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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# How Can India Produce AI, Instead of Becoming Its Tenant?

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**

6 May 2026

**SCIENCE & TECH****ECONOMY****GS3****GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# How Can India Produce AI, Instead of Becoming Its Tenant?

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## EDITORIAL SUMMARY

Writing in the **Indian Express** (May 6, 2026), former **RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan** and economist **Rohit Lamba** issue a strategic warning: India is at risk of becoming a **“tenant” of foreign AI systems** — using and paying for AI infrastructure built by OpenAI, Google, Microsoft, and Meta — without owning the underlying capabilities, controlling the data governance, or sharing in the economic value created.

The piece argues that India possesses a **unique and unreplicable foundation** for building sovereign AI: its **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) — the India Stack** (Aadhaar, UPI, ONDC, DigiLocker, ABHA). No other country has a comparable combination of scale (1.4 billion biometric IDs), transactional depth (18–21 billion UPI transactions monthly), and public-good design principles. The authors argue this DPI can serve as the **data and governance backbone** for developing India-specific AI applications at scale.

But DPI alone is not enough — the editorial calls for **three parallel investments**: sovereign compute infrastructure, open multilingual datasets, and open-source large language models for Indian languages.

## KEY ARGUMENTS

### The “Tenant” Risk

SCENARIO	IMPLICATION
India uses OpenAI/Google AI with no sovereign stack	Strategic dependency; data sovereignty risk; no domestic economic value capture
India’s data trains foreign AI models	Indian users’ data enriches foreign companies; India pays for the output
Critical sectors (healthcare, agriculture, governance) run on foreign AI	Geopolitical vulnerability; terms can change; no recourse
India lacks compute infrastructure	Cannot train or fine-tune large AI models independently

The “tenant” metaphor is precise: a tenant pays rent, cannot modify the property, can be evicted, and builds no equity — the opposite of strategic technology ownership.

## India's Unique Advantage — The DPI Foundation

COMPONENT	SCALE	AI RELEVANCE
<b>Aadhaar</b>	1.4 billion biometric IDs	Identity verification; consent-based data access
<b>UPI</b>	18–21 billion transactions/month	Financial behaviour patterns; economic activity data
<b>ONDC</b>	Open Network for Digital Commerce	Commercial transaction data; supply chain
<b>DigiLocker</b>	250+ crore documents	Educational, government records
<b>ABHA</b>	Ayushman Bharat Health Account	Healthcare records; disease pattern data
<b>CoWIN</b>	Vaccination data	Demographic + health

This DPI generates **structured, consent-based, high-quality data** across demographics, sectors, and regions — rare at this scale globally.

## What India Must Build

COMPONENT	WHAT IS NEEDED	WHY
<b>Sovereign compute</b>	GPU clusters for AI training (India AI Mission: 10,000 GPUs initially)	Without compute, India cannot train or fine-tune large models
<b>Open multilingual datasets</b>	Curated training data in 22 Scheduled Languages	India's AI must work for Tamil farmers, not just English speakers
<b>Open-source LLMs</b>	Indian-language foundation models (Sarvam AI model is a start)	Prevents monopoly; enables ecosystem
<b>Public-private R&amp;D</b>	IIT + IISc + private sector (Sarvam, Krutrim) collaboration	Distributes investment; builds talent retention
<b>Data governance framework</b>	Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 implementation	Ensures data sovereignty while enabling AI development

## IndiaAI Mission — Current Status

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Budget	₹10,372 crore
Compute target	10,000 GPUs (Phase 1); expanding to 100,000+ (Phase 2)
Key component	AI Compute Infrastructure + IndiaAI Datasets Platform + FutureSkills Prime
Private players	Sarvam AI (Indian LLM); Krutrim (Ola founder Bhavish Aggarwal's AI)
Space AI example	Pixxel + Sarvam AI "Pathfinder" — orbital AI satellite (Q4 2026)

## UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Science & Technology	AI governance, sovereign AI, LLMs, compute infrastructure
GS3 — Economy	Digital economy, technology exports, intellectual property
GS2 — Governance	IndiaAI Mission, DPI governance, data sovereignty, DPDP Act 2023

**Mains Keywords:** AI sovereignty, Digital Public Infrastructure, India Stack, Raghuram Rajan, Rohit Lamba, IndiaAI Mission, Sarvam AI, Krutrim, DPDP Act 2023, UPI, Aadhaar, open-source LLM, sovereign compute, GPU infrastructure, multilingual AI, technology tenant

### Prelims Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
Article authors	<b>Raghuram Rajan</b> (former RBI Governor, 2013–16) + <b>Rohit Lamba</b> (Princeton economist)
Core argument	India must produce AI, not become a “tenant” of foreign AI platforms
DPI foundation	Aadhaar (1.4B IDs), UPI (18–21B transactions/month), ONDC, DigiLocker, ABHA
IndiaAI Mission	₹10,372 crore; 10,000 GPUs (Phase 1)
Sarvam AI	Indian open-source LLM company; Pathfinder satellite (with Pixxel)
Krutrim	AI startup by Bhavish Aggarwal (Ola founder)
DPDP Act 2023	Digital Personal Data Protection Act — data governance framework
Raghuram Rajan’s tenure	RBI Governor: September 2013 – September 2016

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