring **data as a national strategic asset**, critical for AI, platforms, surveillance tools, *and defence*.
- Promoting **domestic apps and platforms**.
- **Enshrining the strategic role of Sovereign Clouds** for data storage, AI training, digital public services, national security applications, and future economic growth - **in Digital Industrial Policy**. Today, the vast majority of India's **public, corporate, and government data** resides on **foreign cloud platforms**, creating deep vulnerabilities. Without sovereign clouds, India risks permanent dependency on foreign entities, data exploitation, and potential weaponisation of digital services.

- Ensuring **FTAs under negotiation** do not dilute India's digital sovereignty, particularly on sensitive issues such as source codes and cross-border data flows, and other important issues.
- Strengthening **digital self-reliance in India's military capabilities**, as network centric and AI infused capabilities and battlefields are now the order of the day.
- Proofing India from extortion and psychological warfare by external platforms.

A lively interactive discussion followed, during which Dr Patra took many questions from the audience and panelists. The meeting concluded with a unanimous call to **prioritise Digital Industrial Policy** as the backbone of India's digital sovereignty, economy, and national security.

Monday, September 22, 2025