

STAKES IN WEST BENGAL

Bengal has voted in the first phase of Assembly elections where Mamata Banerjee is seeking a fourth term and BJP is trying to break her citadel. Given the high polling, it looks like a wave in one direction is blowing in the State that needs to integrate with the rest of the country in its growth trajectory. While BJP leaders are upbeat about today tentatively 91 percent - turnout, Mamata's TMC is also no less enthusiastic. It is a clear bipolar battle and sadly Congress is not even at the periphery of the contest to form the next government in West Bengal. For BJP and PM Narendra Modi, winning West Bengal is crucial for national security and bringing the state back on the map of rapid development that rest of the country has been going through. Even Tamil Nadu registered very high polling, signaling the voters needing a change. Usually such high voting is associated with "a wave", often anti-incumbency.

YASIN MALIK'S TEMERITY

JKLF terrorist who is convicted of terror funding and other charges and is lodged in Tihar Jail is still living in a make believe world. After admitting to receiving terror funds, he is now claiming it was all part of his role to push "back channels" talks between India and Pakistan. The man is charged with killing five IAF personnel and he remaining free for so many years made mockery of India's judicial system and his victims. One simply wonders what kind of governments we had that not only allowed people like Malik to roam around freely but also facilitated his trips to Pakistan in the name of track-two diplomacy. He only collected more funds for his activities and also amassed personal wealth, married a Pakistani and mocked at the Indian system. Thank God this was stopped by the Modi government and finally law is taking its course.

The cost of stalling women's reservation

Gourav Vallabh

India stands at a pivotal moment in its democratic evolution, one where the question is no longer whether women deserve one-third political representation, but whether a few family-owned political parties are willing to enable it. The recent inability to advance the operationalisation of women's reservation in Parliament has exposed a troubling contradiction. While the principle of empowering women in governance enjoys broad rhetorical support, sections of the opposition, particularly parties aligned with the INDI bloc, have continued to create hurdles at critical moments. By invoking technical objections around sequencing, delimitation clarity, and procedural conditions, they have effectively stalled progress. The optics were even more striking when, to the surprise of many, some opposition leaders appeared to celebrate the outcome-an outcome that delayed the transfer of political power to women across the country.

In contrast, the government has maintained a clear and consistent position. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated in his address to the nation, empowering women through political representation is not a matter of political convenience but a national priority. He emphasised that the government remains committed to delivering this right to the women of India "at any cost," and that while current parliamentary arithmetic may pose constraints, the resolve to implement women's reservation is firm.

The larger issue, however, is not merely political. It is about what India stands to gain or lose from this reform. The case for women's reservation is often framed in terms of fairness, but the more compelling argument is about governance.

India is one of the few countries with strong, large-scale empirical evidence on how women's political participation affects governance outcomes. The landmark research by Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo provides a clear answer.



Studying reserved panchayats in West Bengal and Rajasthan, they found that women-led local governments invested 62 per cent more in drinking water infrastructure in West Bengal and 56 per cent more in Rajasthan compared to their male-led counterparts. These were not symbolic differences; they reflected a systematic reorientation of public spending towards essential services that directly improve quality of life, health outcomes, and productivity. The reason is straightforward. Women leaders bring different lived experiences into decision-making. In the same study, 31 per cent of women identified drinking water as a key public concern, compared to just 17 per cent of men, making women 82 per cent more likely to prioritise it. Representation, therefore, is not just about presence; it is about perspective, and perspective shapes policy.

When such representation scales up to Parliament, the implications are profound. A more gender-balanced legislature is more likely to prioritise issues such as maternal health, nutrition, sanitation, childcare, and safety-areas which have long been under-emphasised but have direct economic consequences. Poor childcare limits workforce participation, unsafe public spaces restrict mobility, and weak

health infrastructure increases long-term fiscal burdens. These are not merely "social issues"; they are core economic concerns.

Beyond policy priorities, women's participation improves the quality of governance itself. Diverse decision-making bodies are less prone to narrow thinking and more likely to evaluate policies through multiple lenses. This leads to more balanced, inclusive, and effective policymaking. In a country as complex as India, such diversity is not optional; it is essential for responsive governance.

The impact also extends to justice and institutional accountability. Issues such as gender-based violence, workplace harassment, and unequal access to economic opportunities often suffer from inconsistent political attention. A stronger presence of women in legislatures increases the likelihood that these concerns receive sustained focus, better legal frameworks, and more effective enforcement. Governance thus becomes not only more inclusive but also more just. Perhaps the most significant impact is economic. India's female labour force participation remains below its potential. Structural barriers, ranging from safety concerns to lack of childcare, continue to limit women's full participation in

the economy. When policy addresses these constraints, the gains are substantial. Higher female participation expands the labour force, increases household incomes, and strengthens overall economic growth. No country aspiring to become a global economic powerhouse can afford to underutilise half its talent base.

There is also a powerful intergenerational effect. Research by Lori Beaman and her co-authors shows that sustained exposure to women leaders reduces the gender gap in aspirations by 32 per cent among adolescents and by 25 per cent among parents. In simple terms, when young girls see women in positions of authority, they begin to imagine themselves there. Over time, this reshapes education choices, career trajectories, and the very structure of opportunity.

The Modi government's broader policy framework has laid the foundation for this shift. Initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana have expanded women's access to education, health, finance, and entrepreneurship, with Mission Shakti integrating these efforts.

India has debated women's reservation for decades. The evidence is clear, and the benefits are undeniable. What remains is the political will of a few parties. When implemented, this reform will not just change who sits in Parliament; it will change how India is governed. And every delay is not just a procedural pause; it is a missed opportunity to improve governance and accelerate India's progress.

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The writer is a Professor of Finance and a Part-Time Member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister; Views presented are personal.

THE QUIET PRACTICE OF SUSTAINING YOURSELF DAILY

Sharmila Das

There are days when the world seems to have misplaced its instruction manual. Nothing is dramatically broken, yet nothing feels entirely in place. Emails multiply with suspicious enthusiasm, conversations trail off unfinished, and beneath it all lingers a quiet, persistent question: what is the point of all this? On such days, sustainability appears as an abstract ideal-something debated in policy rooms and global summits, distant from the lived reality of a restless mind and an overworked body.

But what if sustainability begins much closer to home? Closer than policies or pledges. Closer than climate targets and conscious consumption. What if it begins with the simple act of sustaining oneself? At first glance, that sounds almost too easy. After all, we are functioning-moving through our routines with reasonable efficiency. Yet a more honest look reveals something else: we are often running on fragments of attention, borrowed energy, and a body that has quietly learned not to interrupt. This is where yoga enters the frame-not as a performance of perfect postures, but as a gentle interruption to this slow depletion.

It begins with something disarmingly



simple: the breath. A slow inhale, followed by a slightly longer exhale. It can feel underwhelming, even inadequate, as if something so basic cannot possibly address the complexity of modern life. But the breath, in yogic practice, is not merely physiological-it is connective. It bridges the gap between a mind that races ahead and a body that struggles to keep pace. In its steady rhythm, attention begins to return.

We rarely lose attention all at once. It slips away in fragments-through notifications, distractions, and thoughts that lead nowhere useful. By day's end, exhaustion often comes not from effort, but from dispersion. The breath gathers this scattered energy, gently but persistently, calling the

mind back.

Soon, the body joins this quiet process. For too long, it has been relegated to the background, consulted only when it protests. Yoga shifts that relationship, inviting the body into awareness. A stretch reveals tension long held. A bend uncovers forgotten spaces. A moment of imbalance reminds us that stability is not fixed, but practised. In this rediscovery, there is even a touch of humour-the realisation that your shoulders have been holding on to conversations long finished, or that your spine, given attention, can move with ease. Movement, then, becomes more than exercise; it becomes restoration.

Between breath and movement, the

mind, too, begins to soften. Thoughts gather, emotions shift, and clarity feels distant. The instinct is often to suppress or spiral. Yoga proposes something quieter: observation.

To sit, to breathe, and to notice-without reacting. A thought arises; you acknowledge it and return to the breath. A memory surfaces; you let it pass. In that space, a more sustainable way of being begins to emerge. This is not a dramatic transformation. It builds in small increments: a few minutes of stretching, a conscious breath before a difficult moment, a pause where there might once have been reaction. Individually small, together they form a rhythm that does not deplete. The meaning of sustainability then shifts. Before we can sustain the world, we must learn to sustain ourselves. A restless mind cannot hold clarity. An ignored body cannot sustain energy. A driven spirit cannot sustain joy. Yet we expect all three to function seamlessly. Yoga does not resolve life's uncertainties. It offers a way to remain steady within them-to breathe when things feel constricted, to move when stuck, and to pause when everything insists on urgency.

The writer is a trained Sivananda Yoga teacher; Views presented are personal.

Why nuanced oversight of social media platforms matter

Sandip Chatterjee

Journalism is considered the "fourth pillar" of democracy, alongside the legislature, executive, and judiciary. It acts as a watchdog, ensuring accountability, transparency, and informed public opinion. A free press guards against the misuse of power and acts as a vital bridge between the government and citizens. Traditional media, such as print and television, have been performing these duties for years, contributing to India as a vibrant and evolving democracy. The content in these media is relatively static, reasonably edited, and validated to ensure factual correctness, with scheduled publication cycles for a limited geography. Journalists shoulder responsibility for such content.

Social media, however, thrives on participation, turning passive viewers into creators and amplifiers, unlike print media's fixed format. This fosters discussion but also risks echo chambers, contrasting with digital media's controlled navigation. Content evolves in real time via edits or threads on social platforms, while

print is immutable once published. Traditional media allows revisions but lacks the crowd-sourced dynamism of social media platforms. In print and digital media, content undergoes mandatory editorial processes, and thus the output is duly validated, whereas social media content becomes challenging when based on falsehood or mala fide intent.

Social media poses significant challenges to ensuring good governance. Platforms, intentionally or otherwise, may enable the rapid dissemination of fake news and propaganda, which can polarise societies and undermine informed decision-making. During events such as the 2020 Delhi riots, false narratives exacerbated tensions, complicating government efforts to maintain order. This viral nature often outpaces fact-checking, leading to public outrage or misguided protests. Algorithms create filter bubbles that reinforce biases and limit exposure to diverse views. During the CAA protests, such echo chambers fuelled division rather than dialogue, making effective communication chal-

lenging for authorities.

Governments also face intense public scrutiny online, where even a single misstep can trigger widespread backlash requiring immediate response. Limited resources for monitoring and moderation further strain capacities, especially during coordinated disinformation campaigns. Efforts to counter such threats are often met with concerns related to surveillance and privacy.

Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has proposed amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These draft amendments seek to revise the framework for regulating online news and current affairs content, as well as to strengthen compliance with advisories and directions issued by the Ministry. While the changes may be clarificatory and procedural in nature, if implemented well, they can help create a safer and more accountable internet, improve legal certainty, and address concerns arising from misinformation and harmful content. An open,

safe, trusted, and accountable internet is a citizen's right.

The expanded role of the Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) allows it to consider a broader range of matters beyond complaints. This could enable better scrutiny of illegal content and a quicker response to rapidly spreading misinformation. The amendments also clarify that data retention obligations under the IT Rules operate "without prejudice" to other laws, potentially supporting investigative and legal processes.

Critics argue that the amendments represent an expansion of executive power over online speech. The insertion of Rule 3(4), which mandates intermediary compliance with government directions as a condition for retaining safe harbour under Section 79 of the IT Act, is seen as beyond the rule-making powers of the Act. Faced with the risk of losing safe harbour, intermediaries may over-comply, potentially leading to excessive censorship. Concerns have also been raised about the broad definition of "news and current affairs content", potentially bringing a wide

range of user-generated content, including social media posts and video commentaries, under regulatory purview. Not clearly addressing whether generative AI platforms qualify as intermediaries may lead to enforceability issues. While the government aims to create a more accountable and safer online environment, critics caution that such provisions, if applied broadly, could undermine media independence and create a climate of over-censorship.

It is relevant to refer to judicial developments in this context. The Karnataka High Court, in September 2025, dismissed X Corp's (formerly Twitter) challenge against the Central Government's "Sahyog" portal, a tool for issuing content takedown notices to social media platforms. This order explicitly validates the government's regulatory power under the IT Act for public order and security, stating that foreign platforms must comply with Indian laws and cannot claim absolute Article 19 rights. The High Court ruling aligns with Article 19(2) restrictions on free speech for sovereignty and public order. The court described Sahyog as

an "instrument of public good", promoting cooperation between platforms and authorities, and rejected claims of overreach. It did not delve deeply into specific amendment challenges but reinforced that regulation is constitutionally permissible when proportionate. The Karnataka High Court decision provides key precedent affirming government authority despite ongoing debates.

The growing scale of information operations adds another dimension. Algorithmic bots and coordinated networks are increasingly shaping online discourse. Advances in artificial intelligence have enabled the creation of deepfake videos, which are difficult to detect and have a stronger impact than text-based misinformation. With enhanced scale and automation, such technologies pose serious challenges to democratic systems and public trust.

In this emerging scenario, bringing social media platforms and content creators under an appropriate oversight framework becomes essential for sustaining a vibrant democracy and supporting economic growth.